Cultural Renewal in Cambodia

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Academic Activism in the Neoliberal Era

By

Philippe Peycam



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Peycam, Philippe M. F., author.
Title: Cultural renewal in Cambodia : academic activism in the neoliberal era / by Philippe Peycam.
Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2020. | "ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute." | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020023521 (print) | LCCN 2020023522 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004433908 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004437357 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Majjhamaṇḍal Khmersiksā—History. | Cambodia—Civilization. | Scholars—Cambodia—History
Classification: LCC DS554.42 .P39 2020 (print) | LCC DS554.42 (ebook) | DDC 959.604/3—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020023521
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020023522

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISBN 978-90-04-43390-8 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-43735-7 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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Acknowledgements

This book is the result of different sequences of reflections and writings on a place, Cambodia, and a period in which I was personally engaged in the country, to establish the academic-cultural organization of the Center for Khmer Studies (1999–2009).

To put into words a personal intellectual trajectory and a professional itinerary has not only required that I recollect thoughts. It has also consisted in collating a number of documents, (re)visiting sources, while interviewing contemporary actors and individuals involved in activities comparable to those described. Not really a scholarly analysis built on systematic research, this book stands rather awkwardly in the category called 'essay'. It is a locally and historically situated monograph that nonetheless seeks to provide inspiration beyond the Cambodian case. It took me over 8 years to write it after I left Cambodia, in 2009.

I should stress the importance of two institutions that served as catalysts or facilitating spaces for my writing the book. These are the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP), Washington DC, and the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore.

I must begin with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore, my first institutional anchor for this project, which has continued to host me during a series of long summer breaks. Singapore is where I ended up after Cambodia and where I have continued to reside in summer and winter holidays. I want to thank especially ISEAS members including Lee Hock Guan, sociologist, who supported my application for affiliation and who introduced me to Ambassador Krishnasamy Kesavapani, the then director of ISEAS.

My profile somehow fitted with the unusual collection of scholars and professionals associated to the Institute. The idea of writing about Cambodia and my experience there allowed me to interact with many researchers and fellows, starting with Hock Guan who became a close friend. Among the number of ISEAS affiliated scholars, I should name in random order Lê Thu Huong, Michael Montesano, Tansen Sen, Geoff Wade, Pou Sothirak, Ooi Kee Beng, Hélène Njoto, and many other researchers. My interactions with them helped me to frame my work within the larger regional context of Southeast Asia. Since I could work only intermittently on the book, I am lucky to have relied on such an agreeable and inspiring environment as that of ISEAS, a place I always looked forward to return to. I have particularly enjoyed working in the Institute's wonderful library from where so many of the materials used

in this book originate. As the manuscript progressed, I discussed more with Ng Kok Kiong, the ISEAS Press director, who facilitated my path toward publication, introduced the first manuscript to three anonymous reviewers, and once I passed the test, arranged for the co-publication of the book with Brill Publisher. At Brill, I was lucky to meet and engage with Chunyan Chu, who has always been very supportive and accessible. Kayla Griffin, Production Editor at Brill's Boston office, very diligently guided me through the final editing phases.

In the first years of my affiliation at ISEAS, I received a research and writing grant from the Institute which helped me to cover the costs of traveling to Cambodia or spend time in the U.S., and Europe, so that I could interview people. Before this grant, in the very early phase of my compilation of notes, I benefitted from the support of the Leon Levy Foundation, New York, whose starting writing grant enabled me to frame my ideas into what would eventually become a full-fledged monograph. It is this early writing grant, together with ISEAS's affiliation, that gave me the first impetus to engage in this writing project.

The other enabling space for writing the book is the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in Washington DC. I was first introduced to USIP by the late Joel Barkan, a scholar of Africa who, with his wife Sandy, visited CKS in 2008. Joel was very interested in the CKS institutional and programmatic model as an original initiative that, in his eyes, befitted both the Southeast Asian and African 'southern' environments. It was him who pointed me to USIP and, in 2009, hosted me in his home in DC to introduce me to two key persons at the Institute: Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Elisabeth Cole (Lily), respectively director of the USIP Jennings Randolph Fellowship Program and Senior Program Officer also in charge of the Fellowship program. Their engagements in devising contextualized strategies to mitigate conflict situations got them interested in my story at CKS. As I was emerging out of Cambodia, they encouraged me to apply to the Jennings Randolph Fellowship Program, which I was lucky to be awarded at the end of 2009, for the year 2010–2011.

My fellowship time at USIP (2010–11), broken into two periods due to my new job at the International Institute for Asian Studies, was equally extremely inspiring. There, I met scholars and activists from very different environments, ranging from South Sudan to China, Belgium to Cambodia. Beside my interactions with Chantal and Lili (which, with Lili, have continued to this day) I enjoyed my conversations with the other international fellows: Valérie Rosoux, Jok Madut Jok, Stein Tonnesson, Zheng Wang, Patricia Fagen, Valérie Norville, Judith Vorrath, and Kamoludin Abdullaev. I take this opportunity to thank them all here for they created the kind of stimulating and at the same time 'detached' environment that helped me organize my thoughts. I also thank

here my Research Assistant Sarah Johnson, with whom I learned much about the way the U.S. foreign policy was conducted, and who became interested in Cambodia as a result of our collaboration.

Based in the newly built beautiful institute on the Mall in DC, I was able to get a sense of how the U.S. Government, and in particular the Department of State located across the street, operated. I also got a feel for Washington DC, a capital city that combines a high level of cosmopolitanism with local and sometimes parochial human scenes. I was blessed by the warmth of Lili and Chantal and by local people, including my most gracious hosts, Tom Zearley and Xiaofang Li. I was also happy to connect with members of the vibrant local Cambodian community there. My time at USIP was in fact instrumental in helping me conceive, free from past sensitivities, the idea of a book on my Cambodian period, something I would not have imagined otherwise.

It was the encouragements I received in both Singapore and the United States that got me to face my post-Cambodia future in a positive and constructive fashion. This was done through the elaboration of this book, however frustrating it was sometimes to work on it. My subsequent appointment at IIAS, Leiden, effective in April 2010, provided me with the moral frame of mind I needed to continue on the project with no reason to dwell on my Cambodian past other than what could be drawn that was of general interest. So, I should also thank IIAS and my colleagues, for the flexibility they allowed me to work and complete the book. Albeit indirectly, IIAS's vibrant intellectual environment has also been instrumental in helping me to think broad and in comparison.

Beyond these institutions, there are individuals who helped me to shape my ideas. There are many people I should thank here, though I am sure I will forget many. First, I should thank those from whom I learned while working at CKS and whose close interaction helped me to understand both the Cambodian situation and the work I was involved in: Son Soubert, the late Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, Cecily Cook, Nut Suppya, Joan Shigekawa, Lynn Szwaja, Alan Feinstein, Michel Rethy Antelme, Khing Hoc Dy, Nouth Narang, David Chandler, Ralph Nicholas, Lois de Menil, Anne Bass, Jacques Hennessy, Mary-Ellen Lane, François Tainturier, William Southworth, Thonevath Pou, Sylvain Vogel, Peter Maguire, Selma Ertegun, Olivier Cunin, Serge Rega. I would also like to thank my former Cambodian colleagues at CKS, notably Nop Sovanna, Oum Daraneth, Tith Sreypich, Chean Men and Kheng Kethya.

After my time in Cambodia, I continued to benefit from my discussions with them. As I progressed in my awkward writing project, I came across a number of 'new' people who advised me or sometimes even read parts of my manuscript: Lili Cole, already mentioned, Peter Dimock, Eric Heikkila, Michael Herzfeld,

Lee Hock Guan, Sadiah Boonstra, Michael Montesano, Carol Gluck, Françoise Vergès, Aarti Kawlra, and Roshni Sengupta, who re-read the whole manuscript and edited my English. In them, I encountered receptive minds who constructively discussed some of the points I grappled with. In many ways, they helped me frame my work so that it would not be a simple personal story restricted in space and time but rather that my account should be construed as a reflection on issues encountered in many other 'southern' contexts equally affected by the neocolonial and neoliberal forces which I describe in the book.

In moving away from the singular to the more general, I also greatly benefitted from the insights of the three anonymous readers of the first manuscript, for their extremely helpful and sometimes impassionate comments. They helped me revise the piece and lift it to another level of more general comparative relevance. This effort to distil the universal 'exemplary' character out of my Cambodian account was further enhanced by the encouragements I received from Carol Gluck, Françoise Vergès, Aarti Kawlra after my (keynote) presentation of the book at the fifth annual conference of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies, "Global Critical Pedagogies", organized by Jeroen de Kloet from the University of Amsterdam, Thursday 18 October 2018. I am grateful for their continuing encouragements.

I finally must thank my partner Masako Iijima, who, for nearly a decade, has put up with rantings about Cambodia and my CKS experience, and together with them, with the ghost book I was working on. More than anyone else, Masako made me see through them in a positive and constructive light.

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Abbreviations

ACC	Asia Cultural Council
APSARA	Authority for the Protection of the Site and Management of the Region of Angkor
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIC-HE	Building Institutional Capacities in (Cambodian) Higher Education
CAORC	Council of American Overseas Research Centers
CCC	Cambodia Community Center
CEDORECK	*Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Civilisation Khmère* [Center for Documentation, Research on Khmer Civilization]
CORMOSEA	Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia
CKS	Center for Khmer Studies
CNRS	*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* [National Center for Scientific Research]
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
DC-Cam	Documentation Center of Cambodia
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
ECA	[United States Department of State's Bureau of] Educational and Cultural Affairs
EFEO	*École Française d'Extrême-Orient* [French School of Oriental Studies]
FUNCINPEC	*Front uni national pour un Cambodge indépendant, neutre, pacifique, et coopératif* [National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia]
HYI	Harvard-Yenching Institute
ICC	International Coordinating Committee
IKTT	Institute of Khmer Traditional Council
JFTP	Junior Faculty Training Program
KDP	Khmer Dance Project
LICADHO	Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PIC	Publishing in Cambodia
PRCUD	Pacific Rim Council on Urban Development
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
PAO	Public Affair Officer
RAC	Royal Academy of Cambodia
RF	Rockefeller Foundation
RUFA	Royal University of Fine Arts

RUPP	Royal University of Phnom Penh
SIPAR	*Soutien à l'Initiative Privée pour l'Aide à la Reconstruction de l'Asie du Sud-Est* [Private Support for the Reconstruction of Southeast Asia]
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
USIA	United States Information Agency
VALEASE	*Valorisation de l'Ecrit en Asie du Sud-Est* [Valorization of Written Culture in Southeast Asia]
WB	World Bank
WMF	World Monuments Fund



MAP 1 Map of Cambodia
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

Introduction

La culture ne sauve rien ni personne, elle ne justifie pas. Mais c'est un produit de l'homme: il s'y projette, s'y reconnait; seul, ce miroir critique lui offre son image.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE, *Les Mots*

• • •

[Culture saves nothing, nobody; it doesn't justify. But it is a produce of man, projecting itself in him, recognizing itself in him; alone, this critical mirror reflects his own image.]

JEAN PAUL SARTRE, *Les Mots*

• •
•

I write this monograph both as a historian of modern Southeast Asia and as the former director of an experimental institute once dedicated to finding new ways that the cultural work of scholars, intellectuals, artists, artisans, and citizens around the world interested in Asia could contribute to social renewal in a society struggling to recover from destructions brought about by war and, as I discovered, the detrimental effects of northern neoliberal policies. Through this account, I attempt to question how culture, always at risk of being framed as politically or commercially constructed 'heritage', can, in its humanistic, intellectual and aesthetic definition, be an emancipatory force if it is deployed through an independent local-global set of actions.[1] This is what was attempted

1 Laurajane Smith (2017) defines heritage as "part of a cultural and political performance and set of negotiations that has material consequences for a range of contemporary social problems. Heritage is about the present, and about how certain interpretations of the past are used in and *for* the present." 'Heritage, Identity and Power'. In *Citizens, Civil society and Heritage-making in Asia*, edited by Hsiao Michael, Huy Yew Foong, Peycam Philippe (2017). Singapore: ISEAS-IIAS-Academia Sinica, ISEAS Press, p. 16. 'Culture', especially in post-conflict societies like Cambodia, equates the continuing existence of the idea of the collective beyond divides, whether ethnic, religious or social. What Toni Shapiro described, when she interviewed Cambodian refugees: "The Khmer have developed a particularly spiritualized and essentialist notion of culture, with specific collective historic memories, behaviors, and rituals used to identify themselves as 'Khmer.' … 'We,' a Khmer community, is defined by memory, by beliefs, and by actions – not by geographic boundaries. The Khmer embody their

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by the institute I worked on setting up, the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS), like its predecessor in exile in the 1980s, the Center for Documentation, Research on Khmer Civilization (in its French acronym CEDORECK),[2] aiming to function as an organization embedded in the community, without disciplinary or institutional borders nor epistemic privileges or entitlements.

Why post-war Cambodia? Perhaps because the extreme character of its modern history – successively a colonial European protectorate, a non-aligned post-independence kingdom (under Norodom Sihanouk), an anti-communist American-supported puppet republic, an integral utopian communist regime (under the murderous Khmer Rouge), a soviet-aligned socialist republic, a transitory United Nation-led country, a post-cold war multi-party market democracy – offers a vivid, albeit accentuated, picture of what many societies in the Global South experienced or are still experiencing. After the country 're-opened' in the wake of the United Nations' interim rule over the country in 1992–93, officially known as the United Nation's Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), along with it, the 'liberalization' of its economy and, in 1993, the organization of the first democratic elections after two decades of war, genocide and authoritarian rule, the Southeast Asian country became a favorable ground for new social experiments. Post-UNTAC Cambodia saw three contradictory forces converge that contributed to remaking the country. The first was the introduction of a representative political system with multi-party elections and the promise of the 'rule of law' leading to a collective embrace of democratic aspirations. A second force, unleashed by UNTAC, corresponds to a deep-seated internal Cambodian evolution towards a greater autonomy of individuals and communities as independent actors vis-à-vis state institutions and policies. Cambodia's forced integration into the global capitalist system and the imposition of neoliberal policies was the third transformative evolution that affected the country unleashing within it new social divisions, hierarchies and modes of relegation based on access to wealth.

At first, the different forces coexisted, each appearing to support the other. Individual and collective autonomy could not be achieved without the combined support of the neoliberal libertarian discourse and the guarantees provided by a 'pluralistic' political system based on electoral democracy. Neoliberalism needed individualism and social liberalism as political forces to push its rhetoric of outright competition forward while electoral democracy

country." Toni Shapiro (1994). 'Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia'. PhD Dissertation. Ithaca: Cornell University, p. 6.

2 CEDORECK is the French abbreviation of *Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Civilisation Khmère*.

endowed it with legitimacy, which eventually resulted in the establishment of the usual pairing in mainstream development discourses of 'democracy' and 'the market'. As for democracy and pluralism, if they theoretically relied on the open commerce of ideas among equal citizens, the process of rooting themselves in the country could only temporarily withstand the deleterious consequences of Cambodia's brutal integration into the global capitalist circuit, resulting in soaring socio-economic inequalities and the consolidation of a 'shadow state' in the hands of a parasitic oligarchy. The deep-seated contradiction of objectives between the three forces at play eventually surfaced, leading to a social, economic and political crisis in which Cambodia is engulfed until this very day. The period in which I worked in Cambodia saw the beginning of this process of reckoning where neoliberal policies had begun to subvert state power and its already low level of acceptability through an economy of "accumulation through dispossession" at the expense of Cambodian society as a whole, and with it, its aspirations of equality and justice.[3]

In the field of culture, Cambodia in the 2000s offered a rare historical 'moment' in which, out of the abyss in which the country had sunk in the previous decades, rose the hope for collective survival through the assertion of new independent institutional and programmatic civic models – a hope that emerged through alternative exploratory spaces of exchange and a long-term vision of social reconstruction through culture. This work, in many ways, continues my exploration of the emancipatory potential of a civic public sphere I first worked on as a historian of colonial southern Vietnam.[4] At that time, I argued in favor of Jurgen Habermas's historical model of the rise of a public sphere in the form of a group of Vietnamese public activists capable of appropriating new forms of cultural and political expressions against colonial coercion.[5] In that particular context, like in *Ancien Régime* Europe, large segments of society, including women, were left outside this revolution of rhetoric and symbols. Because of the fundamentally discriminatory nature of colonialism, Habermas' restrictive theory could however apply to the Vietnamese

3 Simon Springer (2015). *Violent Neoliberalism: Development, Discourse and Dispossession in Cambodia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 16.

4 Philippe Peycam (2012). *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism, Saigon 1916–30*. New York: Columbia University Press.

5 Jürgen Habermas (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press. I have used here the French translation (1992). *L'Espace public, Critique de la politique*. Paris: Payot.

context, disclosing the emergence of an indigenous culture of contestation against the political status quo.[6]

With post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, another historical moment saw a counter-culture emerge that was potentially more inclusive of class and gender differences and at least as resolute to do away with old hierarchies. This phase corresponds to the rise of civic empowerment experiments, notably through the amalgamation of culture, humanistic scholarship and collective social engagement, a phenomenon first revealed among Cambodian intellectuals and artists in exile from the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79) and the ensuing soviet-style Democratic Republic of Kampuchea (1979–92). This mode of creative 'civil society' was given a chance to flourish in the Southeast Asian country following the UNTAC interlude.

The first two decades of post-war Cambodia were indeed characterized by a sharp weakening of traditional state and elite actors, at least in their capacity to impose norms and hierarchies onto a society that had become insusceptible by decades of abuse, with the socialist ultra-nationalist utopia of the Pol Pot regime as its most severe form. The politico-cultural vacuum was filled by a wild assortment of initiatives (and discourses) emanating from non-state programs ranging from family-run associations to organizations of different sorts. The more substantial interventions, UN agencies and those supported by Western states, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), supported Cambodia's fast integration into the global capitalist system. The neoliberal order was quickly coopted by the ex-communist elite in power. It became the new mainstream ideological horizon for many Cambodian and international actors in the country, a phenomenon described in detail by Simon Springer.[7] Fundamentally hostile to the involvement of the state except for the preservation of 'law and order', the newly prescribed dogma enshrined electoral process as the beacon of democracy to go in par with economic *laissez faire*. In doing so, it turned a blind eye to the damaging effects unleashed on an already fragmented society, with growing inequalities, the re-introduction of vertical patronages, extortive practices and, under Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodia's People's Party, a case of kleptocracy at the national level.

In parallel to these macro developments, against the specters of state violence, lawlessness and elite capture, an explosion of micro-initiatives occurred

6 On the limits of Habermas's theory see Nancy Fraser (1992). 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy'. In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by C. Calhoun. Cambridge Mass.: M.I.T. press, pp. 109–142.

7 Simon Springer (2015). *Violent Neoliberalism*, p. 16.

in the social domain that experimented with alternative institutional models of non-for-profit "social economy enterprises". Conceptualized by Erik Olin Wright, this new type of non-state, non-market social economy enterprise emerged out of a specific civil society environment as: "economic activit[ies] that [are] directly organized and controlled through the exercise of some form of social power." Olin Wright's focus on the economic sector reveals how non-commodified organizations of public service, like universities, or some cultural and social organizations, have the capacity to occupy the social space, a space that is non-state, and non-market. In Olin Wright's words, their social power is "rooted in the voluntary association of people in civil society and is based on the capacity to organize people for collective action of various sorts."[8]

Several avatars of this alternative social organization emerged in post-war Cambodia. They were born out of a collective desire of bottom-up agency and, explicit for a number of them, the need to reconnect pieces of broken communal identities. The strange two decades after UNTAC saw in particular a surge in the number of independent cultural projects. Many were initiated by returning Cambodians. They followed a trend that begun in the 1980s with the CEDORECK, an integrated Paris-based organization of Cambodian exiles.

One of them was CKS. From 1999 and for the following ten years, I worked as its founding director. With colleagues and associates, Cambodian and foreign, I was involved in the creation of a new non-for-profit social economy enterprise that aimed to 'build local capacities' and seek ways to restore collective solidarities and civic consciousness.

Nearly a decade later, I seek to revisit this experience and its genealogy because I believe it holds a powerful insight into the efforts to move beyond a dominant order that afflicts the part of the world usually designated as the Global South.[9] The project that was CKS had two ambitions: first, to function as an inclusive international academic regional studies institute in the arts, social

8 Erik Olin Wright (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. London and New York: Verso, pp. 193–194. A well-known example of social economy enterprise is the free-access voluntary Internet encyclopedia Wikipedia which is not market driven.

9 The notion of 'Global South' should not be limited to regions of the world once under Western colonial or imperial domination. Elements of the subjugated 'South' are found in the 'northern' confines as well, with large sections of society economically impoverished as a result of the dislocating forces unleashed by extreme global capitalism. There are many historical accounts on the geostrategic transformations of North American and European corporate capitalism to free themselves from democratic modes of control in those countries, a process that accelerated from the 1970s onward with the beginning of massive deindustrialization in the North and of parallel industrialization in 'southern' countries like East and Southeast Asia. For an historical discussion on these massive shifts, see for instance Timothy Mitchell (2011). *Carbon Democracy, Political Power in the Age of Oil*. New York: Verso.

sciences and humanities; second, to serve as a local organization intended to contribute to the (re)constitution of an influential community of Cambodian academics, creative public leaders and social educators. As an independent educational and cultural program, CKS aimed to empower people through critical knowledge education as it is practiced in the academic humanities or through other arenas of exchange. These forms of 'creative' or 'humanistic knowledge' do not develop naturally. They require properly organized spaces of exchange and interaction, while their reliance on the state or state structures, Cambodian or international, remains minimal.

The book seeks to reflect on this aspect of human and institutional 'capacity building' by arguing that true democratization, postwar or otherwise, is only possible when people are given the opportunity to partake in open public debates concerning their community's fate, and the causes and ramifications of past tensions or mistrust can be openly discussed. This means that top-down interventions, generally orchestrated by the state or state-sanctioned elite-driven actions must be mitigated by eliciting initiatives at the grassroots level where people-to-people interaction becomes the norm and in which local actors are proactive agents of change. I see instead the all-embracing environment of university teachers and their students, school and high-school teachers, cultural and educational institutions, community associations, art workshops, and other collective platforms, including forums on social media, as representing a public sphere of cultural agents that, in its own interactions and expressions, provided that exists a certain degree of fluidity and openness in its midst, bears the potential to act as a catalyst for the transformation of social relations.

Like many of my contemporaries, I saw (and still see) in Cambodia, the possibility of an open and diverse platform in which a critical mass of independent writers, teachers, professors, artists, craftsmen, publishers, librarians, journalists, non-commercial lawyers and other social activists and educators could occupy the field of public discussions and contribute, collectively, while maintaining a 'safe zone' outside the realms of monetary and coercive power. They could be Cambodian nationals, returnees, and even locally established foreigners so long as they operated independently in the country. These agents of public creative change not only hold the promise of a culture of accountability, they can also inspire new collaborative paradigms as alternatives to atomizing discourses like those promoted in the 'market democracy' model which is today responsible for the continuation of a toxic atmosphere of widespread mistrust, nearly three decades after the end of the war.

Expanding beyond war-torn countries, this experimentation toward the re-appropriation of means and spaces of public debate by society may

contribute to the larger discussion often articulated in southern societies over the necessity to imagine new modes of social interaction and alternative public politics.[10] As I learned in Cambodia, building this new humanistic public sphere begins with the consolidation of a core community of social and cultural actors, not only through programs but also through networks of people and institutions. Taking CKS as an example, in its own historical, societal and local global continuum, along with other contemporary civic initiatives, I explore concrete ways to support the emancipating role played by these educators and their spaces of action at both local and macro-societal levels.

This account, however, also underscores the limits of implementing this vision as a result of convoluted interactions with institutional forces spurred by conflicting agendas – political, social, economic or ideological. I must pay special attention to the neoliberal momentum under the shadow of which fell our negotiations with them. It was ultimately this shadow, with the complicity of state institutions, that eventually tamed the emancipatory potential represented by CKS and other contemporary projects. Neoliberalism's influence, coupled with a reassertion of technocratic state power in the service of that order, could not only be found in bureaucratic systems and their practices of international aid like UNESCO or the World Bank, but even in established academia. What CKS and other contemporary grassroots Cambodian projects represented indeed contrasted with the prevailing working values pervading institutional international 'stakeholders' – a normative protocol described by anthropologists as "audit culture" and unbridled competition as opposed to that of solidarity and collaboration.[11]

Though unique in its scale of devastation, post-war modern Cambodia can offer lessons to other situations, including those not affected by war. In terms of cultural institution building, efforts at historical and cultural contextualization of one's actions remains nonetheless critical. The recounting of my experience of building CKS is in many ways a reflection on how my colleagues and I sought to insert the project within long-term historical trends

10 Some of these new models have been explored by Boaventura De Souza Santos, with his promotion of new "Southern Epistemologies", or Achille Mbembe and his work in favor of a de-colonial 'citizen' pedagogy. See Boaventura De Souza Santos (2016). *Épistemologies du Sud, Mouvements citoyens et polémique sur la science*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. Achille M'bembe (2012). 'At the Centre of the Knot'. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 38 (1): 8–14.

11 For an anthropological insight on the pervasive institutional culture of accountability and how it particularly infiltrated today's academic world in the humanities and the humanistic social sciences, see Marilyn Strathern (Ed.) (2000). *Audit Culture, Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. London: Routledge.

like the process of secularization of Cambodian society. At each step of the institute's development, we faced important methodological dilemmas that called for historical and cultural contextualization. This was the case when, for instance, we had to decide on translating key Western language materials into Khmer (with the risk of imposing the visions and values of outsiders onto the Cambodian mainline discourse), or when, we sought the support of the king and the local Buddhist community. Here the book seeks to rehabilitate notions such as local social configurations and local temporalities. This means that works by historians, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, but also artists, creative writers and even spiritual leaders, for their capacities to trace human agencies *in context* ought to serve as inspiration or guides for civic actions, beyond prescribed imposed systems. This book thus points to the inherently positive political nature of humanistic contextualized knowledge, particularly when it stays free from institutional norms and economic interests.

When I began writing what will become a book, I started to narrate my experience in Cambodia by developing a prescriptive policy account, wishing initially to recount my work at CKS as a means to come to terms with a period of intense involvement in a highly contested environment. At that time, I blanketed my actions in the formatted discourse of 'post-conflict policy' promoting 'development' and 'democracy'. It sounded compelling. It was also too comfortable. I was conforming to my past position as NGO director who always sought to convince supporters and 'funders'. This professional deformation was reinforced by the recognition that my story fitted the tenets of post-conflict policy for which I earned two fellowships, one at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington DC, U.S., and one at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, both of which I am grateful to for their support.

Soon, however, the realization came about that the argument needed to be freed from this meta rhetoric that was not fully mine. While revising the initial text, a litany of factual deeds, I began to see how this testimony could only make sense once the original dispositions at the root of my involvement were reclaimed. The reflections on my experience as they are presented in this book will therefore not reproduce the position I took during my professional engagement at CKS. It might possibly surprise some of my former colleagues. For eight years, I struggled to correct the text and expand its perspectives. Recalling the reasons that got me to Cambodia in the first place, I progressively moved away from uncritical policy rhetoric. Ultimately, my training as a historian aided by new readings and interactions with people with comparable experiences, helped me recapture the voice of my original engagement. The need to relate to the personal reflection on civic action that in hindsight was led by a perhaps naïve, optimistic quest for justice drove me forward. Consequently, the text

has morphed from a narrow policy account into what hopefully is an argued testimony and an ethical, civic stand. The intention is to help those who seek strategies to counter situations marred by the lingering legacies of colonialism, war, technocratic developmentalism and today's unfettered version of global capitalism.

In the process of writing this book, I learned to detach myself from elements of the narrative that would have made it too personal, and somewhat the prisoner of personal affections. In much of what is described in the subsequent chapters, especially in Parts 2 and 3, where I recall the work involved in developing CKS and its interactions with partners or 'stakeholders', I ran the risk of erring on the side of limited reflexivity. In the process of writing, I realized how difficult it is to detach oneself from the feelings, opinions and subjectivities once held – and perhaps still hold – to draw facts. This has sometimes meant attempting to convey alternative or decentering views. I am still not sure of the success of this endeavor. Writing about events of which one was an engaged protagonist makes it particularly difficult to "show without telling", as I was rightly urged to do by one of the anonymous readers of the manuscript. This account is, and will continue to be, at best, an unfinished business. I now feel confident that the narrative of the book can be read by people with no connections or baggage associated with its object.[12]

The book is divided into three parts of three chapters each. The first part is a historical introduction to the environment in which CKS as an institutional and programmatic project was born. A special emphasis is first placed on the colonial and immediate post-independence periods by focusing especially on the interaction between state politics and institutional knowledge production in the educational and cultural sectors. This 'founding' phase is one in which a trend towards autonomy of academics and intellectuals – first French, and then Cambodians – vis-à-vis the state and its institutions took shape. The phenomenon continued to grow even when Cambodia fell victim to political anarchy after the coup in 1970. In parallel to the ensuing civil war, the genocidal destruction of the Khmer Rouge, and after 1979, the establishment of a pro-Vietnamese socialist regime, the process of dissociation from state politics attracted a large number of Cambodian intellectuals in exile. A hardening of their stand in terms of their free agency, and the recognition of the foundational role culture ought to play in the rebuilding of the country led to the original experiment of CEDORECK. This Parisian precedent paved the way for

12 This work of 'distancing' was made easier thanks to the advices of the three outside readers. I am particularly grateful to the anonymous readers of the manuscript and to my English language editor Roshni Sengupta.

a number of initiatives that sprung up in the 1990s and 2000s, the period of 'creative chaos' that characterized post-UNTAC Cambodia.

The second part of the book recounts the creation of CKS into an original hybrid organizational and programmatic model that would include both academic knowledge production and capacity building, global and local, educational and civic in character. The search for inter-disciplinary and trans-sectoral synergies in all CKS activities aimed to facilitate the emergence of a growing community of Cambodian academics able to also serve as public social educators. To that end, the Center developed an original initiative called Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP), an integrated, local-international capacity building program. CKS also introduced a strategy of outright collaboration with other projects and organizations equally involved in the support of humanistic education and culture in the country. This account mainly covers the first ten years of the Center's existence which coincides with my own involvement there (1999–2009). When possible, I will reflect on the impact of the activities developed during this founding period, even after my departure.[13]

The third part is a reflection on the way the original organizational model of CKS was able to emerge out of a maze of ties and relations with international institutional 'stakeholders'. These included area studies academics and their universities, individual philanthropists, private institutional funding organizations, international agencies and diplomatic cultural missions. This section addresses the intricate negotiations that existed between CKS, and with it, the search for intellectual emancipation, in continuation of the Cambodian genealogy of autonomy described above, and a prevalent discourse on post-conflict Cambodia by these international institutional agents – whose center of gravity lays in the North – a discourse imbued with the politics of state legitimacy and an ideological bias in favor of development in line with the mainstream neoliberal tenets. Through the exemplary case of CKS in Cambodia, I therefore hope to show how a bottom up initiative located in the South found itself restricted by the very institutions whose official public service mission betrayed a fundamental irresponsibility and an incapacity to remedy the state of permanent indeterminacy and atomization of collective agency in the South.

13 CKS continues to operate today. Since 2009, it has had three directors, two of them Cambodian: Mike Sullivan (2009–2011), Krisna Uk (2012–2016), Ngo Natharoun (2017–).

PART 1

The Politics of Knowledge in Cambodia

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The first section of the book sets out to provide a succinct genealogy of modern Cambodia, with special attention paid to the development of institutional education and cultural activities in the country within the historical framework characterized by the emergence of the Cambodian nation-state.[1] Historians commonly accept this period to stretch from the beginning of the French 'Protectorate' to the first decade of the new millennium, corresponding to the first decade of the existence of CKS and my time in Cambodia.[2] Framed chronologically, this part of the book follows two intertwined courses: (1) the development of institutional cultural and educational policies by state entities (colonial, national or international), and (2) the reactions of Cambodian intellectuals, artists and activists to these initiatives. I follow a thread that I believe runs uninterruptedly through Cambodia's otherwise fragmented modern history: the process of emancipation of local intellectuals from all forms of prescribed state or elite-sanctioned model. As I argue, it was in the wake of the civil war and the terribly destructive decade of the 1970s that the Cambodian state – and any kind of state incarnations – ceased to act as the principle mobilizing force for cultural developments, a critical situation that paradoxically opened up new spaces for civic engagement.

Chapter One focuses on the colonial and early post-independence establishment of the modern nation-state until 1970 and the beginning of the civil war. In this section of the book, I review in detail the educational, cultural and societal policies developed by the French and Sihanouk authorities through the creation of new institutions such as the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, the Buddhist Institute and the Royal University of Fine Arts, and their intellectual and political orientations. The narrative also traces early examples of independent public activities within and outside these institutions contributing to the emergence of an autonomous Cambodian public sphere.[3] The spiraling destruction of Cambodia into a full civil and international war under

1 Sections of this chapter were published in the journal *Sojourn, Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, in two parts under the title: 'Sketching an Institutional History of Academic Knowledge Production in Cambodia, 1863–2009'. (2010. *Sojourn* 25 (2): 153–177; 26 (1): 16–35).

2 I am following David Chandler's chronological sequencing of Cambodia's history that considers France's occupation of the country (1863–1953) as leading to its establishment as a modern nation-state. David Chandler (2008). *A History of Cambodia* (fourth edition). New York: Westview Press, p. 4.

3 Since Edward Said's seminal book, the notion of 'orientalism' asserts the relation of power in Western colonial discourses on the 'other', the non-Western societies and cultures (Edward Said [1978]. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon). Here, the term orientalist should be shorn of the pejorative overtones it has often acquired through oversimplified readings of Said's works.

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the Khmer Republic (1970–1975) and the ensuing genocidal episode of Khmer Rouges regime (1975–79) is the focus of the second chapter. I review the impact of these conflagrations on educational and cultural practices in the country. The first full-scale independent response by Cambodian intellectuals to the destructive extremisms of the Lon Nol and Pol Pot state regimes – and the affirmation of a hitherto unbridgeable legitimacy gap between Cambodia's state and society – was the cultural and scholarly institutional adventure in exile of the *Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Civilisation Khmère* [Center for Documentation, Research on Khmer Civilization] (CEDORECK), which is also introduced. The third chapter focuses on post-war Cambodia until 2015. It pays particular attention to the major political and social transformations the country underwent before and after the UNTAC interlude (1992–93). The chapter specifically documents the international market-friendly, aid-dependent evolution in the educational and cultural sectors. It also looks at the development of a nation-wide social media public sphere, a phenomenon preceded and paralleled by an explosion in the number of local and international 'non-governmental organizations' (NGOs). In doing so, the chapter evaluates the chances of survival of a knowledge-based 'civil society' in Cambodia. For this account, I drew inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu, his quest to unpack often hidden socio-political strategies behind knowledge production policies.[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty's emphasis on the need to re-introduce the culturally contextualized 'local' into the intellectual debate was another major stimulation behind this work.[5] It is not my ambition to exhaustively narrate Cambodia's modern history. Many historians have done a much better job doing that.

4 Throughout his work Bourdieu encouraged social science researchers to engage in what he called "a sociological history of the social sciences". See Pierre Bourdieu (2004). 'L'objectivisation du sujet de l'objectivisation' in Johan Heilbron, Remi Lenoir, Gisèle Sapiro eds., Paris: *Pour une histoire des sciences sociales*, Fayard, p. 19.

5 In Chakrabarty's view "the 'Western method' [imposed in Cambodia] must be considered in light of a re-introduction of the place of the 'local' and with it, the European hermeneutic tradition that tends to restitute within thought itself the relationship between thought and dwelling". Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000). *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 255.

CHAPTER 1

A Post-Colonial Nation

What we know of Cambodia as a country is largely framed by the legacies of colonialism. Even the name 'Cambodia' is an English translation of the French *Cambodge*. The constitution of the modern Cambodian nation-state with its present boundaries also dates back to the time of French colonial rule (1863–1953). According to the official 'national' historical narrative, Cambodia directly descends the Angkorian 'Empire' (9th–15th centuries) which, at its apex, covered most of mainland Southeast Asia.[1] By the fourteenth century, Angkor as a functioning political center was abandoned. The old empire, the official story tells us, was broken into numerous polities, with a Cambodian king reigning over a much smaller, albeit linguistically unified, community. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the pre-modern Khmer state progressively fell prey to two competing national projects, the Siamese (or Thais) in the West, and the Vietnamese in the East. Pressures from the two competing forces led to increasing intrusions from these countries into Cambodian affairs, a process accelerated by the weakening of the monarchy. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Khmer 'kingdom' survived almost only in name. By this time, the Cambodian polity – not to be confused with its socio-cultural and economic fabrics, widely integrated into the heterogeneity of the region (with ethnic Khmer, Chinese, Viet, Thai, Lao, Cham and aboriginal elements) – could well correspond, in contemporary European eyes, to that of a 'declining state'.[2] Despite this almost absence of a functioning state apparatus, a common language and script, a set of shared knowledge and myths, a general allegiance to the king and the Buddhist *Sangha* (community) are evidences of the existence

1 If pre-colonial states' claim of linkage to Angkor by Cambodian kings are well evidenced, the sense of a direct connection with Angkor to be felt by the population is a more elusive one. See Bernard-Philippe Groslier, 'L'Image d'Angkor dans la Conscience Khmère', *Seksa Khmer* (1986), # 8–9, Paris, pp. 5–30.

2 This Eurocentric narrative of a glorious past followed by a long period of "dark age" or decline was first applied to Europe itself, with a "Middle Age" that followed Greco-Roman Antiquity and preceded the "Modern" period (starting with the "Renaissance"). Similar narrative patterns were used by Western scholars to characterize other regions of the world. For Cambodia, see David Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia* (fourth edition). New York: Westview Press, pp. 77–136. For India, see Partha Chatterjee (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments, Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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of a culturally bound society.[3] This society was essentially structured around three classes – peasants, officials and royalty – a fixed social division that probably dates from the Angkor period.[4]

Before the French occupation, education in Cambodia was a religious and communal matter. Boys with rich enough families to spare them from rural agricultural work were sent to *wats*, (i.e. Buddhist monasteries, pagodas, temples) to be trained by monks.[5] Temple education became more widespread in the twelfth century.[6] Students would learn to read and write Khmer texts. These primarily included poems and folk tales such as the *Reamker*, the Cambodian version of the Ramayana. The goal of these schools was not to make students literate or to prepare them for higher education or a professional work force. Rather, the *Sangha* aimed to instill pupils with the cultural knowledge and moral values they would need to become good Buddhist members of the community. Some scholars have highlighted the positive influence this type of education had on society. Clayton notes that education was intended to support solidarity by "ensuring social cohesion and the maintenance of traditional values".[7] Other scholars like Ayres hold a more nuanced approach suggesting that the *wat* schools played a less benign role as they reinforced the social hierarchy and status quo.[8] The exclusion from education of members of the lower strata of society had Vickery question the unanimity in allegiance of Cambodian society in favor of Buddhism.[9] Despite these differing views, the

3 David Chandler (1973). 'Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848'. PhD dissertation. University of Michigan.

4 Michael Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–82* (Second edition). Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, p. 13.

5 Vickery makes this remark for pre-war twentieth century rural Cambodia, a situation that may have also been true in earlier times. Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–82*, p. 10.

6 Dy Sideth (2004). 'Strategies and Policies for Basic Education in Cambodia: Historical Perspectives Institute of Comparative and International Education.' *International Education Journal* 5 (1): 90–92, p. 91.

7 Thomas Clayton (1995). 'Restriction or Resistance? French Colonial Educational Development in Cambodia; Institute for International Studies in Education.' *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. University of Pittsburgh, p. 2.

8 "Students were equipped to become citizens in a system in which they were taught to refer to themselves as *knjom* (slave) and to willingly accept the necessity of their subservience to individuals of higher social status." In David Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis: Education, Development, and the State in Cambodia, 1953–1998*. Bangkok: Silkworm Books, p. 18.

9 "The poorest peasants were deprived by their poverty of the main merit-making and cosmic insurance function of their society's religion. We can surmise that some of them, at least, must have felt resentment, compounded perhaps by the fact that in traditional Cambodian society a period spent as a monk was essential to becoming a full adult with one's own wife and family." Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–82*, p. 10.

wat schools could be recognized as Cambodia's traditional education system. In addition, it is worth suggesting that *wats*, in their social functioning beside the family unit, contributed towards framing the sociability of the young monks. They represented a real 'school of life' to which young men were initiated in a relatively permissive environment – free from the state's encroachment.[10]

According to Jacques Népote, pre-modern Cambodia had its own form of 'civil society'.[11] It used channels such as the Buddhist clergy, ritual demonstrations or client networks. This 'public opinion' took literary forms of expression like songs, prophecies, and the spreading of rumors. It could also take the radical form of public disobedience in the form of the killing of representatives of authority, escape into the forests, and the refusal to recognize the authority of the prince. More directly, 'public opinion' was expressed through organized uprisings led by charismatic leaders, heads of clients, 'enlightened monks', *kru* (teachers) with medium capacities, patrons' clients including high-end mandarins, or mercenaries, who were often foreigners. These mores of socio-political agency continued to prevail well after the arrival of the French. Népote notes the "formidable resistance of traditional channels" against imported forms of public expression, like the use of print.[12] One of its most recent demonstrations may have been found in the Khmer Rouge (1975–79).

1 French Rule (1863–1953)

The arrival of the French in mainland Southeast Asia, and the creation of 'French Indochina' comprising Vietnam (divided into three 'countries'), Laos and Cambodia, signaled the beginning of modern *Cambodge*.[13] Under colonial

10 For glimpses of the sociability in pre-modern Buddhist monasteries, see Adhémard Leclère (1899). *Le Buddhisme au Cambodge*. Paris: Ernest Leroux, pp. 389–432. For a more general account, see Ian Harris (2005). *Cambodian Buddhism, History and Practice*. Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, pp. 49–80.

11 Throughout the book, I take a broad definition of the expression 'civil society' as the sphere of human social, political and cultural creative actions located outside state control or influence. Jacques Népote (1979). 'Introduction à une histoire de la presse au Cambodge'. *Présence Indochinoise* 2: 96–129.

12 Népote (1979). 'Introduction à une histoire de la presse', pp. 97–98.

13 Cambodia had been reduced to a vassal state of Siam which had annexed its Western provinces, while growing influence from the Vietnamese kingdom threatened the eastern part of the country. After the French establishment of a colony in southern Vietnam, King Norodom of Cambodia requested a French protectorate over his kingdom. In 1863, he signed an agreement with the French to turn his kingdom into a protectorate. The

rule, Cambodia was provided with the attributes of the nation-state modelled on Europe. The 'Protectorate' regime in Cambodia maintained the formal pyramidal social order with the royalty, and to some extents the *Sangha*, as its nominal head.[14] It operated around a number of functioning attributes: a centralized administrative apparatus; a geographically unified territory marked by boundaries; a postal, road and communication system; a capital city with functional administrative, residential and ceremonial quarters, uniform and systematic taxes, legal and judicial systems, and a standardized – albeit restricted – education model.[15] This imported apparatus remained fragile. Beyond the Royal Palace, only a few Cambodians served in the colonial administration which was mainly populated by the French and the Vietnamese.

The French emphasis on education in Cambodia did little to remedy this situation. The blueprint was minimal and extremely elitist. Framed by members of a few educational institutions, its objective was to shape a narrow and dependent social layer imbued with state ideology. France's influence on Cambodia's intellectual realm was however transformative in at least three ways: (1) in the disruption of the traditional educational system and its non-systematic replacement by a state-supported education apparatus; (2) in the strong link made between education and politics and the reinforcement of the state through efforts to engender indigenous loyalty; (3) in the construction of a top down national imaginary constructed on the triptych of "Angkor, Monarchy, Buddhism".

In the first decades of their rule, the French failed to enroll large numbers of Cambodians in Franco-Cambodian schools. Some scholars like Sideth have argued that the colonizers purposefully withheld education in order to maintain power.[16] Other historians like Clayton, suggest that low enrollment should instead be seen as the result of Cambodian resistance. Cambodians initially kept their children away from Franco-Cambodian schools in order to minimize contacts with children of Vietnamese immigrants following the lead of King

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country gradually came under French colonial rule. For a reasoned account of the period, see David Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*.

14 "The exploitative character of colonialism [...] merged easily with [that] of traditional [Cambodian] society, and intensified it; and for many of the Cambodian elites the evil of colonialism probably resided less in its exploitative character than in the fact that they were not in ultimate control." Vickery (1999), p. 16.

15 These attributes of colonial-shaped 'modern' nation-states are powerfully described by Benedict Anderson (1991). *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, pp. 113–140.

16 Sideth (2004). 'Strategies and Policies for Basic Education ...'. p. 92. Vickery (1999) also makes this point, p. 19.

Norodom, who "looked down on all that was foreign."[17] Monks also played a role in discouraging parents from sending their children to non-traditional schools as the French language was viewed as a "peril for the Buddhist doctrine."[18] It was therefore not just colonial administrative inertia that contributed to the weak status of the French education system but also Cambodian resistance to it.

The situation began to change in the early 1900s when the French realized that new types of unmonitored temple schools were cropping up near the border with Thailand under the influence of the Thai *Sangha*. These schools provided the authorities the opportunity to develop a 'modernized' education system that would not be rejected by the Cambodians. Taking inspiration from a southern-Vietnamese model, the French established *Khum* (communal) Schools in 1908, after which they began to spread them across the country.[19] In parallel to developing basic education in the countryside, new "Franco-Cambodian schools" were established in Phnom Penh and in other provincial capitals. These were elementary and full-course schools where pupils were taught writing, mathematics and French. Their purpose was to train a restricted body of native civil servants who would assist French administrators.[20] Scholars have referred to those who graduated from these Franco-Cambodian schools as 'new men', for they learned to discard traditional values and cultural practices in favor of European ones.[21]

French educational reforms did have an impact on the Cambodian population. It is estimated that by 1944, fifteen to twenty percent of school-age boys were attending some kind of French school, either Franco-Cambodian schools, *khum* schools, or modernized *wat* schools.[22] By the beginning of the 1930s, a limited first generation of Cambodians educated in the French system began to incorporate themselves into the middle levels of the colonial administration. Some of these 'new men', however, became a cause of concern for the

17 Clayton (1995). 'Restriction or Resistance', p. 4.

18 Forest, A. (1980). *Le Cambodge et la colonisation française: Histoire d'une colonisation sans heurts (1897–1920)*. Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, p. 155. Even towards the later part of the colonization period when the French were more actively recruiting students and made attendance mandatory, many civilians continued to resist the pressure to attend French schools.

19 Clayton (1995). 'Restriction or Resistance', p. 8.

20 This provision of education was in large part a French attempt to "engender indigenous loyalty." See Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 27.

21 Clayton (1995). 'Restriction or Resistance, p. 4.

22 Clayton (1995). Ibid., p. 10.

French authorities because of their resistance to French policies of cultural 'modernization'.[23]

This newly gained Cambodian agency was also found in the adoption of new modes of public expression, especially print media. Cambodia's nascent 'print capitalism' can be traced back to the country's integration into the classical circle of colonial 'modernization' with its corollaries of rapid urbanization; the institution of a centralized political, administrative and economic system; the development of secular education and the introduction of new technologies, a process that nonetheless took a slower turn than in neighboring Vietnam or Thailand.[24] The development of an autonomous Cambodian public print culture indeed follows sequences identified in other colonial contexts. The French also introduced newspapers and printed publications in the country.[25] Periodicals like *Le Petit Cambodgien* were funded by the Protectorate authorities and printed in neighboring Saigon. They were meant to serve the small community of French residents as well as the embryonic group of Western-educated Cambodians representing a nascent urban elite whose children started to attend French schools.

It took another two decades for Phnom Penh to have its own newspapers: in French, with *L'echo du Cambodge, l'Impartial de Phnom Penh*; and in Khmer, with the official *Bulletin Elémentaire Franco-Khmer* (1925) and *Sruk Khmaer* (1927). It was however the literary journal *Kambuja Sorya* (1926), published by the newly created Buddhist Institute, that would come to bear the most lasting impact on Cambodia's intellectual landscape. The journal's ambition was to establish a bridge between 'traditional', Buddhist, and 'modern' secular knowledges.[26] A further breakthrough in the realm of the print media took place in the 1930s, principally in Phnom Penh. With over 50,000 inhabitants, its schools, its printing houses, the presence of a growing community of

23 In 1942, following an attempt by the conservative Vichy-backed colonial regime to Romanize the written rendering of the Khmer language, some of these educated Cambodian intellectuals, led by monks, responded negatively against the reform. "What the French saw as a self-evident improvement in the status quo was seen by the Cambodians as an attack on the essential character of their civilization." (David Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 208). Romanization plans were abandoned when the Japanese sized power in March 1945.

24 On the complex process of 'backwardness' and subalternity of Cambodia vis-à-vis Vietnam within the 'federal' political architecture of French Indochina see Benedict Anderson (1991). *Imagined Communities*. London and New York: Verso, pp. 124–131.

25 The first non-administrative periodical in French *Le Petit Cambodgien* was launched in 1899.

26 On *Kambuja Sorya* and the Buddhist Institute's influence in the secularization of print knowledge, see chapter 2.

Cambodian civil servants and employees of the private sector, a small but powerful landowning community, and a large presence of Chinese and Vietnamese alongside a small but conspicuous French community, the city was important enough to host a local print industry. The number of registered titles increased from four in 1924 to 56 in 1936. This is when Cambodian journalism and local public opinion were born.

The first example of independent political Cambodian journalism appeared in December 1936, with *Ngaravatta* (Angkor Wat). *Ngaravatta* was a nationalist, anti-colonial and anti-monarchical weekly. It was founded by the charismatic World War I veteran and future leader, Son Ngoc Thanh. *Ngaravatta* became the main opposition tribune available in Khmer.[27] World War II interrupted the trend, as the Vichy-inspired colonial authorities and the ephemeral Japanese occupation that followed [March–August 1945] clamped down on all forms of public expression. After the return of the French in 1945, the development of a public political press was soon revived. The beginning of the first Indochina war (October 1946), which soon also affected Cambodia, and the increasing factionalism in the national political sphere made it difficult for the sector to operate. Yet, even during this confusing period, numerous press innovations aimed at a larger audience occurred.[28]

1.1 *Colonial Orientalism and Its 'Dissidents'*

In the realm of ideology, French colonizers and their Cambodian royal protégés paid particular attention to the construction of a historically unifying narrative that was able to support their political projects within 'French Indochina'. This process introduced a policy meant to shape a 'native elite', although as discussed above, for reasons having to do with priorities – some would say lack of it – a somewhat Malthusian attitude characterized early colonial educational policies in Cambodia.[29] At any rate, from the beginning itself the question as to who controlled and shaped knowledge of Cambodia's past was a highly

27 The case of *Ngaravatta* followed a trend begun twenty years earlier in southern Vietnam where the main stream of 'modern' opposition to colonial rule was expressed almost essentially through the press. Philippe Peycam (2012). *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

28 For instance, the periodical launched in 1947, *The Cambodian Peasant*, was aimed at Cambodian farming families. Like the first woman-targeted magazine, it benefited from government subsidies. (Phnom Penh: National Library of Cambodia).

29 The French were less concerned to promote native French-educated Cambodian *évolués* than they were in neighboring Vietnam where they were under constant accusations by Vietnamese intellectuals of leading a parsimonious native educational policy.

contested issue for all actors involved, be it French colonials and scholars, their post-colonial successors, Cambodian political leaders or intellectuals.

Scientific knowledge associated with modern *Cambodge* is, to a considerable extent linked to one colonial institution: the French School of Far-Eastern Studies or *Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO). EFEO was founded in 1900. It was the main colonial state-validated institution habilitated to perform this politically-charged cultural and intellectual enterprise.[30] Rarely has one single colonial institution so extensively shaped the historical contours of a new 'imagined community' as that of today's Cambodia and its national culture.[31] Funded by the Government General of Indochina, the *Ecole* was established along the lines of the prestigious *Ecole Française d'Athène* in Greece, under the scientific responsibility of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* in Paris. The institution's loyalty was thus twofold. As an advanced scientific institute, it leaned towards the circles of official metropolitan academia. As a political cultural structure, it was oriented towards the colonial state.

Philology, the distinguished science of metropolitan universities, was promoted alongside Archaeology, the hobby of colonial administrators and militaries, as EFEO's disciplines *par excellence*. History and the new fields of Religious studies, Sociology and Anthropology, were also integrated under the EFEO's wing, on paper at least. The question of the place of Anthropology is a crucial one. Because of EFEO's unequivocal Republican origin it had departed from the biological conceptions prevailing in neighboring Germany. EFEO's colonial character, however, maintained its fundamental ambiguity. Anthropological scholarship was restricted to utilitarian objectives directly associated with the responsibilities of dominance over indigenous populations. As in other colonial contexts, social science-based research founded on the appreciation of the cultural integrity of native communities remained remarkably unrepresented in EFEO activities.[32]

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30 On EFEO, I have drawn from the work of Pierre Singaravélou (1999). *L'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient ou l'Institution des Marges, 1898–1956, Essai d'Histoire Sociale et Politique de la Science Coloniale*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

31 EFEO's establishment must be linked to the general institutionalization movement that occurred at the turn of the century both in the *métropole* and in the Far Eastern colony. Peycam (2010). 'Sketching a History'. *Sojourn* (*Part 1*). Footnote 14, p. 171.

32 On the political debates in the *métropole* over the new social science, see Herman Lebovics (1992). *True France, the War over Cultural Identity, 1900–1945*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. On its evolution in Indochina, see Susan Baily (2000). 'French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina'. *Modern Asian Studies* 34 (3): 581–622. A comparison with the newly constructed 'Africanist' field can be drawn in Emmanuelle Sibeud (2002). *Une Science impériale pour l'Afrique? La construction des savoirs africanistes en France, 1878–1930*. Paris: Editions de l'EHESS.

As a colonial-state institution, EFEO embodied a disciplined, quasi-aristocratic cast of officially recognized and co-opted civil servants-cum-scholars that from the start renounced the building of intellectual bridges with the 'natives'.[33] Yet, despite its conservative outlook, the legacy of the *École* may be characterized by three paradoxical consequences for the Cambodians. While it developed a definition of a hierarchical Cambodia shaped through the prism of the Angkorian past, the *École* also presided over the process of vernacularization of knowledge through the modernization of Buddhism and the transformation of Khmer language into a literary means of expression. As a restrictive circle of academics mostly focused on the antique past, EFEO, moreover, generated frustrations among some French contemporaries. A few of them, pejoratively nicknamed *amateurs* scholars, chose to study Cambodia's society in its living contemporaneity, outside the *Ecole*'s ranks.

1.2 *'Angkorization' of Cambodia*

EFEO's continuing focus on Cambodia was rooted in the study of its antiquity. The institution's most concrete and visible task in the country, as assigned by the colonial government and later by the Paris-based authorities was to conserve and curate the historical monuments of the Angkor complex, which soon came to epitomize EFEO itself. Even before the formal hand-over of the province of Siem Reap from Thailand in 1907, the *École* sought to achieve an almost unquestioned scientific stewardship over the knowledge of Cambodia's ancient past.

Domain of the visible, Angkor and Khmer arts in general represented from the start one of the best 'heritage' assets to legitimize France's presence in the Far East. This claim was justified with historical arguments that resulted from years of exploratory and media campaigns establishing an exclusive lineage between the resurrected state of Cambodia and past Angkorian *grandeur*. From 1907 on, EFEO began a massive enterprise to 'restore' and comprehend the site of Angkor. The archaeological park was created in 1920. The scholarly achievements of the *Ecole* on Angkor are well known, accounting for a considerable corpus of 'scientific knowledge' which established the scientific legitimacy of the institution for posterity.

33 On the characterization of the historical figure of the colonial civil servant scholar in Southeast Asia, see descriptions by historians like Benedict Anderson (1998. *The Spectre of Comparisons, Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. New York: Verso) or Thongchai Wichinakul (2014. 'Asian Studies across Academies'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (04): 879–897). Pierre Singaravelou's book (1999) (Op. Cit.) on EFEO develops a Bourdieusian study of the *École* and its members, from the point of view of the institution.

What EFEO scholars did was to imbue Cambodians with the notion of nationhood first crystallized through the founding moment of Angkor.[34] An official narrative of Cambodia's history was thereafter established which distinguished three historical periods in relation to Angkor taken as its principle point of reference: the 'pre-Angkorian', 'Angkorian', and 'post-Angkorian' periods, with tutelary monarchs like Suryavarman II, builder of Angkor Wat (c. 1113–1145) and Jayavarman VII, artisan of the greater Angkorian Empire (c. 1181–1218). This official genealogy was embraced by all successive Cambodian regimes. All sought to position themselves as 'restorers' of Angkorian mythical grandeur.[35]

1.3 *Knowledge Modernization through Buddhism*

One point that is often overlooked is the influence of the French and their involvement in reforming Buddhism. It was through EFEO that the colonial authorities laid the foundations of a unique example of institutionalized knowledge modernization in the vernacular language.[36] Though it was embedded in colonial elitism, the program succeeded in constituting a solid literary base thanks especially to the institutions they created and to its architect, Suzanne Karpelès. The first reason for this interventionism was political. As mentioned above, the French realized that the main source of 'native' opposition to its rule originated from the Buddhist *Sangha* and the fact that monks to a large extent still received training in Thailand. Fearing the subversive influence of these agents who enjoyed social prestige the government decided to create a

34 Prior to French 'interventions', the reminiscences of Angkor existed in the Cambodian collective although it was probably devoid of the idea of a bounded social body like that of the 'nation'. See Bernard-Philippe Groslier, 'L'Image d'Angkor dans la Conscience Khmère', *Seksa Khmer* (1986), # 8–9, Paris, pp. 5–30.

35 David Chandler describes well this colonial legacy in the field of national representation: "As they created something known as *Cambodia*, the French, bequeathed to the Khmer the unmanageable notion that their ancestors had been for a time the most powerful and most gifted people of mainland Southeast Asia. They also decreed that Cambodia's subsequent attempts to live within its means represented a decline. Cambodians responded to these contradictory signals by using the grandeur of their past as a framework for the present and identifying themselves with Angkor." David Chandler (1991). *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, War and Revolution since 1945*. New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, p. 6.

36 For this sequence, I borrowed from the work of Penny Edwards (2007). *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation*, 1860–1945. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. See also by the same author: (2005) 'Making a Religion of the Nation and Its Language, the French Protectorate (1863–1954) and the Dhammakay'. In *History, Buddhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, edited by John Marston and Elizabeth Guthrie. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 63–85.

new apparatus of control of the Buddhist culture to train future monks. There was also another reason for this interest in Cambodian Buddhism. The erudite school of Buddhist studies, a sub-branch of Sanskrit and Hindu philology, had been hugely influential in Europe. This school reified Buddhism into a corpus of canonical texts. The trend ran parallel to an indigenous movement to purify and reform Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism.

Three Indologists – George Coedès, Louis Finot and Suzanne Karpelès – set out to organize Buddhist education by creating new institutions of higher learning for elite Cambodian monks while introducing secular subjects like Khmer language lessons.[37] From 1908–1911, a program was developed to establish *Ecoles des Pagodes* or 'Pagoda (*Wat*) Schools'. In 1914, an *Ecole de Pali*, dedicated to the study of Pali, was founded in Phnom Penh, which was turned into the *Ecole Supérieure de Pali* (ESP-Superior Pali School) in 1922.[38] These schools were run under the scientific supervision of EFEO. The ESP included a library designed to hold all works on Buddhism and Buddhist manuscripts in Pali, Sanskrit, and Khmer, and was also allowed to print and disseminate books.

Under Karpelès's leadership of ESP (1923–1941) the scope of activity expanded dramatically. In 1925, the *Bibliothèque Royale du Cambodge*, Cambodia's first national library was created. In 1927, Cambodia's first Khmer-language literary journal, *Kambuja Suriya* (Cambodia Sun) was launched. It was a monthly periodical that included contributions on Khmer Buddhism, culture and history.[39] The year 1930 saw the creation of the Buddhist Institute (BI) to oversee all these activities with Karpelès in charge of both the *Bibliothèque* and the Institute. Officially, the BI's founding mandate was to "rescue Cambodian Buddhism from degeneration".[40]

Karpelès who soon gained a considerable influence on nascent Cambodian nationalist circles significantly strengthened this institutional climate. It is at this juncture, that a clearly indigenous movement aiming to anchor the

37 Independent scholars working on Cambodian Buddhism like Adhémare Leclère were kept out of this process.

38 Pali is the sacred language of the Pali Canon or *Tripitaka* scriptures in Theravada Buddhism.

39 George Chigas (2000). 'The Emergence of Twentieth Century Cambodian Literary Institutions: the case of *Kambujasuriya*'. In *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literature*, edited by David Smyth. Richmond: Curzon Press, pp. 135–146.

40 The *Institut Bouddhique*'s foundation received the support of the conservative GGI Pierre Pasquier and his Political Affairs Director, Louis Marty, the architect of a similar campaign of cultural – conservative – 'modernization' in Vietnam. Marty was also the founder of the colonial political police, the *Sûreté*.

process of Buddhism modernization in a self-consciously Khmer national context began to assert itself. Two religious associates of Karpelès, the Venerables Chuon Nath and Huot Tat emerged as its leaders. In the following decades, Nath and Tat channeled their skills and political awareness into developing Buddhism as the Khmer national religion and promoting Khmer as the national language.

Between 1927 and 1930, 60,000 Khmer texts were produced. In 1930, a huge program aimed at translating – and nationalizing – the sacred texts of *Tripitaka* into Khmer was launched. It was completed in 1969 resulting in 200 volumes. The compilation of the first Khmer dictionary by Chuon Nath was based on a similar effort, going hand in hand with the objective of expanding the range of technical and conceptual terminologies in Khmer. This subsequently contributed to the transformation of the vernacular into a literary 'modern' language. The whole endeavor consolidated the transition from a scribal culture to that of print and from a religious to a secular literary intellectual tradition. Mass publication initiated by the BI was the necessary intellectual condition for the development of a national public sphere, and with it, the principal vector for the rise of a collective imagined national destiny: modern nationalism.[41] Under EFEO's supervision, the BI thus had a lasting impact on Cambodian society.

The collusion of French designs to 'modernize' Cambodian culture by molding it into an elitist, Buddhist-led trend and the growing Cambodian aspirations to national autonomy broke up in the 1940s, as stated earlier, when the government decided to Romanize the Khmer language. Cambodian intellectuals saw the proposed plan as a threat to Khmer culture and especially to the Khmer language, which they associated with the Khmer nation. The plan was quickly abandoned. In 1941, moreover, Karpelès – a Jew – was sacked from her position by the pro-Vichy colonial government. The ESP and the BI represented a space of intellectual and political maturation, as well as the birthplace of modern anti-colonialism in Cambodia. The most immediate consequence of the work of the BI was political nationalism. Though in existence from the very beginning of the French occupation in Cambodia, anti-colonial sentiments eventually re-surfaced in the form of an embryonic movement spearheaded by a group of Buddhist reformers who studied or worked at the BI. Three young men played a significant role in shaping Cambodian self-awareness with, in

41 On the notion of public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas (1962). *Struckturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. Hermann Luchterhand Verlag. (English version: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989). On the importance of mass publications and the transformation they produced in shaping a sense of common destiny among members of this 'community', see, Anderson (1991). *Imagined Communities*.

1937, the launch by the BI's former clerk Son Ngoc Thanh and the institute's librarians Pak Chheounn, and Sim Var of *Ngaravatta*.[42] Entitled 'Angkor Wat', the paper published in vernacular Khmer was a demonstration of the embracement by these early Cambodian nationalists of EFEO's intellectual constructions. *Ngaravatta* not only gave Cambodians a chance to read about global events in their native language, it set out to "awaken of the Cambodian people" by acting as the mouthpiece of a distinctly recognized living Khmer culture.[43]

1.4 *'Amateur' Scholars*

The work carried out by the BI must be linked with that of the EFEO and its effort to restore Cambodia's ancient Angkorian *grandeur*. Karpelès's legacy does not fundamentally differ from that of the EFEO orientalists with their desire to intellectually 'restore' Cambodia and its national attributes: the rendering of Angkor, of Buddhism and of the Khmer language. Their work shaped an official Cambodian intellectual 'tradition' rooted in nationalism, grounded in Theravada Buddhist religiosity and on the central position of the monarchy as well as its devotion to the Angkorian past. As the political and religious protector, the king embodied this proclaimed unity. Like all forms of nationalism shaped by Western colonialism, it was a top down structure. Yet Buddhist studies, a component of EFEO's philological program, were closely related to contemporary practices. The program somewhat represented a transition between the glorious 'ancient' and the 'contemporary' in which indigenous societies became their own subject of investigation.

This approach was the domain of cultural anthropology (ethnology as it was called then) and disciplines related to it like social archaeology or linguistics. These fields of investigation had initially suffered some sort of epistemological devaluation by the *École*'s founders. The first ethnologists, linguists, anthropologists, human geographers, sociologists, historians or even economists of Cambodia operated *outside* the institution, thus creating a dichotomy between 'amateur' and 'official' scholarship with a *de facto* marginalization of the former by the latter.

The erudite scholar Adhémard Leclère is the best example of this relegation by the colonial establishment. Leclère's curiosity and versatility led to a considerable body of ethnographic knowledge that included legal studies,

42 Chandler (2008), *History of Cambodia*, p. 199.

43 Chandler (2008) Ibid., p. 200. The same men organized the first anti-French public march in 1942 to protest the arrest of Achar Hem Chieu, a nationalist monk who led the protest again the Romanization of the Khmer language.

oral literature analysis, study of contemporary religion, medicinal knowledge, and social history. His *History of Cambodia* was the first European text to use the 'post-Angkorian' royal chronicle histories as a framework for the study of the past.[44] When he passed away in 1917, 'amateur' scholars and ethnographers on Cambodia like himself had more or less disappeared as a result of their social and institutional marginalization by EFEO.[45] This absence undoubtedly represents a gap in scholarship, although it served as an inspiration for a number of post-independence Cambodian intellectuals.

2 Independent Cambodia (1953–1970)

When World War II ended in 1945, the Japanese, who had briefly replaced the French as colonial mentors between March and August, left Cambodia. France immediately set out to reestablish its influence in the region. Faced with mounting opposition from Cambodian nationalists, the French authorities allowed Cambodians to form political parties. Two leading movements emerged. The Democratic Party, in favor of immediate independence and parliamentary democracy. It was supported by young teachers, civil servants, politically active members of the Buddhist *Sangha*, and a growing number of activists whose opinions had been influenced by *Ngaravatta*'s nationalistic appeals. The other force was the Liberal Party representing the interests of the old rural elites, officially in favor of gradual independence and the preservation of extended powers for the king. On every electoral occasion the Democratic Party won a landslide majority and subsequently controlled the National Assembly.

It was King Sihanouk who proved to be the man of the moment. Put on the throne by the colonial government in 1941, he had been confirmed by the Japanese and was maintained by the returning French. Initially working with them, he set out to push for independence through negotiations, in a "friendly, diplomatic way".[46] After the war broke out between the French and

44 Leclère's scholarly versatility and ethnological curiosity must be noted. His *oeuvre* included research on legal history (*Recherches sur la Législation cambodgienne*, 1890; *Recherches sur la legislation criminelle et la procedure des Cambodgiens*, 1894; *Recherches sur les origines brahmaniques des lois cambodgiennes*, 1898); oral literature (*Contes et Légendes*, 1895); religious practices (*Les fêtes religieuses bouddhiques chez les Cambodgiens*, 1894; *Cambodge, fêtes civiles et religieuses*, 1914); ethno-anthropology (*Les Pnongs*, 1899); history (*Histoire du Cambodge*, 1914).

45 An exception was Evelyne Porée-Maspéro who worked at the BI's library developing Cambodia's first ethnologically-based collection entitled 'Cambodian Mores and Customs Commission'. She eventually joined EFEO in 1947. (Singaravélou (1999), p. 347).

46 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 214.

the Vietnamese Communist *Viêt Minh* (October 1946), a growing number of Cambodian activists began to operate in the countryside leading guerilla groups. Many joined the anti-colonial and anti-monarchist *Khmer Issarak* underground movement led by Son Ngoc Thanh, founder of *Ngaravatta*.[47] Against this threat and a hostile Democratic-led Assembly, Sihanouk, nominal head of state, alternated between negotiation and confrontation with the French. He spearheaded around his person a "crusade for independence" which he obtained in November 1953.[48] The *Sangkum* Party enabled him to openly enter the political fray as Prime Minister in 1955 after he abdicated (as king) in favor of his father Suramarith. He became Prince Sihanouk. From then until 1970, his grip on political power remained without serious challenge.

Backed by a new political party, the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*, usually translated as 'People's Socialist Community', Sihanouk's post-independence regime was characterized by its authoritarian paternalism around the principles of 'royalist-Buddhist socialism'. This was a rather vague construct that, while claiming to seek progressive goals and the end of social injustice, was rooted in conservative religious and social traditions.[49] In practice, economic management developed as a form of 'crony socialism' where members of the elite managed state enterprises. This trend was exacerbated following a policy of nationalization of all economic assets in 1963.

Like the colonial state before it, Sihanouk sought to orient the public debate around culture and national identity. The state retained much of the colonial-era elitist ideology, adopting Angkor, Buddhism and the Monarchy as the founding pillars of Cambodian identity. Pluralism was discouraged and opponents of the regime were treated as traitors. Meanwhile, opposition to the regime was growing among different sections of Cambodian society, particularly army officers, the urban elite and intellectuals and students.

In the area of education and cultural policies, the Sihanouk years were characterized by massive developments. They were however framed in the same top-down statist model as that of the colonial regime. At the time of independence, Cambodia had only nine high schools nationwide. Higher education was

47 By 1954, the *Khmer Issarak* operating with the Viet Minh controlled as much as 50 per cent of Cambodia's territory. Vickery (1999). *Cambodia, 1975–1982*, footnote 43, p. 321.

48 According to Vickery, Cambodia's independence in favor of Sihanouk was largely aimed, in agreement with the French, at suppressing the increasingly successful rebellion in the countryside. Vickery (1999). Ibid., p. 17.

49 Sihanouk's 'royalist-Buddhist socialism' was not to be Marxist socialism. Without class conflict, it "depended on the 'ancient' Cambodian practice of the sovereign providing for the welfare of his people". Vickery (1999). Ibid., p. 23.

nonexistent.[50] Sihanouk took an aggressive stance on turning things around. The first few years of his rule were characterized by an unregulated expansion of educational facilities. Primary education enrollment drastically increased. For example, the number of females enrolled in primary schools grew from nine percent to thirty-nine percent from 1950 to 1965.[51] Such rapid development meant, however, that there was a chronic shortage of skilled teachers. Subsequently, this led to a decline in the general quality of education. Tertiary education also expanded drastically. In the 1960s, several universities were built in Phnom Penh and in a few of the provinces. Such development did not go without structural difficulties. According to Ayres, Sihanouk was so focused on providing Cambodians with the opportunity to attend higher education *in* the country (previously, students interested in tertiary education would have to go abroad) that he did not pay enough attention as to how the new universities would be staffed and financed.[52] Additionally, because the growth of economic and labor opportunities in Cambodia could not keep up with the expansion of the education system, students graduated with skills for which there was no market. The lack of job opportunities left many youths disgruntled and frustrated, especially as they had been led to believe that education would provide them with a way to escape from the occupation of their fathers which was mainly agriculture.[53]

This period of rapid educational expansion seriously impacted the emerging national public sphere by creating a body of individuals who felt they were entitled to participate as informed citizens in Cambodia's so-called 'socialist democracy'. This educated section of society, in its most part urban, grew increasingly frustrated with Sihanouk and his regime. People were indignant at the prince's policies marred by blind repression and lack of awareness of prevailing social realities.[54] Overall, Duggan characterizes Sihanouk's

50 By 1954, one year after the country's independence, Cambodia had 271,000 children who studied in primary schools, 3,300 in secondary schools, and only 144 students who received their full *Baccalauréat*. (Vickery [1999]. Ibid., p. 19). See also Stephen Duggan (1997). 'The Role of International Organizations in the Financing of Higher Education in Cambodia'. *Higher Education* 34 (1): 1–22, p. 3.

51 Sideth (2004). 'Strategies and Policies for Basic Education', p. 94.

52 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 50.

53 The state administration became the main recipient of this fast-expanding population of students, but by 1961, Sihanouk himself acknowledged that there were no more jobs available. He advised the students to go back to the countryside, something that was not possible. Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–1982*, p. 20.

54 On Sihanouk's erratic style of governance see Milton Osborne (1994). *Norodom Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

educational policies as "inspired but ill-informed"[55] while Ayres writes: "expansion, declining quality, perceptions of social mobility, and the emergence of educational radicalism – all symptomatic of an 'educational crisis' – were to prove the dominant themes of educational policy and practice until Sihanouk's deposition in 1970."[56]

Ideologically conservative, Sihanouk framed a distinct so-called 'Cambodian way'. He ascertained the country's historical development in a way that the triptych – Angkor – Buddhism – Monarchy – remained the symbolic pillars of the post-independence nation-state. This was perceptible in scholarly circles, especially in the fields of humanities and social sciences. Sihanouk maintained a number of colonial institutions like the BI or EFEO (which continued to oversee the archaeological park of Angkor). He created new institutions like the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) and the Buddhist University. In the arts, Sihanouk promoted the growth of a vernacular film and music industry while he supported 'traditional' visual and performing arts under the Palace's patronage. During the period, literature in the vernacular language expanded massively despite being subject to censorship.[57] Considerable efforts were also invested in defining a distinct 'Khmer modernist' style in the fields of architecture and urbanism.[58]

In the realm of public debate and the press, Sihanouk's regime aimed at responding to the growth of young literate Cambodians and the parallel trend of mass urbanization. This meant a growing sophistication of the sector with the rise of specialized periodicals aimed at reaching new segments of the population. Cultural, technical and administrative presses developed along with titles aimed specifically at women. A print media sector dedicated to current affairs information as well as political 'opinion' developed, of which the latter essentially grew as an opposition press against Sihanouk's policies. During this period, the press remained equally divided between titles in Khmer and in French, highlighting the persistence of social divides. Among the periodicals of Marxist leaning were *Yumavit/l'Ami du Peuple* and *L'Observateur*. These were opposed by Sihanouk's propaganda arsenal of subsidized official titles

55 Duggan (1997). 'The Role of International Organizations', p. 4.

56 Ayres, *Anatomy of a Crisis*, 45.

57 Klairung Amratisha (1998). *The Cambodian Novel: A Study of its Emergence and Development*. PhD Dissertation. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

58 Helen Grant Ross and Darryl Collins (2006). *Building Cambodia: 'New Khmer Architecture' 1953–1970*. Bangkok: The Key Publisher Co. Ltd.

aimed at covering all streams of society. In the virulence of opposition titles, Népote notes a trend toward radicalization.[59]

The activities of 'journalists' came to mean opposition to the established regime. This was a clear sign of the absence of any political consensus in the Cambodian (urban) society. It is exemplary for the continuing rift of legitimacy that existed between a state in the hands of the traditional elite represented by Sihanouk who relied quasi exclusively on the support of the majority of the population in the countryside, and a more turbulent and divided urban civil society. By the end of the regime, Sihanouk was in overt war with journalists and other forms of open public opposition, systematically using censorship and other repressive means leaving many intellectual activists to join the ranks of underground communist opposition.

2.1 *Birth of 'Khmer Studies'*

Parallel transformations affected Cambodia's intellectual realm, a phenomenon that can be traced to the late years of French rule. The post-World War Two period saw an expansion of scholarship in and on Cambodia resulting from the rise in influence of the newly-created *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS) in France. Thanks to its multi-disciplinary organization and the anti-fascist stance of its early leaders, CNRS combined guaranteed funding with peer-reviewed governance and a prime focus on research.[60] The new set-up facilitated the rise to prominence of a generation of academics that undertook a more a dynamic appreciation of Cambodia and its society. If many of them were French, they were soon emulated by a first wave of Cambodian researchers who acted as precursors of an irresistible process of nationalization of 'Khmer studies'.

Before introducing these Cambodian pioneers, I must introduce a few of the 'transitional' French scholars, because of their influence on Cambodia's nascent academic environment. One of the truly influential figures in the new academic movement is Georges Condominas. From French-Vietnamese parents, he studied sociology and ethnology under Marcel Mauss. In 1964, Condominas established the first CNRS 'Laboratory on "Southeast Asian Studies"', the *Centre de Recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est et le Monde Insulindien*. He became famous for his work on the highland populations on the Cambodian-Vietnamese border.

59 Jacques Népote (1979). 'Introduction à une histoire de la presse au Cambodge'. *Présence Indochinoise* 2: 96–129; p. 110.

60 Although the CNRS was created in 1939, its expansion in the domains of the social sciences and humanities took place after the war. On the origins and early years of the CNRS, see *Bulletin du Comité pour l'Histoire du CNRS* (2007). # 20.

Throughout his career, Condominas advocated an active interaction between ethnologists and the groups they studied, inspiring a number of village-based studies after him.[61] His influence crossed disciplines and borders, orienting ethnographic studies on daily cultural practices while providing historians access to vernacular language materials. Though not exclusively involved in Cambodia, Condominas' influence in the development of a distinct field of 'Khmer Studies' should be stressed. He trained many future Cambodian ethnologists.

Another influential figure was Bernard-Philippe Groslier, the son of George Groslier, creator of the Museum and the School of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. Bernard-Philippe was born in Cambodia. In 1959, Sihanouk and the EFEO jointly appointed him director of the Angkor Conservancy. Together with the long-time director of the *École* (1956–77), the Indologist Jean Filliozat, Groslier's Cambodian legacy must be associated with the modernization of EFEO while he worked to perpetuate its intellectual monopoly over Angkor. There, he introduced social science methods, initiating a massive archaeological program that made use of new hydrological and topographic materials. Groslier also supported the development of ethnographic works near Angkor. His intellectual influence however went beyond the study of Angkor. His holistic vision integrated EFEO into the emancipating field of Khmer studies. A number of Cambodian historians and archaeologists followed his path. Meanwhile, the philologist George Coedès remained a major intellectual figure in the post-war period. His erudite scholarship, linguistic versatility, and longevity, made him the mentor of generations of scholars. His book on the 'Hinduized States of Indonesia and Indochina' became a classic of the newly created field of Southeast Asian Studies.[62]

In the midst of this bustling French academic renewal emerged the first generation of Cambodian intellectuals. Most of these men and women studied in France in the 1950s and 1960s. Some stayed, while others returned to Cambodia where they contributed to shape the academic institutions of the

61 Among them were Juliette Baccot (Cham village), Jean Ellul (Elephant tamers and their rituals), Jacqueline Métra (Bru minority village), Gabriele Martel (Lovea village), Ang Choulean (popular religious practices), Mayko Ebihara (Svay village).

62 To this list should be included Jean Delvert, whose *Cambodian Peasant*, published in 1961, introduced the disciplines of geography and economics into the field of Cambodian studies. Comparative research between the ancient Khmer and Indian 'worlds' was significantly influenced by Jean Filliozat. Filliozat supported two of the first Cambodian scholars in Cambodian philology Au Chhieng and Saveros Pou. Three other major scholars of ancient Khmer epigraphy included the Indian Sanskritists Kamaleswar Bhattacharya and Sachchidanand Sahai and the Frenchman Claude Jacques.

newly independent country. The influence of this first generation on the following ones, in spite of the dramatic disruptions that occurred in the country, was crucial. Their legacy should not be limited to their works and publications, but also, in the country's fast transforming academic landscape, to their institution-building achievements. To appreciate the revolution in the field that took place in those early years of independent Cambodia, I need to underscore the role played by those pioneers.[63]

The first 'modern' Cambodian scholar of repute was Au Chhieng. Educated in France, he studied Sanskrit under Georges Coedès and Louis Renou, and later held the position of librarian while he taught at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Études*. Throughout his career, Chhieng kept a low profile in the academic world. His articles in the *Journal Asiatique* dealt with post-Angkorian Khmer literature and linguistics. He is better known for his catalogue *raisonné* of the rich Khmer Collection of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, an essential reference instrument for scholars on Khmer studies. He died in 1980 in France.

Of even more importance is the work of Saveros Pou. Born in 1929, she first worked as Khmer language reader at the Langues'O. She defended her *Doctorat d'Etat* on the Khmer Ramayana in 1974. She became the first Cambodian woman with a doctorate.[64] Pou studied under André Bareau, Louis Renoux, Jean Filliozat and Georges Coedès. In the 1960s, she integrated CNRS while holding a '*Correspondent*' position at the EFEO. Prof. Pou is the promoter of the newly coined field of *khmérologie* or khmerology which, she argues, should be rooted in the study of the Khmer language and its ancient literature.[65]

Equally influential for generations of Cambodian intellectuals was the linguist, philologist, historian, playwright, and poet Keng Vannsak (1925–2008). A Reader of Khmer language at the *Langues'O* and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, Keng Vannsak had a strong impact on his

63 For this section, besides consulting a number of article acknowledgements, biographical notes as well as secondary sources, I greatly benefited from discussions with a number of scholars including: Nouth Narang, Khing Hoc Dy, Thonevat Pou, Vann Molyvann, Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, Ang Choulean, Nut Suppya, Michel Rethy Antelme, among others. I take this opportunity to thank them.

64 The thesis, 'Etudes sur le Râmakarti' was later published as an EFEO publication (PEFEO [1977]. CXI. Paris). Prof. Pou's *Doctorat de Troisième Cycle* (eq. to M.Phil.) focused on Khmer toponymy. This latter work was published in the EFEO *Bulletin* (*BEFEO* [1967]. LIII: 377–450). I am grateful to Khing Hoc Dy for these precisions.

65 Pou insisted that the most urgent task was the uncovering of the Khmer literary heritage' contained in the inscriptions and texts of the 'Middle period'. Saveros Pou (2000). 'What is Khmerology?', conference given at the Buddhist Institute, Phnom Penh: Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.

contemporaries including the future Khmer Rouge leaders Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) and Ieng Sary during their student time in Paris. He himself never supported Communism. In the 1960s he taught Khmer Literature, Epigraphy, and Civilization at the Buddhist University in Phnom Penh and at the Royal University of Fine Arts. A staunch anti-monarchist, he was jailed twice for his opposition to Sihanouk. During the Lon Nol regime he created the short-lived Khmer-Môn Institute. In 1971, he defended his Doctorate under the title "The Search for the Cultural Khmer Origins" in Paris.[66] Like Saveros Pou, Keng Vannsak inspired a scientific quest for the vernacular referents of Cambodian culture to be found in the Khmer language which he named '*khméritude*' (in reference to the concept of *négritude*). He is the inventor of the Khmer-script keyboard for typewriters and later the computer. He died in self-imposed exile in France.

Another early Cambodian scholar of note was the sociologist Man Tay Son, unfortunately less known due to his premature death during the Khmer Rouge regime. His work focused on the evolution of Cambodian society through popular religious practices. Man Tay Son is regarded as the first Cambodian social scientist who attempted to critically analyze the inner functioning of contemporary Cambodian society (*'penser la société cambodgienne'*). In the vein of sociologist Maurice Godelier, Son studied at the Paris Sociology School under Gourvitch, Betelheim and Lévi-Strauss. Close to geographer of Indochina Pierre Gourou and the sociologist Paul Mus, Son returned to Cambodia in the late 1960s to teach at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, defending his *Doctorat d'Etat* in France in 1973. He disappeared in 1975.

Chea Tay Seng was Cambodia's first art historian. He received his *Licence-ès-lettres* at the Sorbonne. With support from Bernard-Philippe Groslier, Chea Tay Seng studied museology and archaeology at the *Ecole du Louvre*. In 1964, he became curator of the National Museum in Phnom Penh while he served as dean of the newly created Faculty of Archaeology at the Royal University of Fine Arts. He worked during the Khmer Republic at the Ministry of Information and was subsequently executed by the Khmer Rouge at the Tuol Sleng prison on 27 May 1976.

There were many other influential Cambodian thinkers who emerged during this period. Some became celebrated writers while others engaged in visual arts. One of them is considered as the father of Cambodian performing arts: Hang Thoun Hak. Hak went to France in the 1950s to study drama at the *Sarah Bernhard Ecole des Comédiens* where he trained under French director Jean Vilar. Thereafter Hak returned to his home country convinced of the need

66 In French: *Recherche d'un fonds culturel Khmer.*

to democratize access to the hitherto court-based Cambodian Ballet, while bringing forth less aristocratic forms of arts like the Bassac Theater. His cultural agenda followed a Republican political line. Embarking on an academic career, Hak was involved in the foundation of two major institutions of performing arts: the National Theater of Cambodia and the Department of Performing Arts at the Royal University of Fine Arts. Hak briefly assumed the position of Prime Minister during the Republic (1972–73). He died in the first days after the Khmer Rouge seized power.

Another remarkable figure of this generation is the architect-urban planner Vann Molyvann. Molyvann was the first Cambodian to graduate in Architecture at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts* in Paris. Inspired by Le Corbusier, he created a unique Cambodian modernist style still lauded today.[67] Molyvann became minister of Education in 1967 under Prince Sihanouk. The architect-minister escaped the fate of his contemporaries by leaving the country in the wake of the 1970 coup. He resumed activities in the post-UNTAC period as the first president of the APSARA Authority in Angkor, allowing him to become in the eyes of many young Cambodians one of the rare links with the country's pre-war cultural world.

2.2 *The Royal University of Fine Arts (1965–1975)*

Members of this first generation of Western-trained Cambodian scholars and intellectuals, were closely involved in a number of experimental state-supported educational and cultural institutions. One of the most enduring state-backed projects initiated during the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk was the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA). Founded by Sihanouk himself in 1965, RUFA or *Université Royale des Beaux-Arts* was an institutional experiment that aimed at shaping a distinctive Cambodian curriculum in the arts and humanities. Vann Molyvann was the first rector of the University. In symbiosis with the Cambodian State (and members of the renovated EFEO), RUFA was one of the most important post-independence higher education investments.[68] RUFA combined intellectual influences of EFEO's director Bernard-Philippe

67 Among Vann Molyvann's most famous *chefs d'oeuvres* are the Independence Monument, the National Stadium, the National Bassac Theater, the Chankarmon Theater, and many other buildings. Beside his architectural activity, Molyvann was involved in developing the first national framework for art education.

68 Since the 1950 'Quadripartite Agreement', the EFEO was granted by the Cambodian government a unique status: as a foreign institution, its work and presence were recognized 'of national interest'. In practice, this meant that national cultural institutions like the Angkor Conservation and the Phnom Penh Art Museum continued to be administered by members of EFEO while the Ecole was involved in the development of educational initiatives like RUFA (Singaravélou (1999), pp. 278–279).

Groslier, the ethnologist Georges Condominas, Norodom Sihanouk himself and its first rector, Vann Molyvann.

Its initiators set out to create a university that was anchored in combining the 'local' study and practice of arts, humanistic sciences, as well as 'classical' studies and contemporary ethnology. The Royal Palace's sometime patronizing and elitist influences were mainly visible through the teaching of the 'Royal Ballet'.[69] With its four departments of Archaeology, Architecture, Plastic Arts, and Dramatical & Choreographic Arts, 'classical' Angkorian references were blended with ethnographic knowledge and art forms. RUFA was to embody a truly Cambodian model in the national higher education landscape. Like Molyvann's distinctive architecture, RUFA combined elements of 'Classic-Ancient', 'Sacred-Regalia', and 'Vernacular-Contemporary'. As a space for inter-disciplinary trans-cultural interactions, RUFA constituted an original Franco-Cambodian post-colonial university model.[70] The university somewhat kept free from the deleterious over-politicized atmosphere that gripped other campuses onward from the mid-1960s.[71] During the Khmer Republic (1970–75), the university's unique pedagogical model remained, although it was stripped

69 A School of Cambodian Arts (*École des Arts Cambodgiens*) had been established by the Protectorate in 1918, in conjunction with the creation of the Museum of the same name. The School essentially focused on traditional craft around a program aimed at 'regenerating' classical Angkorian Cambodian art forms. In her PhD dissertation, Ingrid Muan shows how a debilitating grip was set on Cambodian art forms by the School of Cambodian Arts and its creator, George Groslier, the father of Bernard-Philippe. Groslier imposed a teaching in which 'art' was often reduced to reify ornamental objects meant to be reproduced through a standard grid, with no spaces left for artists to create and improvise. On this and other examples of active colonial orientalism forced upon Cambodian artists and craftsmen, see Ingrid Muan (2001). 'The Cambodian Arts' in the Age of Restoration 1918–2000'. PhD Dissertation, Columbia University. Also, Muan (2005). 'Haunted Scenes: Painting and History in Phnom Penh'. *Udaya: Journal of Khmer Studies* 6: 15–39. See also Gabrielle Abbe (2015). '"Decadence and Revival" in Cambodian arts and the role of George Groslier (1887–1945)'. In *Cultural Heritage as Civilizing Mission*, edited by Michael Falser. Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 123–148.

70 Interview of Vann Molyvann (2004). In *Cultures of Independence*, edited by Ly Daravuth and Ingrid Muan. Phnom Penh: Reyum, p. 19.

71 During the Sihanouk regime, draconian measures were increasingly taken by the state to restrict young Cambodian scholars from studying abroad – mainly in France – where it was feared they would be 'contaminated' by subversive – left-wing – views. Also, from 1967 onward, every start of academic year was preceded by a mass ceremony at the Ministry of Education where university rectors, deans, professors and students were all forced to kneel down to swear their total allegiance to Sihanouk, the monarchy and the Queen-Mother (Kossamak), see Keng Vannsak (1981). *Tragédie d'un Peuple* (*Khmer*). Montmorency: 'Association pour la Préservation de la Culture Khmère', p. 15. On the atmosphere of general suspicion and increased political polarization among academics from the late 1960s onward, see Milton Osborne's personal account (2004). *Before Kampuchea*. Bangkok: Orchid Press, pp. 93–102.

of its former ties with the monarchy. The re-named 'University of Fine Arts' kept the same structure except for the integration of the former Royal Ballet – thereafter named National Ballet – into a new department of Performing Arts. Many of Cambodia's future 'Liberal Arts' scholars continued to receive training there: Ang Choulean, Yin Tan Phong, Son Soubert, and many others. They carried forward its unique way of studying and engaging with Cambodian society, its history and culture. State political interferences into the university's programs apparently remained limited.[72]

72 RUFA's teaching excellence was recognized particularly through the quality of the students' Bachelor degree memoirs. Those that survived loss and decay during the Khmer Rouge got re-used as reference materials when the university re-opened in 1988. In spite of a number of international programs aimed at restoring its past glory, RUFA never recovered the intellectual prominence it once enjoyed.

CHAPTER 2

Civil War, Genocide and CEDORECK

By 1965, the spillover effect of the U.S. 'Vietnam War' on Cambodia was unmistakable. One year earlier, Sihanouk broke off diplomatic relations with the United States. He allied himself with the North Vietnamese, allowing the communist guerillas to set up bases in Cambodia. It was around this time that Cambodian insurgents known as the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) began to consolidate their power along the border with Vietnam. Sihanouk called them the *Khmer Rouge*. Despite a marked reverse in his political orientations in favor of the right, Sihanouk was deposed by a *coup d'état* by his prime minister in April 1970, paving the way for the institution of the Khmer Republic. The event, at least symbolically, marks the turning point when the country began to descend into internal political chaos. The new decade and the deposition of Sihanouk launched a spiral of political upheavals and the effective dislocation of Cambodia as a country, worse, as a society. Tensions had been high for some time with Sihanouk increasingly caught in a vainglorious attempt at self-legitimation while the war that was raging in neighboring Vietnam and Laos had already spilled over into Cambodian soil. The conflict eventually brought down the regime and with it the whole nation in a whirlpool of destruction and death.

1 The Khmer Republic (1970–1975)

The short-lived Khmer Republic that followed Sihanouk's demise was almost immediately engulfed in civil war. The regime was right wing in inspiration, pro-American, and staunchly anti-Vietnamese. Its anti-communist attitude aggravated an openly racist stance particularly vis-à-vis the ethnic Vietnamese community living in the country. The new regime led pogroms against Vietnamese in the capital and other major city centers. Meanwhile, encouraged by the United States, the new head of state Marshal Lon Nol launched a series of offensives against the North Vietnamese armed forces in Cambodia. These attempts proved disastrous. The inexperienced Cambodian army suffered heavy losses.

At first, many Cambodians in the cities supported the new regime for what they hoped would inaugurate a less arbitrary and infantilizing model of governance than Sihanouk's. By contrast, rural Cambodians continued to harbor

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support for the Prince. An increasing number of them eventually joined the communist guerilla, particularly once they knew that Sihanouk had rallied it. Lon Nol soon found himself controlling only the capital city and several provincial capitals while their peripheries became unstable. Even as Lon Nol felt order and stability slipping away, the "Marshall head of state" implemented a policy of 'Cambodianization' aimed at uprooting the monarchical tradition while simultaneously promoting Cambodian nationalism. Not unlike Sihanouk's emphasis on 'Buddhist Socialism' but with a racialist undertone that prefigured the Khmer Rouge, Lon Nol's policy of 'Neo-Khmerism' drew on the glorious past of the Cambodian nation. A new form of ethnicity-based ultra-nationalist republicanism rooted in the worship of a mythical 'Khmer race' permeated political and social life. Once again, the state was to be the sole provider of a collective official ideology as it tried to control all modes of educational and cultural production.

Increasingly, the republican regime became caught in a deadly spiral of "despondency, rivalry, factionalism, and corruption", a trend that inevitably led to defeat.[1] The Republic totally depended on U.S. military support coupled with 'economic assistance'. Immediately after Sihanouk's overthrow, the U.S. targeted eastern Cambodia for one of the most destructive bombing campaigns ever unleashed in an attempt to stamp out the Communist guerillas. Over a hundred thousand tons of bombs fell on the Cambodian countryside killing an estimated six hundred thousand Cambodians – nearly ten percent of the population – and leaving nearly two million people as internal refugees.[2] If it temporarily halted the activities of the Communists, the campaign, which lasted until August 1973, largely contributed to hardening the will of those who survived while it also enabled them to recruit large numbers of incensed peasants.[3] In April 1975, the communist forces finally converged on Phnom Penh. The Republic's army disintegrated. Upon seizing the capital, the Khmer Rouge executed the regime's leaders and Lon Nol fled into exile.[4]

As far as public print and media culture were concerned, the short period of the Khmer Republic was initially characterized by a real outburst of initiatives, especially advantageous to the press. This trend was at first encouraged by the new regime as a reaction to the propaganda of the Sihanouk regime. Yet, this embracing of political modernity – with the introduction of television

1 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 67.

2 Kiljunen, Kimmo (ed.) (1994). *Kampuchea: Decade of the Genocide: Report of a Finnish Enquiry Commission*. London: Zed Books, pp. 5–6.

3 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 252.

4 "The last four years of the Khmer Republic were violent and melancholy." In Chandler (2008). Ibid., p. 252.

and the spread of short-wave radios – soon gave way to more traditional attempts by state agencies at controlling journalists while mobilizing all forms of public communication to promote the regime and its war effort. As the war was uprooting hundreds of thousands of the rural population, Phnom Penh and Battambang became the last bastions of public political expression. The subsequent stamping out of urban life immediately after the Khmer Rouge take over, with the elimination of all forms of public expression in the country, paradoxically highlighted the essentially urban character of the cultural and educational policies pursued by the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes and thereof, the relatively marginal importance of any forms of public expression in the pre-genocide Cambodian civil society.[5]

Under the Republic, the Cambodian education system also suffered heavily. The regime was so preoccupied with trying to assert its legitimacy that it was incapable of implementing the kind of reforms the country desperately needed. As Lon Nol reduced educational funding, many schools closed down, especially in rural areas. The United States' bombing campaign in eastern Cambodia also had an adverse effect on the educational infrastructure of the country. Meanwhile, the tertiary education system, when it was able to operate, remained atrophied, with too many students and too few adequately trained educators. Ayres believes that the Lon Nol regime, like its predecessor, exacerbated this crisis by failing to recognize that the system was "incompatible with the needs of an essentially agrarian nation".[6] As under Sihanouk's regime, students realized they were taught skills that could be of no practical use. Worse, as the Republic's power weakened, the socioeconomic achievements of the previous fifteen years started to wane.[7] Students and teachers grew frustrated with the regime's inability to keep its promises, and many fled the Khmer Rouge-controlled areas to join the Communist movement. Others sought to remain neutral, hoping for a return to normalcy."[8]

1.1 *The Khmer-Môn Institute* (*1971–1975*)

Perhaps the one last example of post-independence state-sponsored academic and cultural institution that was ever attempted and that somewhat echoed the RUFA experiment was the 'Khmer-Môn Institute', established by Lon Nol in

5 Vickery, along with other scholars, points to the fact that the Cambodian civil war "whatever else it may have been, was also a war between town and country in which the towns fought increasingly to preserve privileges while the rural areas suffered." Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–1982*, p. 26.

6 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 91.

7 Dy, Sideth (2004). 'Strategies and Policies for Basic Education', p. 95.

8 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 93.

1971. In contrast with RUFA, the new Institute proved to be an organizational and intellectual failure from its very beginning. Originally a French-Cambodian scientific project aimed at studying the linguistic 'Môn-Khmer' family of the Austroasiatic group in a Phnom Penh-based 'Môn-Khmer' institute, the project was taken over by the new regime and reconstituted as a 'Khmer-Môn' Institute. The reversal of the order of Môn and Khmer, "an expression that had been consecrated for more than fifty years",[9] is indicative of the regime's effort to promote an ultra-nationalist political agenda in the country's academic system. One of the new institute's objectives was to popularize Lon Nol's phony conceptions of 'Neo-Khmerism' built around a "bizarrely racist ideology" that proclaimed the existence of a Khmer-Môn 'race', or 'civilization' that once controlled most of the Indochinese peninsula.[10]

For the promoters of this agenda, and in particular it's director the anti-royalist Keng Vannsak, the Khmer-Môn cultural-racial substratum was at the origin of the 'Khmer nation' and was responsible for considerable past achievements like Angkor.[11] The Institute's director was even sent to Burma on one of the Republic's first missions abroad to apparently study the original forms of Khmer-Môn dress.[12] In 1972, the Khmer-Môn Institute was endowed with a pseudo-scholarly journal. With Vannsak's departure that same year, the institute's conspicuous scientific and institutional failure preceded its forced closure by the Khmer Rouge in 1975. The short-lived initiative amounts to one of the last attempts by a Cambodian state to impose a political ideology upon Cambodian intellectuals. It was this kind of heavy-handed initiatives that had seen Cambodian intellectuals desert the Republican regime despite a genuinely early enthusiasm among many after the suffocating final years of the Sihanouk regime.

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9 Marie Alexandrine Martin (1994). *Cambodia: A shattered Society*. Berkeley: University of California, p. 129.

10 "Scholars had for many decades regarded the Môn-Khmer family of languages as crucial to the understanding of Southeast Asian culture, but Lon Nol, by an absurd rearrangement of the term, now came to believe in the messianic mission of a so-called Khmer-Môn race." Ian Harris (2005). *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. 164.

11 Kheng Vannsak quickly became disillusioned with the highly propagandist purpose of the Institute. He stepped down a year later and moved to Paris to work for UNESCO as Cambodia's deputy representative and *chargé d'affaires* of Lon Nol's Khmer Republic in France, where he would spend the rest of his life.

12 In 1971, Lon Nol created a series of Government advisory bodies including a 'Coordinating Committee for Khmer-Môn Friendship Activities and for Malayo-Polynesian Khmer-Môn Culture', Martin (1994), p. 130.

2 The Khmer Rouge (1975–1979)

Democratic Kampuchea (DK) – the movement and regime better known as *Khmer Rouge* (Red Cambodians)[13] – controlled Cambodia from April 17, 1975 to January 7, 1979. Saloth Sar, also known as Pol Pot, was the regime's revolutionary leader who plunged the country into a deadly utopian political nightmare. In his youth, Pol Pot was an unsuccessful student who was drawn to anti-intellectualism at an early age. While in France from 1949 to 1953 he joined the French Communist Party that championed the Viet Minh's anti-colonial action in Cambodia. When he returned to his homeland, he operated as a left-wing activist and joined the underground movement. In 1962, he assumed control of the local Communist movement. Within months, he and his followers went into hiding in the jungles of northeast Cambodia fleeing persecution from Sihanouk's forces. There, Pol Pot began planning a peasant revolution and started recruiting young followers from Cambodia's ethnic minority groups.[14] The *coup d'état* by the Republicans against Sihanouk in 1970 helped pave the way for the Khmer Rouge to ascend to power. Over the next five years, the movement extended its control over Cambodia's rural areas. The 1973 massive U.S. bombing contributed to its recruiting momentum. Finally, in early April of 1975, Pol Pot's troops seized Phnom Penh.[15]

Immediately after the fall of the Lon Nol regime, what was still known as Cambodia's Communist Party (CPK) and its leaders distanced themselves from all foreign actors including their former Vietnamese allies. The perverse form of nationalism that guided the CPK's actions for the following "three years, eight months, and twenty days" resulted in the death of almost two million people.[16] From the start, Pol Pot made it clear that the goal of the revolution was to "do away with all vestiges of the past."[17] The ideology of the Khmer Rouge was in many regards an extreme form of supremacist nationalism combined with a radical agrarian utopian vision. Undoubtedly influenced by the experiences in Communist Yugoslavia and China, Pol Pot idealized notions of self-reliance, equalitarianism and rapid collectivization. The DK's leaders aimed to transform Cambodia by removing what they viewed as 'barriers' to national independence and social justice.

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13 Expression given to it by Norodom Sihanouk.

14 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 99. On Saloth Sar – Pol Pot, see Philip Short (2006). *Pol Pot, Anatomy of a Nightmare*. New York: Holt Publisher.

15 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 255.

16 Chandler (2008). Ibid., p. 255.

17 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 104.

The glorified image of Cambodia's agrarian past that they associated with the age of almighty Angkor was to be achieved by dismantling numerous aspects of Cambodian life which they deemed responsible for Cambodia's decadence.[18] Existing social groups, family life, individualism, Buddhism and other institutions were viewed as obstacles to the revolution.[19] To achieve this agrarian utopia, time had to be turned back: "History was to be undone."[20] A new society, one that empowered the poor and granted absolute equality, was to be formed.[21] Within the first week after the taking of Phnom Penh over two million Cambodians were forcibly removed from the cities, even the injured, aged, and disabled were deported. The civilians were relocated to the countryside where they were forced to grow rice and other crops under the supervision of the Khmer Rouge. However, agrarian utopia was not so easily achieved.

The regime was entirely willing to sacrifice human resources in order to pursue its goals. The Khmer Rouge's style of revolutionary violence operated outside any legal framework, even when they controlled the state apparatus.[22] In a reflection of the high state of paranoia that reigned at the helm of DK's power, Pol Pot was convinced that 'foreign enemies' wanted to "violate, encroach upon, threaten and annex" Cambodian territory.[23] Thus, he and his men arrested and executed all those who posed a potential threat to the regime. Those deemed unfit to work in the fields were also eliminated. Those targeted included ethnically non-Khmers such as people of Vietnamese, Cham and Chinese descents, intellectuals and professionals as well as soldiers and officials who had served the Lon Nol regime. Many of these 'enemies of the state' were taken to the infamous Security Prison 21 (S-21) where they were imprisoned and tortured. It is estimated that between 1975 and 1978, up to 17,000 victims were transported from Tuol Sleng (the Security Prison) to an

18 Sasha Sher (2003). 'Le parallèle éminemment douteux entre l'*angkar* révolutionnaire et Angkor'. *Aséanie* 11: 21–37.

19 Officially, DK recognized the right of individuals to hold (or not) religious faith. In practice, however, no religious activities were tolerated. Leaders of the regime saw Buddhism as an instrument of the traditional elites to maintain 'feudal' attitudes and relationships. See Vickery (1999). *Cambodia, 1975–82*, p. 191; Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 256.

20 *Ben Kiernan (1996). The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 27.

21 "No Cambodian government had ever tried to change so many things so rapidly; none had been so relentlessly oriented toward the future or so biased in favor of the poor.", in Chandler (2008). Ibid., p. 255.

22 Craig Etcheson (2005). *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide*. Lubbock: Texas Technical University Press, p. 5.

23 Radio Phnom Penh, 27 September 1977; *FBIS*, 4 October 1977; H27 as referenced by Karl Jackson (1978). "Cambodia 1977: Gone to Pot." *Asian Survey* 18 (1): 76–90, p. 77.

extermination camp where they were executed and thrown into mass graves.[24] Other Khmer citizens were murdered in the rice fields or died of starvation or disease.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact number of deaths that occurred during or were caused by the Pol Pot regime, but estimates range from 1.5 to 1.7 million.[25] Scholars such as Vickery and Kiernan assert that probably less than half of these deaths were caused by executions.[26] 'Hell on earth' came to an end in January 1979 when Vietnamese forces reached Phnom Penh and toppled the Khmer Rouge. Vietnam and Cambodia had been engaged in border clashes since the Khmer Rouge came to power. Late in 1978, after particular acts of aggression by Cambodia against Vietnamese civilians living near the border, Vietnam launched an offensive to oust the Pol Pot regime. Within a few weeks of the invasion, Cambodia "cracked open like an egg."[27] Khmer citizens, exhausted from four years of starvation, hard labor, and incessant executions, welcomed the invaders. Pol Pot and his entourage fled and the Vietnamese-supported People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was born.

Under the DK regime, the Cambodian education system that had operated under Sihanouk and Lon Nol, and those who had been a part of it, were eliminated. The stated policy of the regime was to abolish all literary schooling above the lowest primary grades.[28] The simple act of having attended school, speaking a foreign language and sometime even wearing glasses could serve as grounds for execution. Professors, students, intellectuals, and Buddhist monks, were targeted. Statistics by the Cambodia's Ministry of Education recorded that '75% of the teaching force, 96% of tertiary students and 67% of all [elementary and secondary] pupils' died in Democratic Kampuchea.[29] In 1977, Pol Pot justified the actions of his regime by arguing that teachers and professors had "actively obscured the inequities in the old social system and had turned

24 Terence Duffy (1994). "Toward a Culture of Human Rights in Cambodia." *Human Rights Quarterly* 16 (1): 82–104, p. 90.

25 Bruce Sharp (2005). "Counting Hell: The Death Toll of the Khmer Rouge Regime in Cambodia.". Available at: http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/deaths.htm, accessed on 13 August 2011.

26 Michael Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–82*, pp. 200–201. Ben Kiernan (1996). *The Pol Pot Regime, p. 456*. See also Patrick Heuveline (1998). "'Between One and Three Million': Towards the Demographic Reconstruction of a Decade of Cambodian History (1970–79)." *Population Studies* 52 (1): 49–65, p. 50.

27 David Chandler (2000). *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 1.

28 Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–1982*, p. 183.

29 Thomas Clayton (1998). 'Building the New Cambodia: Educational Destruction and Construction under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979'. *History of Education Quarterly*: pp. 7–8.

worker-peasants away from revolution toward acceptance of exploitation".[30] With this argument, Pol Pot claimed he was implementing a system of retributive justice. Many scholars, however, argue that the regime killed so many intellectuals not out of revenge, but rather because of the paranoia and sense of insecurity of its leaders. The regime wanted to eradicate all those capable of potentially posing a threat to their power.[31] As a result, four years of Khmer Rouge completely destroyed the formal education system that had existed in Cambodia.[32]

One should, however, caution against the myth that the DK abolished all schools. While educational agendas were cast aside, an alternative, "primitive and pathetic" form of system was established.[33] In 1976, the regime outlined its educational policies in the *Four-Year Plan to Build Socialism in All Fields* as well as in statements made by its leaders. In their translation of the *Four Year Plan*, Chigas and Mosyakov found the following statement: "In our educational system there are no examinations and no certificates; it is a system of learning through the collective and in the concrete movement of the socialist revolution and the building of socialism in the specific contexts, especially the co-operatives, factories, and military units."[34] Children were to attend village schools (usually in stables or in thatched huts) where they would learn basic literacy and numeracy, revolutionary songs and slogans, and revolutionary morality.[35] Foreign language instruction was forbidden.

Moreover, the DK foresaw a strong linkage between education and manual labor. A Khmer Rouge aphorism proclaimed: "The school is the rice paddy [and] the pen is the hoe."[36] The importance of learning technology was also emphasized, although this type of knowledge was most likely to be used only for agricultural development.[37] Some technical tertiary education also

30 Thomas Clayton (1998). 'Building the New Cambodia', p. 7.

31 Kenneth Quinn (1989). "The Pattern and Scope of Violence," in *Cambodia 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death*. In Karl Jackson ed. Princeton, p. 188. Vickery also thinks that suspicion of disloyalty toward the regime was one of the prime motives behind the DK leadership's effort to downgrade education and eliminate educated people. (Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–1982*, pp. 183–186).

32 Even before the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, 50 per cent of the nation's hospitals and schools had been destroyed by bombing and artillery fire, see Duggan (1997). 'The Role of International Organizations', p. 3.

33 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 109.

34 George Chigas and Dmitri Mosyakov (2014). Available at: http://www.yale.edu/cgp/literacyandeducation.html; accessed 16 July 2014.

35 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 113.

36 Clayton (1998). 'Building the New Cambodia', p. 11.

37 "The stated policy of the DK leaders was first 'to eradicate illiteracy', although schooling was to be conducted 'in factories and cooperatives' and was to remain close to the realities of an agricultural country." (Vickery [1999]. *Cambodia 1975–1982*, p. 183).

existed. An Institute for Scientific Training and Information was in operation in Phnom Penh from 1976 to 1979, and there was a post-primary agricultural school in the country. Little is known about these programs. The Khmer Rouge had neither the funds nor the political will to devote much attention to the cause of education.[38] Focus was directed primarily at defense from both internal and external threats whether perceived or real. Finally, at the core of the regime's ideology was the preference of DK leaders for a mass of un-educated children-soldiers to a community of educated avant-garde revolutionaries.[39]

As for other sectors of Cambodian society, the KR's educational and cultural legacy was disastrous. By the time the Vietnamese took Phnom Penh, there was widespread desolation everywhere. Books and printing facilities had been destroyed, the academic and cultural facilities that had survived had been left to crumble, and worst of all human capital had almost completely disappeared.[40] Teachers, graduates, and intellectuals had either fled the country or been killed. The majority of children were illiterate. The educational devastation that the Khmer Rouge had caused was long lasting. A 1993 survey found that 31 percent of the population over five years had zero education, that nearly half the population was illiterate, and that the mean years of schooling was only 3.5.[41] Under these drastic conditions, the very idea of a Cambodian 'public sphere' and even 'civil society' had been annihilated. It would take decades for Cambodia to recover.

3 Rebuilding from the Ashes

3.1 *In Cambodia: the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979–1993)*

In the decade that followed the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979, the Vietnamese occupied Cambodia. A pro-Hanoi government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) followed the socialist state model of one-party rule until 1991 when it abandoned its Marxist-Leninist ideology. The country was in total disarray, the population traumatized, and its institutions,

38 Ayres: "the DK regime provided Cambodia with an opportunity to address the education crisis [created by its predecessors], but the regime failed to do so, due primarily to the extremity and savagery of the leaders." (Ayres [2000]. *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 119).

39 Etcheson (2005), *After the Killing Fields*, p. 5. Such kind of anti-intellectualism among the DK leaders echoes that harbored by members of the previous regimes' social elite. ("there was always a certain implicit denigration of learning and of intellectuals by the established elite"), Vickery (1999). *Cambodia 1975–1982*, p. 22.

40 Duggan (1997). 'The Role of International Organizations', p. 1.

41 Prasertsri, Supote (1996). 'Rebirth of the Learning Tradition: A Case Study on the Achievements of Education for All in Cambodia. Mid-Decade Review of Progress towards Education for All'. UNESCO: Education for All Forum Secretariat.

infrastructure, and intelligentsia destroyed. The destruction of Cambodian social institutions during the 'Year Zero' period under the Khmer Rouge had been thorough. It had left the PRK with little to start. There were no currency, functioning cities, police, schools, books, hospitals, post and telecommunications, legal system and commercial networks, whether state-owned or private. The fall of the Khmer Rouge allowed for massive internal movements, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians looking for relatives, returning to their homes or seeking refuge overseas. The disorder also resulted in famine outbreaks.[42]

Against these considerable odds, the new regime, set out to rebuild the country. This was not done without difficulties, including a continuing international economic and aid embargo imposed against the new regime by the United States, their allies and China.[43] The regime was accused of being a mere 'puppet' of Vietnam. Faced with economic sanctions and a growing debilitating war against a coalition of opposition factions concentrated mainly on the Thai-Cambodian border,[44] the PRK nonetheless took important steps toward the reconstruction of Cambodian society.

One of the first measures taken by the PRK was a partial restoration of Buddhism as the official religion of Cambodia. Temples were gradually reopened to accommodate monks and to resume a certain measure of traditional religious and social life. Repair works were started in about 700 Buddhist temples and monasteries, of the roughly 3,600 that had been destroyed or badly damaged by the Khmer Rouge. By mid-1980 traditional Buddhist festivals began to be celebrated.

Another essential action taken by the PRK was the restoration of basic state services. For that, it needed to train a whole new generation of cadres and educators. Because of the massive devastation of human resources during the Khmer Rouge, the regime totally depended on external assistance.[45] When the Vietnamese 'liberators' went into Cambodia, they took with them a mass of technical and political advisors. Their influence was pervasive. The West's refusal to assist Cambodia led to a quasi-exclusive support provided

42 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 230.

43 The right to represent Cambodia at the United Nations was vetoed by the U.S. and China resulting in the Cambodian seat being held by Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea. Between 1979 and 1993, the PRK was considered as the *de facto* government of Cambodia, with limited international recognition.

44 These factions included Sihanouk's royalist party FUNCINPEC (*Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif*), Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea, and the nationalist Khmer People's National Liberation Front, led by Sihanouk's former Finance Minister, Son Sann.

45 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 233.

by the international socialist bloc, including, after Vietnam, the Soviet Union and other eastern European countries. Beyond teaching and learning materials, these countries offered training assistance at all levels including higher education.[46]

According to Ayres, the educational crisis in 1979 had multiple structural dimensions: (1) a crisis of quality – with severe deficiencies in human resources and infrastructure; (2) a crisis of orientation – with a contradiction between the goals and the structures of the system; (3) a crisis of timing – the PRK attempting to do too much too quickly. "By November 1979, when 716,553 students had officially enrolled in primary schools throughout Cambodia, the nation had only 13,619 teachers, at a ratio of 1 teacher for every 53 students. Only 4,000 of the teachers had formal qualifications".[47]

Plans for rehabilitating higher education started with the opening of the Teachers' Training College. By transforming the former University of Phnom Penh into this upper secondary vocational training institution for educators, the post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian government returned to scholarship's basic social function: educating future educators. Given the shortage of Cambodians capable of transmitting knowledge, the policy of 'Khmerization' of tertiary education that had been carried out by the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes was abandoned.[48] In terms of content, the PRK's educational policy can be summarized into two conceptions: "good technical training and good political training".[49] Courses included, but were not limited to, "Marxist-Leninist Theories, World Revolutionary History and the History of the Cambodian Revolution, The Situation and the Role of the Revolution and the Policy of the Party, Moral Education and the Revolutionary Way of Life, and Attitude to the Common People".[50] Overall however, higher education was stifled with an absence of the "liberal-academic mindset that had fueled aspirations of social mobility among students during the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes."[51]

Despite numerous efforts, the PRK never fully succeeded in establishing itself. It remained dependent on Vietnamese and Soviet aid. The conditions in the country meanwhile remained strenuous. In addition to the disorganizing legacy of the Khmer Rouge, the country remained plagued by a protracted civil war that continued to bleed Cambodia. Faced with a destroyed country,

46 Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 126.
47 Ayres (2000). Ibid., p. 132.
48 Ayres (2000). Ibid., p. 139.
49 Thomas Clayton (2005). 'Reorientations in moral education in Cambodia since 1975'. *Journal of Moral Education* 34: 505–517, p. 510.
50 Clayton (2005). 'Reorientations in Moral Education', p. 511.
51 Ayres (2000), *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 49.

a lack of international aid and conflicting loyalties as a result of the civil war, large numbers of distraught Cambodians, many from the remaining educated fringes of society, flocked to the Thai border. At one point, there were more than 500,000 of them living behind the border. Though Vietnam's occupation army of as many as 200,000 troops controlled the major population centers and most of the countryside, security in many rural areas remained tenuous. Many Cambodians felt this Vietnamese presence as an unbearable intrusion into their lives fueling the traditional anti-Vietnamese sentiment and high suspicions vis-à-vis the leaders of the PRK.

3.2 *Cultural Survival* in Exile: *the CEDORECK*

Besides the large concentrations of refugees fleeing Cambodia in the late 1970s, the period saw many Cambodian intellectuals forced into exile in Europe and the United States. Their situation somewhat compelled them to address the question of the relation between politics and scholarship and the issue of institutional production of knowledge in their country. The response of these stateless individuals was to invent a new model built *from the bottom-up*. Its most visible expression was the CEDORECK, established in Paris, France. The program is particularly interesting for a number of reasons. The initiative emanated from *individual* scholars themselves, whether Cambodian, French or American and not from the state. Even if it benefited from the support of a number of French and international people and institutions, it was essentially created by Cambodian individuals who, despairing over the fate of their country and its culture, chose to 'do something' on their own initiative. CEDORECK's intellectual agenda was proclaimed free from designs of power or association with any particular political faction. It aimed to be a concrete response to the question of the 'survival' of Khmer culture considered not just threatened by the Khmer Rouge, but also by any state ideologies that attempted to define it. CEDORECK was interested in the preservation and transmission of Cambodian culture in its broad, multi-disciplinary and social anchorage.

The intellectual origins of CEDORECK need to be traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s with the presence of a number of Cambodian students pursuing their postgraduate studies (*Troisième Cycle*) in France. Many stayed at the *Maison du Cambodge* at the Paris International University campus. There, they were exposed to the increasing political fractionalization of the Cambodian intellectual community along the lines that openly tore the country between Sihanoukists, Republicans, and Communists, particularly after the 1970 coup. Under pressure from both Nationalists and Communists, these intellectuals refused to take sides, often at the risk of personal threats, especially

from KR activists.[52] They powerlessly witnessed from afar the destructive spiral in which Cambodia was rapidly being engulfed. At the same time, the politicized environment of the post-1968 French university and its rejection of 'Imperialism' certainly influenced these intellectuals/students. They felt impatient vis-à-vis what they surmised was the continuing meddling of the state into their intellectual realm, from the avatars of French colonial orientalism, the conservative agendas of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes, and the nihilistic plans of the Khmer Rouge. Their intellectual engagement in favor of the rejuvenation of Cambodian society largely derives from this trend of post-1968 revolutionary libertarianism. In some ways, a 'post-nation-state' political consciousness emerged among some of the CEDORECK initiators.

This consciousness was also shaped by the humanitarian immediacy of war-torn Cambodia. The total black-out of the country after April 1975 coupled with the frightening news that began to leak from refugees in Thailand precipitated these intellectuals into action. In 1977, CEDORECK came into existence as a loose network-organization among a number of like-minded people. It was registered in February 1978 as a Paris-based *Association*.[53] Two years later, the organization's founding President Nouth Narang, explained that CEDORECK was created "among a group of young Cambodian workers and intellectuals pursuing their training in the French universities, who, devastated by the tragedy in their country, set out to defend the values embodied in the Khmer civilization, so gravely threatened".[54]

From the start, the founders of CEDORECK innovated: (a) by seeking to apply a combination of humanitarian and scholarly pursuits. Cultural, scholarly and social activities ought to be mobilized in the service of the Cambodian community in exile; (b) by engaging in the documentation and publication of cultural materials as one of CEDORECK's priorities; (c) by ensuring that the realm of scholarship should remain independent from political factions and any forms of state involvement; and (d) by proclaiming their belief in the primacy of Culture over Politics.

52 For this account, I interviewed a number of surviving founding members, including the organization's founding President, Nouth Narang, Prof. Khing Hoc Dy, and Prof. Kamaleswar Bhattacharya.

53 Interview with Nouth Narang, 2007, Phnom Penh.

54 They included, at the beginning: Nouth Narang, Khing Hoc Dy, Venerable You Hot, Jacques Népote, Ang Choulean, Jean Ellul, Pauline Dy Phon, Sunseng Sunkimmeng, Marie Martin, Tran Quang Hai, Jacques Brunet, Khin Sok.



FIGURE 1 Publications CEDORECK
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

Nouth Narang made the following statements in the introduction to the organization published in the journal *Seksa Khmer* # 1–2 in December 1980. After enumerating the abysmal tragedy prevailing in the country, he explained:

> "Beside the importance of the question surrounding the political future of Cambodia in the world of nations, the question regarding the viability of its culture is of paramount importance. The essential goal of the twenty or so young Cambodians and their French friends who are grouped under the CEDORECK is therefore to fight, not on the political field – an area well beyond their reach – but rather, in the most important realm for the long term, that of cultural values." [...] "CEDORECK has two main objectives: – to safeguard all that can be preserved of the Cambodian culture; – to transmit this cultural heritage to the young generations of Cambodians, who, following the example of their elders, will work as depository of these traditions. CEDORECK illustrates through its action in the international community the will to survive, the authenticity and irreducibility of the Cambodian community, and its culture. In the longer term, it bears witness that Cambodia is not only conscious of its tradition and its history, but that it still possesses the cadres, relays, and guarantors of tradition, trained in modern sciences, and prone to restore, without foreign interference, the country whose destiny ultimately lies in their hands."[55]

55 *Seksa Khmer* (December 1980), # 1–2. Paris, pp. 4–5.

From 1978 to 1980 CEDORECK organized itself logistically and financially. It received the support of a number of institutions and personalities (including the Paris Municipality). From its headquarters at rue Saint-Jacques, it operated its cultural, academic and artistic activities in a community-like fashion. It housed at the Visiting Center, a Library that received donations from all over the world and publications of literary, academic and musical pieces in Khmer. It organized language classes, trips and holiday camping in the French Languedoc, where members "could enjoy the countryside and live a truly Cambodian collective experience", and published a journal, *Seksa Khmer* (Khmer Studies). In addition, CEDORECK was engaged in cultural and social events, from dance training, music performances and the organization of religious festivals. Buddhism, in its daily practice, was from the onset a relevant theme of CEDORECK. The Center's 'social action' also included the distribution of scholarships to Cambodian high school and university students, and distribution of food, clothes and assistance to members of the community in France.

What were the epistemological foundations of CEDORECK? In the organization's formal preamble or mission statement, written more than two years after its formal creation, Nouth Narang urged to build a new field of 'Khmer Studies' stripped of its colonial-era ambiguities. The message was an underlying attack at the old-style official orientalism represented by EFEO. It was also a response to attempts by the successive regimes in Phnom Penh to reify Khmer culture as exclusive and timeless with Angkor as its moment of glory. The French ethnologist Jacques Népote, one of the founding members and co-editor of *Seksa Khmer*, stressed the notions of diversity and heterogeneity. He began by questioning the idea propounded by the various post-independence regimes, that Khmer Culture was "homogenous, solid and pure", and had a direct affiliation to Angkor. Népote stressed that it was diversity and elasticity that characterized this culture which itself was shaped by historical circumstances. This idea was far removed from the image depicted in "many consecrated publications in Cambodia", in which Cambodia was presented "as devoid of history", "*sans problème, sans histoire et hors du temps*". Népote rallied against this frozen image arguing instead how the diversity of Cambodian culture was "anchored in a lived reality practiced daily."[56]

Nouth Narang used the metaphor of the body to make the same point. Cambodian culture and societies must be considered as a living body. In 1986, he wrote:

56 *Seksa Khmer* (December 1980). # 1–2. Paris, pp. 7–10.

> [Our ambition] is to restore a dynamic vision of Cambodian society. Here, the objective is to put in question the usual disciplinary compartmenting / slicing of Cambodia on the basis of an abusive metaphor of human life, whose implicit conclusion would be to acknowledge (*entériner*) the death of the considered object, here, Cambodian society. This compartmenting corresponds to three phases: 1. First, a proto-history associated with the birth and childhood of Cambodia, a period during which the process of constituting an emerging Austro-Asiatism was itself relayed by the anthropology of residual 'savage' ethnical groups; 2. Then, a period of glorious maturity, 'Hinduized', today defined by its own demise, and reduced to the architects' anastylosis technique, the Language historians' catalogs, and the contemplation of Khmer art; 3. Finally, the period of Buddhist decrepitude of a post-Angkorian monarchy, to which is added an ethnography of 'salvation', evident sign that [Khmer] society, colonized from all sides ('*colonisée de toutes parts*'), would naturally be agonizing.[57]

Narang added:

> We, on the contrary, want to underscore the permanence of Cambodian society and the prodigious fertility of its culture, to substitute to this formal, logical treatment, an objective methodological approach, based on a pluri-disciplinarity that can reveal, beyond historical changes, the continuity of the Khmer order.

After enumerating the program of the CEDORECK's *bibliothèque*, Narang situated the organization's intellectual affiliation with a few French scholars considered as proponents of a 'dynamic' vision of Cambodia and its culture:

> May we be allowed to claim another continuity: that of respect towards the teaching of the *true* masters of Cambodian studies, whose disciplinary diversity and chronological aperture are the best inspiration of our will [to emulate them]. We should evoke the names of Etienne Aymonier,

57 Nouth Narang (1986). 'Avertissement'. In Ang Choulean, *Les être surnaturels dans la religion populaire Khmère*. Paris: Bibliothèque du CEDORECK, V–VI (Ang Choulean's book was the first original monograph published by CEDORECK). Years before postcolonial scholarship, traditional Western colonial historiography with its triptych of 'Ancient Golden Age' – 'Decadence' – 'Colonial Resurrection', received here a clear rebuke from a Cambodian scholar (the same point was later addressed by Partha Chatterjee (1993) in: *The Nation and its Fragments, Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 75–115).

George Coedès, George Groslier and his son, Bernard-Philippe Groslier for example, whose *Oeuvre* attest the homogeneity and potentialities of the Khmer nation.

Articles published in the ten issues of *Seksa Khmer* reflected this vibrancy as well as the fundamental heterogeneity and elasticity of culture claimed by its authors. Saveros Pou's nine contributions aimed towards the definition of a 'new classicism' in the previously neglected 'Middle Period'.[58] Three articles by Khing Hoc Dy's showed the variety of literary forms and the permanence of popular myths transmitted from orality to modern vernacular literature.[59] Ang Choulean's wrote three pieces focused on popular cosmology and village culture.[60] The former EFEO 'heavy-weight', B.-P. Groslier even expressed regret and accepted responsibility for the way EFEO failed to recognize the Cambodians' perspective over their own history. He did this in the light of the tragedy that was taking place in the country.[61]

The CEDORECK experience was short-lived. With the reopening of Cambodia and the establishment of UNTAC in 1992, Nouth Narang returned to his country of birth. For some time already, the organization had been plagued by individual rivalries and a number of the founding members had quit. This was perhaps the price paid for the original libertarian character of the organization. Besides CEDORECK, there were other initiatives in France, in the camps in Thailand, and in the U.S. What must be underlined though, is the fundamental radicalism of the model proposed by CEDORECK's founders. For the first time, what a handful of Cambodian intellectuals proclaimed was the cultural totality of Cambodia and its society, a totality that is inclusive and open-ended because it embraces the various forms of expression this society produces. These intellectuals defined their cultural and educational role as that of facilitators and transmitters. They warned against the risks of Cambodian society and its culture being framed as a constructed heritage to serve the political (or economic) agenda of elites. This was accomplished not only through their emphasis on celebrating the creative agency of Cambodia's vernacular society, but also, through their invention of a set of experimental

58 Respectively *Seksa Khmer* (1981) # 3–4, pp. 89–110; (1982) # 5, pp. 33–54, pp. 55–60; # 5, pp. 55–60; (1983) # 6, pp. 3–9; (1984) # 7, pp. 67–175; (1985–6) # 8/9, pp. 207–208; (1987–90) # 10–13, pp. 39–58, pp. 57–129.

59 Respectively *Seksa Khmer* (1980) # 1–2, pp. 45–68; (1981) # 3–4, pp. 137–160; (1983) # 6, pp. 11–18.

60 Respectively *Seksa Khmer* (1980) # 1–2, pp. 155–202; (1984) # 7, pp. 275–278; (1990) # 10–13, pp. 3–30.

61 *Seksa Khmer* (1985–86) # 8–9, pp. 5–30.

programmatic initiatives that included text-based as well-embodied forms of knowledge, without epistemic or institutional entrapments, or other arbitrary hierarchies. This newly gained sense of independence from state or elite recuperation, I would like to argue, was one of the ferments that contributed to the emergence of a new creative community of cultural actors in the post-UNTAC Cambodia. And it is this new form of autonomous cultural activism as was advocated by CEDORECK that would help support a new Cambodian creative community that I thought could inspire the programs and actions taken by the Center for Khmer Studies.

CHAPTER 3

Cambodia after UNTAC

By 1989, the chain of events began to accelerate for Cambodia. The PRK regime was having to live through a time of dramatic changes triggered by the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The continuing difficulties the regime faced eventually led to a shift in government policies. Following the stated intentions of the Soviet Union to cut down its international aid, including in favor of Vietnam, Cambodia's mentor, and against pressures by Western powers towards Hanoi, Vietnamese troops began to withdraw from Cambodia. The last occupation troops left in 1990.[1] In April, 1988, under the leadership of the rising political star Hun Sen, Prime Minister since 1985, the PRK's National Assembly introduced sweeping reforms.

The regime first renamed itself as the 'State of Cambodia' (SOC). Buddhism, partially reestablished by the PRK in 1979, was fully reintroduced as the national religion. The government introduced a series of liberalizing economic reforms that comprised changes in land tenure, tax and market policies, a new investment law aimed at attracting foreign capital, and the systematic privatization of state businesses. Cambodian state resources were thereafter sold without benefitting the state. Highly placed civil and military individuals began to enrich themselves by pocketing whatever benefits they could grab. Corruption at the highest levels of society established in Cambodia the phenomenon known as 'elite capture' which soon became the norm.[2] Meanwhile, with assistance from Vietnam and the Soviet Union progressively cut off, Cambodia's cultural and education sectors entered a difficult transitional period.[3]

With the end of the Cold War in the background, negotiations between the various political factions including the pro-Vietnamese government, the royalists, the Khmer Rouge, and the anti-communist republicans, intensified. This led to the 23 October 1991 Paris Agreement and the subsequent deployment of

1 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 237.

2 "Elite capture is a process whereby resources transferred designated for the benefit of the larger population are usurped by a few individuals of superior status." (Wikipedia, checked July 2016). On the process of institutionalization of corruption in Cambodia, see Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 238. Simon Springer (2010). *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order*. London: Routledge, p. 63.

3 Clayton, Thomas & Ngoy, Youk (1997). 'Cambodia'. In *Asian Higher Education: An International Handbook & Reference Guide*, edited by Postiglione, Gerald & Mak, Grace. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 21–36, p. 26.

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a massive UN peacekeeping mission, the United Nation Transitory Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The signing of the comprehensive political settlement by all the warring factions marked the beginning of post-war Cambodia. The Agreements stipulated the effective disarmament of factional troops, the repatriation of over three hundred thousand refugees from Thailand, and the organization of national elections for a constituent assembly. To achieve these objectives, "the United Nations established a short-term, multinational protectorate over Cambodia."[4] In 1992–1993, thirteen thousand soldiers and over seven thousand civilians took up residence in the country under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) peacekeeping operation. For the first time since its creation, the UN took over the administration of an independent state, organized and ran an election, had its own radio station, its own police, and was responsible for safeguarding human rights at the national level.[5]

1 UNTAC and Its Legacies

The legacy of the UNTAC 'protectorate' has in recent years become increasingly contested. Besides the ways in which this historical episode unfolded, it is the neo-colonial modus operandi of the UN mandate that has been highlighted:

> UNTAC embarked on its utopian, multifaceted mission sluggishly and with foreboding. Its mandate was ambiguous, its time was limited and most of its personnel knew nothing about Cambodia. By the time the mission ended, in October 1993, UNTAC had spent over U.S.$2 billion. Most of the money had gone into inflated salaries. The extravagance

4 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 239.

5 This depiction of the transition process from a PRK-led Cambodia into a post-Paris Agreement, power-sharing UN governance is interpreted differently among historians. Michael Vickery for instance, sees the Paris Agreement as the culmination of a long process of harassment, began after the overthrow of Pol Pot designed by the United States (with the backing of Western countries, China and Thailand) to ensure the destabilization and failure of the Vietnam-supported regime. The inability to destroy the PRK eventually led the U.S. to support negotiations with the regime to include opposition groups based on the Thai border that for a long time had received American backing to inflict maximum disruptions against the Phnom Penh regime. These groups included the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk supporters, and Conservatives under the former Finance Minister Son Sann. Vickery considers them as Nicaraguan-like 'Contras' groups instrumentalized by the U.S. They were forced into a coalition to negotiate with the Phnom Penh regime its replacement by an UN-West-led structure. Michael Vickery (2007). *Cambodia: A Political Survey*. Phnom Penh: Editions Funan.

> and insensitivities of many UN personnel were widely criticized. Phnom Penh grew more crowded and more prosperous, but the rural economy declined, the country's infrastructure remained abysmal, and security was marred by a spate of politically motivated killings.[6]

Perhaps it was the very nature of UNTAC, as yet another top-down imposition with a "new set of foreign benefactors and yet another political system".[7] More recently, it is the ultimate motives behind this UN mission in Cambodia that have been questioned. Besides the obvious security and humanitarian reasons invoked by the mission's supporting powers, other intentions have come to light. The UN needed to reinstate itself at the heart of international relations after years of paralysis during the Cold War. For the Western powers as well as for China, UNTAC was also an opportunity to clear some of the guilt that lingered after decades of devastating policies of interference in Cambodia during the civil war, and an 'accomplice apathy' complex, to say the least, in the wake of the Khmer Rouge atrocities. In some ways, as highlighted by Springer, the UNTAC venture was meant to send a global signal of the new 'consensus' in favor of market democracy as promoted by the United States and its allies following the end of the Cold War. As is often the case with external interventions, the stakes were thus higher than Cambodia itself and "through the dispatch of UNTAC [...], Cambodia became the proverbial guinea pig to a rejuvenated [post-cold war] UN."[8]

Springer goes further by suggesting another agenda of UNTAC, which he links with the opening up of markets like those of Cambodia and Vietnam for international businesses as new attractive destinations for investors because of their cheap and docile workforces, logging, fishing, oil and tourism opportunities. Hun Sen's early economic reforms in 1989, and his capacity to implement a pro-market policy of privatization and deregulation, including using force against resistance to this policy – as in December 1991, when students marching against government-sponsored corruption were met with

6 Chandler (2008). *History of Cambodia*, p. 240.

7 Evan Gottesman (2002). *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 349. Gottesman later adds: "The transition to (violent, repressive) internationally sanctioned pluralism [...] represented the latest of a series of political twists and turns, each of which required Cambodians to accept events beyond their control and to adapt themselves accordingly" (p. 349).

8 Simon Springer (2009a). 'The neoliberalization of security and violence in Cambodia's transition'. In Sopeong Peou (ed.), *Human Security in East-Asia, Challenges for Collaborative Action*. Security in Asia-Pacific series. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 125–141, p. 131. "The UN intervention in Cambodia can be understood as a litmus test of instituting human security at a global level", p. 131.

police gunfire – augured positively in the eyes of many donor countries.[9] It was during this critical period that the ex-communist circles in power, in Cambodia as elsewhere, hurriedly embraced 'neoliberal governmentality', with the chance of amassing massive wealth and the affirmation of their new oligarchic position through patron-client networks.[10]

The demonstration of the relative acquiescence of the 'international community' toward Hun Sen's government and his practices were the first general elections in 1993 when the UN tolerated that Hun Sen refused the outcome of the poll and the victory of his opponents, the royalist FUNCIPEC Party,[11] and clung to power.[12] Rather than confronting the CPP leader, the UN and its sponsors instead forced his opponent Norodom Ranariddh to accept an awkward construction that would make him co-premier with Hun Sen, who effectively continued to maintain control over strategic parts of the state machinery. This development led in effect to the reinforcement of the ruling Communist Party of Cambodia, renamed as Cambodian People's Party (CPP), and its entanglement with the Cambodian state. For Springer, the UN and the 'international community' continued to implicitly support Hun Sen and his 'iron fist' leadership, an opinion not shared by other historians.[13]

Despite superficial protests, the UN and its supporters remained idle when Prime Minister Ranariddh and his party were effectively neutralized through a

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9 Between 17 and 22 December 1991, a series of demonstrations broke out in Phnom Penh focused on the issue of corruption, the sale of factories and other state properties. On 21 December, the arrest of a group of students set off a series of marches on police stations and the National Assembly that escalated into stone throwing by the students. Police and military forces answered with gunfire. At least eight people died in the confrontations (Serge Thion (1993). *Watching Cambodia*. Bangkok: White Lotus, p. 188). These actions were the first student protests against a Cambodian government since 1975.

10 "[…] Marketization in Cambodia offered increased opportunities for the ruling elites to solidify their economic and political power [while] neoliberalism-as-governmentality blinded citizens to the source of their domination as they came to accept the supposed virtues of neoliberal policy" (Springer (2009a). 'The neoliberalization of security and violence', p. 132). Vickery thinks that the embracing of wild capitalism by the ex-communist elites is a direct consequence of the UNTAC episode. Vickery (2007), *Cambodia: A Political Survey*, p. 142.

11 FUNCINPEC is the French acronym for *Front uni national pour un Cambodge indépendant, neutre, pacifique, et coopératif*, which translates in English as "National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia".

12 Vickery contests that "Ranariddh won but Hun Sen refused to move out" (Vickery (2007), *Cambodia, a Political Survey*, p. 164; pp. 70–77). The historian, however, concedes that the U.S. did not want a very strong showing by FUNINPEC as they remained suspicious of an overtly dominant Sihanouk. (Ibid., p. 73).

13 Chandler and Vickery for instance, though not for the same reasons (Chandler (2008), *A History of Cambodia*, p. 241, Vickery (2007), *Cambodia, a Political Survey*, pp. 125–126).

preventive *coup d'État* led by Hun Sen in the summer of 1997.[14] Whether willingly sanctioned by the international community of donor countries or not, it is nonetheless remarkable that the period that both preceded and followed the UNTAC 'protectorate' saw Cambodia fall victim to a classical process of domestic 'elite capture', leading to an unprecedented rise of inequalities and the wholesale privatization of the country's public resources – a process accompanied by a general climate of impunity and an effective reduction of democratic control. The process of structuration of power into a 'neo-patrimonial' political system developed in sequences, with the post-coup period in 1997 and the election the following year as its starting points.[15]

The post-UNTAC general political situation of Cambodia has been characterized by an ambiguous juxtaposition of a political status quo and major societal transformations. In spite of serious democratic breaches, the period brought a sense of political stability that did not exist for at least two decades.[16] It also inaugurated, as we saw, the effective power consolidation of the ex-Communist leadership under Prime Minister Hun Sen. Cambodia's political situation resembles what Carothers has called 'dominant power politics': a society in which the political opposition has been marginalized, and where a change of government through election is unlikely.[17] 'Competitive authoritarianism' is another definition that befits well Cambodia under Hun Sen from 1997 until

14 Chandler (2008), *A History of Cambodia*, pp. 243–244. Springer (2009a). 'The neoliberalization of security and violence', p. 134. Vickery points to "the July 1997 shootout" which occurred as a result of an attempted coup by the FUNCINPEC, with support of Khmer Rouge troops and their international allies (Vickery (2007), *Cambodia, a Political Survey*, pp. 159–166).

15 The concept of 'neo-patrimonialism' is used by Kheang Un to characterize Cambodia's current political system. "Neo-patrimonialism, manifests itself in two realms: the realm of legally based and transparent policies that the government rhetorically claims to promote, and the more common realm of informal, un-codified and un-policed policies which are more prominent, serving as the basis on which power is built, perpetuated and legitimized". The regime of neopatrimonialism is built on patronage bonds featuring forms of nepotism, corruption, clientelism, rent-seeking, coercion, but also obligation, commonality and reciprocity. In Cambodia, patrimonial phenomena are found in all fields, from the way elections are operated to business practices, delivery of public services and the judiciary, or other formal interactions involving communities. Kheang Un (2011). 'Cambodia Moving Away from Democracy?' *International Political Science Review* 32 (5): 546–562, p. 548.

16 The surrender of the remaining Khmer Rouge forces in 1998 was in this sense a breakthrough.

17 "Countries with [the dominant power politics] syndrome have limited but still real political space, some political contestation by opposition groups, and at least most of the basic institutional forms of democracy. Yet, one political grouping dominates the system in such a way that there appears to be little prospect of alteration of power in the

2018 (when opposition parties and independent medias were effectively put to silence).[18]

On the economic front, with an average annual growth rate of 7 percent, Cambodia's recovery was undeniable. The country's economy remained however fragile. It has been mainly driven by two sectors of activity, garment and tourism exports. The other problem is that this growth has been extremely unevenly distributed. According to the World Bank (April 2017), Cambodia's Gross National Income per capita for 2015 had reached $1,070, above the threshold of $1025 for low-income countries. The poverty rate dropped from 47.8 percent in 2007 to 13.5 percent in 2014. However, 4.5 million people (out of 13 million) are considered 'near-poor', with a large proportion living in the countryside.[19]

The post-UNTAC period saw a continuing influx of international aid, initially spearheaded by Western countries and Japan under the aegis of the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). China later joined the donors' group, using more exclusive, 'bilateral', channels. Under the new world order, Cambodia's leaders embraced global capitalism as the new state ideology, for their own benefits.[20] Effectively, the country "locked [itself] into a condition of dependency on foreign assistance as nearly half of the country's budgetary allocations were being drawn from foreign aid, translating into a limited ability to challenge donor agendas and timetables".[21] Cambodia's dependence was reinforced by its inclusion into a number of bilateral and multilateral economic alliances. In 1999, it joined the originally anti-communist Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2004, the country became member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a move that would further limit its capacities to protect its home industry and agriculture.

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foreseeable future." In Ojendal and Lilja, p. 7 (Quote from Thomas Carothers (2002). 'The End of the Transition Paradigm'. *Journal of Democracy* 13: 5–21, pp. 11–12).

18 Levitsky Steven and Way Lucan A., *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). The application of this concept to Cambodia, and its recent evolution to full-blown "hegemonic" authoritarian rule was recently depicted by Lee Morgenbesser in: 'Cambodia's Transition to Hegemonic Authoritarianism', in *Journal of Democracy*, (Johns Hopkins University Press), Volume 30, Number 1, January 2019, pp. 158–171.

19 World Bank Country Overview (http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview. Consulted, 11 July 2017).

20 Vickery remarks that the Cambodian constitution, "if implemented, would make Cambodia a truly 'welfare state'". However, "since 1993, Cambodia has followed the extreme free marketeering of the U.S. and Thai models, with the predictable problems." (Vickery (2007), *Cambodia, A Political Survey*, p. 120).

21 Springer (2009a). 'The neoliberalization of security and violence', p. 137.

These dependencies were accompanied by a concomitant lack of commitment on the part of the government to promote fair and transparent forms of economic governance. Cases of large-scale evictions, exploitation of the labor force, structural unemployment and extreme rural poverty are the predicaments of the majority of Cambodians. The intertwining of the state and members of the political elites with powerful firms, through preferential delegation of business contracts, is consistent with the neo-patrimonial system responsible for the existence of parallel state and non-state structures closely linked to the Prime Minister, his family and his close circle. The multiple cases of confusion of public and private interests at the top contribute to weaken Cambodia's social fabric. They increase social insecurity and the likelihood of future conflicts, a situation of rampant violence which Springer imputes on the process of 'neoliberalization' of Cambodia.[22] Brenner et al. (2010) define neoliberalism as "one among several tendencies of regulatory change that have been unleashed across the global capitalist system since the 1970s [which] prioritizes market-based, market-oriented, or market-disciplinary responses to regulatory problems; [...] strives to intensify commodification in all realms of social life; and [ ] often mobilizes speculative financial instruments to open up new arenas for capitalist profit making."[23] The recurrence of post-war acts of land grabbing, land-swap deals and widespread dispossession of the poor is reminiscent of the perpetuation of a state of affairs created in the wake of the UN mandate.[24]

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22 Simon Springer (2009a) (Ibid.); (2009b). 'Violence, Democracy, and the Neoliberal "Order": The Contestation of Public Space in Post-transitional Cambodia'. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (1): 138–162, pp. 148–9; (2010). *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order: Violence, Authoritarianism and the Contestation of Public Space*. London: Routledge; (2015). *Violent Neoliberalism, Development, Discourse and Dispossession in Cambodia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

23 Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore (2010). "After Neoliberalism." *Globalizations* 7 (3): 327–345, pp. 329–30. See also David Harvey (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

24 A report by the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) detailed this "epidemic" of land-grabbing by the rich and colluding corporates: in the 13 provinces in which LICADHO worked – roughly half the country – more than a quarter of a million people were affected by land-grabbing and forced evictions since 2003. In Phnom Penh, 133,000 people – more than 10 per cent of its population – are believed to have been evicted since 1990. As of 2004, it was estimated that 20–30 per cent of landowners held 70 per cent of the country's land, while the poorest 40 per cent occupied only 10 per cent. In the countryside, 45 per cent of families were landless or near landless. ('Land Grabbing and Poverty in Cambodia: The Myth of Development', Report, LICADHO, Phnom Penh, May 2009.)

Socially, the effective political and economic powers are in the hands of the CPP leadership and its circle of honored tycoons, the *Okhna*, often in connection with international private interests, who display their power and wealth daily.[25] For these high-ranking officials, the blurring of boundaries between what falls in the private realm and what is in the public domain is nearly total. High level corruption is therefore endemic. The lack of social and public responsibility, or civism, of the Cambodian elite is legendary. The most powerful are rewarded, with no considerations given to the vast majority of impoverished countrymen. While old hierarchies, values and conventions have been eroded, trust between individuals remains low and the country continues to be plagued by sporadic acts of violence in domestic and other realms.

Despite this extremely unequal social environment, a new albeit precarious economic 'middle class' has emerged, partially thanks to the trickle-down effect from the aid sector. Over the last two decades moreover, Cambodia experienced an unprecedented level of urbanization.[26] Contemporary Cambodia has become a society showing signs of 'hybridity'.

> The discourses and practices of patron-client relations are interlaced with the democratic discourse, and those who were regarded as leaders in the old system of rule continue to be decision-makers in the contemporary democratic system. In addition, the kinship-based social organization of Cambodian society has become mixed with the new

25 The honorific title *Okhna* is granted by the king. *Okhna* can roughly translate as 'Lord' or 'Tycoon'. The title is usually conferred on elites with ties to the ruling party. Michiel Verver and Heidi Dahles (2015) explain: "Since the early 1990s in Cambodia, the title of 'oknha' has been bestowed upon business people who make substantial financial contributions to national development projects. Recipients of this honor are identified by the leadership of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP), in particular Prime Minister Hun Sen." (Michiel Verver, Heidi Dahles, 'The Institutionalisation of *Oknha*: Cambodian Entrepreneurship at the Interface of Business and Politics', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Volume 45, Issue 1, 2015).

26 From 1998 to 2013, the country's urban population has grown from 15.7 per cent to 21.4 per cent. During the same period, Phnom Penh's population tripled (from 568,000 in 1998 to 1,690,000 in 2013) While the phenomenon offers numerous socio-economic benefits to urban dwellers, it has also resulted in the development of 'ghettos' of urban poor. Evicted or locked out of the city centers, they are pushed to sprawling slums on the periphery where livelihood is extremely precarious. See United Nations Population Fund (2014). 'Urbanization and its Linkage to Socio-Economic and Environmental Issues'. Policy Report. Phnom Penh: 1–39.

> liberal democracy, creating a mixed system in which political participation is steered partly by family connections.[27]

This, however, was the political and social situation before the general election in July 2013. The steady movement of protests that followed accounts for the most direct challenge brought by the Cambodian electorate to the CPP and its grip on power, a process that was eventually circumvented by Hun Sen. For the first time, the opposition coalition led by long-time dissident Sam Rainsy and his new party, the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), seriously challenged Hun Sen's CPP. CPP officially won with 48.79 per cent (68 seats) of the votes against 44.45 per cent (55 seats) for the CNRP amid widespread allegations of fraud and intimidation in the countryside orchestrated by the CPP. By losing 22 seats from the previous election, the CPP earned the lowest percentage of seats it has ever had in the National Assembly since 1998.[28]

What changed with the 2013 election which the Prime Minister and his surrogates had to rig in order to stay in power is that, for the first time, fear changed side. For weeks, thousands of CNRP supporters gathered peacefully in Phnom Penh to protest the results. On 3 January 2014, five garment factory workers (who demanded higher salary wages) were killed by the riot police. This was one of the worst cases of state violence perpetrated since 1991. Embroiled in a bitter communication struggle with the government, the CNRP boycotted the National Assembly for 10 months. The anti-government sentiment infiltrated new segments of society, mainly urban millennials, who grew up in post-UNTAC Cambodia. The general political situation in Cambodia remained for sometimes in flux until Hun Sen got again the upper hand. The crisis was eventually contained through a combination of restrictive laws, intimidations against opponents and, after 2015, the unleashing of a brutal suppression campaign against any actors likely to challenge the CPP's grip on power. The "sham" that were the national election of 29 July 2018, in the absence of the main opposition party whose leaders were exiled, in a context in which dissident voices,

27 Ojendal and Lilja (2011), 302. Historian Michael Vickery views Cambodia's post-UNTAC political and economic situation unequivocally negatively which he first imputes on the longstanding disrupting 'regime change' policy pursued by the U.S. and their allies since the 1980s. This policy "has been a complete failure as originally envisioned to replace the CPP and its leaders with contras. It has succeeded, however, in turning the CPP around and pushing Cambodia into an extreme neo-liberal structure in which all of the worst features of the pre-war society, which led the country to disaster, have come to the fore, and more violently." (Vickery (2007), *Cambodia, A Political Survey*, p. 196).

28 The lack of actual population count may have led to fraudulent voting, such as voters voting in multiple precincts using different names. According to the opposition CNRP, between 1.2 and 1.3 million names were omitted from voting rolls.

civic groups and independent media organizations were effectively silenced, represents the end of a precarious parenthesis of relative political openness which began with UNTAC.[29]

For the purpose of the book, we should however return to the 2013 election and the protest movements that followed as the high-water mark of a collective political culture whose maturity resulted from a long social and political process of fermentation within Cambodian society. What these events brought to the fore can to some extent be attributed to a combination of structural factors: among them the consolidation, though chaotic, of youth's education, the coming of social media, and to some extent, an entrenched societal pluralism resulting from the conspicuous presence of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other associative groups. These factors, taken individually, may not be enough to explain the rise of Cambodia's new 'civil society' in the 1990s and 2000s. They must be factored in the larger context of socio-economic transformations, the increasing precariousness of large segments of the population, the continuing trend towards secularization of society, and the prevalence of a post-UNTAC generic discourse on 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'human rights', however distorted these ideas may have been in practice.

2 Education after UNTAC

The political and economic liberalization of the early 1990s accompanied by a massive flow of international aid into the country, significantly contributed to an era of growth in the Cambodian education sector. This was, however, an un-coordinated and highly unequal development, with the pro-market ideology permeating all aspects of the sector. Resulting from these policies, secondary and tertiary education received scant attention as opposed to primary. This was in line with the new developmental paradigms followed by the Cambodian government stressing efficiency in the basic training of 'human capital' to favorably position the country in the face of 'global competition'. Resulting from this ideological shift was the scrapping by the post-UNTAC government of some of the PRK's achievements such as a nation-wide

29 Hun Sen's crackdown was supported by his new mentor, China, while his rhetoric referred to the newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump. Even before Trump came to power, the U.S. did little to encourage the popular democratic movement that emerged after the 2013 election. See Morgenbesser (2019). 'Cambodia's Transition to Hegemonic Authoritarianism', p. 158.

state-sponsored network of libraries or a translation and publication program.[30] This happened while locally trained human resources remained scarce and financial strains were put on high schools and universities.[31] It is both sad and ironical that when the country would have needed a committed state sector to help rebuild its educational infrastructure, it was met with neoliberal tenets emphasizing deregulation, privatization and a limitation of the state's support. These policies, promoted by sector 'experts' who had no or little experience of the country, particularly weakened attempts at reinforcing Cambodian universities.[32]

To deny that the education policies prescribed by Cambodia's post-UNTAC international partners did not try to address some of the structural problems of the Cambodian educational sector, in spite of their pro-market biases, would not however be accurate. Almost singlehandedly, institutional international cooperation like those of UNICEF, the U.S. and Japanese aid programs set out to support Cambodian general education through a qualitative effort in favor of its primary sector. The method used was to focus on a numerically reduced but better-trained teaching corps and on developing basic educational materials. Important efforts were deployed to provide the country with properly sheltered primary schools, or to make education more accessible to girls, members of minority groups and more generally, to a young population which, in its vast majority, continued to live in rural areas.

To a large extent, the nation's political leaders subverted post-UNTAC modernization efforts. According to Ayres "the development of a financially and qualitatively sustainable education system [...] remained a secondary priority of Cambodia's administration". This had to be found in "the ascendancy of political expedience over policy, quantity over quality and contempt for technical advice and the processes and outcomes of planning [...] as the underlying themes of [this] period of 'lost opportunities' that was evident from at least

30 Another consequence of the macro-political changes was a process of professional marginalization of Cambodian academics or technicians trained in the socialist countries.

31 Mary Louise Caldwell, Paul Henry (University of Sydney) (2013). 'Neoliberalism and Structural Violence in Developing Countries: The Case of the Cambodian Education Market'. *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Macromarketing Conference*, Toronto, Canada. The structural adjustment strategies that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund forced upon Cambodia were based on slashing public-sector budgets to make room for 'market forces'. See Degu, Wondem A. (2005). "Reforming education" in Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren (ed.) *Post-conflict development. New challenges*. Boulder CL, London, Lynne Rienner, pp. 129–145.

32 In chapter 9, I will discuss my encounter with 'experts' from the World Bank. I witnessed first-hand how their ready-made models were awkwardly forced onto Cambodia – a method that led to their partial rejection by the regime.

1995."[33] To the neglect shown by the government must also be added widespread practices of institutionalized corruption at all levels of education, largely due to the very low salaries received by teachers and education officials. As a result, many only put in limited hours and effort as they committed to other businesses or farming duties to ensure household economic security. The practice of collecting an extra fee from pupils in order to hold extra classes, thereby only partially teaching the syllabus, became widespread.[34]

Focusing on Cambodia's higher education, one key aspect of the post-UNTAC landscape has been the proliferation of private universities, a phenomenon that started in the early 1990s. The process was encouraged by international donors as a way to compensate for the inability of the government to seriously address the sector's continuing weaknesses. For some, promoters of free enterprise, the privatization policy of the mid-1990s corresponds to a breakthrough in the history of Cambodian higher education. In nearly ten years, these institutions mushroomed, reaching the figure of 45 in 2010.[35] The rapid growth of private higher education allowed public universities to offer fee-paying programs, and private universities to open in provincial towns. It provided better paying jobs – itemized by the hour – to teaching staff already employed in the public sector. This development was however achieved without much coordination by the state. These initiatives were driven out of the desire to make quick money from a young population desperately in need of training. This

33 Ayres (2000), *Anatomy of a Crisis*, pp. 170–172. Later Ayres writes: "While the quality of education at all levels of the system remained deplorably low throughout the country, the government, in light of directions from its leaders, failed to provide the system with the funds necessary to effect sustainable improvement. Further, it continued to force on the Ministry of Education policy directions that undermined the capacity of the educational officials, and their advisers, to work toward the realization of the system's stated goals, and, therefore, the alignment of the education system with the country's development agenda". (Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 183).

34 "If you look at state primary schools, when students enter, they will experience being asked by the teacher to give some money, either in the form of buying lessons or as 'thank you' [payments]," says Preap Kol, executive director at Transparency International Cambodia. "Every month the teacher sends a grade book to parents and when you return to school teachers will expect some money in them." (Kevin Ponniah (2014)). 'Cambodia Crackdown on Corruption in Schools Scores Low With Exam Cheats', *The Guardian*).

35 Leng Phirom (2010). 'Students' Perceptions toward Private Sector Higher Education in Cambodia'. Center for International Studies, Ohio University, p. 3. Their number have since stabilized: there are 35 private universities and institutes against 21 public institutions. See Wikipedia, 'List of Universities in Cambodia', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_universities_in_Cambodia (Accessed July 2017).

unregulated situation continued for nearly a decade. It benefitted a number of government-friendly tycoons who owned these 'educational' institutions.[36]

For some time, the government ignored pleas from public universities and experts to provide the country with an independent mechanism capable of evaluating these private establishments to ensure quality standards. In 2003 eventually, a national accreditation mechanism, the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), was established, under direct supervision of the government and its Deputy Minister Sok An. Among ACC's provisions was the introduction of a common humanities-based foundational education at the undergraduate level. For some time, only a handful of private institutions like the Phnom Penh-based Pannasastra University and University of Cambodia seriously engaged in improving their standards.[37] The others mostly aimed at charging exorbitant fees to credulous students and their parents. 'Good' private institutions have tended to specialize in high-demand courses such as language training, Business Administration or Information Technology. The disproportionate importance of these courses in the universities' curricula occurs often at the expense of foundational fields.[38] Meanwhile, the offspring of the elite – some of them owners of these private universities – have left the country for education abroad.[39]

The two decades that followed UNTAC thus saw a steady process of transformation and development of education, particularly in the primary sector. This positive evolution was not really matched in the secondary and tertiary sectors where a phenomenon of commodification has allowed for a growing disparity between 'educated' and 'less educated' segments of the population. A same segmentation exists among students and former students, perpetuating

36 For instance, Sok An, the late Deputy Prime Minister, and the treasurer of the regime, owned, among many other private assets, a major private university in Phnom Penh called Zaman University.

37 Unemployment among graduates from private universities, one year after graduating, amount to 90 per cent (30 per cent for the public sector).

38 Pit, C. and D. Ford. (2004). 'Cambodian higher education: Mixed visions'. In P.G. Altbach & T. Umakoshi (Eds.), *Asian universities: Historical perspectives and contemporary challenges*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press. (pp. 333–362) in Leng Phirom, 29.

39 In 2016, 4,221 Cambodian university-level students were enrolled in institutions of higher education outside Cambodia. This is 1.9 percent of the student population. The top 10 destination countries for Cambodian students were Thailand (955 students), Australia (602), Vietnam and France (443), the United States (376), Saudi Arabia (350), Japan (297), South Korea (273), New Zealand (82) and the United Kingdom (66). *Phnom Penh Post*, 7, March 2016, 'Thousands of Cambodian Students Study Abroad' (Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon).

a culture of social disenfranchisement among many. The pro-market character of the policies pursued paradoxically undermined international agencies when trying to deal with the structural weaknesses of the Cambodian education sector, particularly at the level of the state apparatus, playing into the hands of politicians who resorted to old practices of patronage and cronyism. According to Ayres, the persistence of economic disparities in the country, in many respects a product of the continuation of a restrictive educational system, yesterday 'feudal', today privatized and commodified, has brought mixed results in the process of reconstructing Cambodian social and cultural life.[40]

An important factor of transformation of Cambodia's education was the growing domination of English as the main means of high knowledge *par excellence*. The new context of the post-UNTAC period largely contributed to the choice made by Cambodians seeking to integrate into the new economy to embrace the language of Shakespeare.[41] Not only did the other educational languages such as French, Chinese or Vietnamese become marginalized or restricted, but Khmer itself continued to be confined to the role of a non-expert, non-technical, non-theoretical even, knowledge vehicle. This supremacy of English is also found in the media and communication sector, including the Internet and social media.

3 From 'Media to Digital Democracy'?

Another phenomenon in need of analysis is the growing role of the media, in particular those in the digital format, more precisely the 'social media'.[42] The Constitution enacted in 1993, explicitly subscribed to the liberal democratic model prescribing freedom of expression and the press. The first post-war experience of free public media was through radio, the medium best suited to Cambodia given the low literacy rate of its population. Radio UNTAC set a precedent of high standard due to its provision of credible news and information

40 "The education system has been caught in the middle of [ ] state-making aspirations: one hand is used to promote development, change, and modernity, yet the other is used to sustain the key tenets of the pre-colonial polity. These contradictory expectations for education have produced the educational crisis, a disparity between education and Cambodia's economic, political and cultural environments." Ayres (2000). *Anatomy of a Crisis*, p. 187.

41 Thomas Clayton (2006). *Language Choice in a Nation Under Transition, English Language Spread in Cambodia*. Springer, New York. See especially chapters on education pp. 149–206.

42 Social media are online channels such as websites or applications that enable users to create and share content and engage in social networking.

and the equal airtime it gave to the different political parties and electoral candidates. The station was credited for helping to create the kind of environment that made the 1993 elections possible and led to a 95 percent turn-out at the polls. This experience did not, however, survive the UN mandate. There was no real effort among the Authority's supporting countries, including the Cambodian state, to keep the station on air under UN auspices, or to transform it into a nationally controlled service.[43] The abrupt demise of such a successful experiment illustrates the precarious condition of the press during and just after the UN's nineteen months in Cambodia. Yet, despite UNTAC's short legacy span in the sector, a relatively flourishing and freewheeling media culture emerged in Cambodia. In many ways, and if compared with Cambodia's neighbors, the trend has continued, at least until 2017,[44] allowing for the existence of a relatively dynamic, yet restricted, national 'public sphere' in an otherwise controlled political environment.

The 1997 coup marked a temporary first blow to the openness of the Cambodian press. Media broadcast fell under direct government control. Journalists challenging the authorities or reporting on corruption practices faced harassment, censorship, imprisonment or physical attacks, including murder. What has led to a sense of precariousness has been the dichotomy between theoretically favorable conditions for the media to play their role of social educators – with legal press provisions among the most liberal in the region – and a reality characterized by intimidation, self-censorship, and a disproportionate use of the law by the people in power through defamation charges against journalists. A difference must also be sketched between an English-language newspaper scene, with titles such as *Phnom Penh Post* and *Cambodia Daily*, that had for some time enjoyed relative freedom, compared to a much more restricted Khmer-language press. Cambodian journalists have moreover continued to lack serious training, having limited their skills to narrow specializations without the larger humanities-informed education that could empower them as actual social educators.[45]

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43 Casey McCarthy (2012). 'Media development in transitional democratic Cambodia'. Master dissertation, Malmo University.

44 The forced closure of the English and Khmer language *Cambodia Daily* on September 12, 2017 by the authorities (for specious unpaid tax accusations), can be seen as the end of a unique period of relatively open media culture which began with UNTAC. *Cambodia Daily* (September 4, 2017) 'Cambodia Daily Announces Immediate Closure Amid Threats'.

45 "While intentions were good, short-term efforts to address the dire situation of the media was ineffective and unrealistic" (Michael Hayes, former Publisher and Editor of the *Phnom Penh Post*) in McCarty (2012), 'Media development in transitional democratic Cambodia'. Master thesis (Communication for Development), Malmo University, p. 11. On the issue of media training albeit taken in a narrow definition, see Judith Clarke (2000).

In line with the process of liberalization of the economy, the Cambodian media has often been reduced to a commercial industry with little provisions to ensure its pluralism or its qualitative editorial content. The practice of journalism has often remained associated with blackmailing and intimidation, with major titles and channels in the hands of government-friendly oligarchs. Yet, though superficial in tone, the press has somewhat maintained a semblance of diversity. On occasions, it has even improved in quality.[46] When they are interviewed, however, Cambodia's 'media stakeholders' ranging from radio, TV and print representatives (state, private and NGO's), press lawyers, academics, media educators, and human rights observers agree that "the proliferation of print and broadcast media did not live up to the quality and independence normally required for these media to play their civic role."[47]

If we take a historical view, due to the relatively open conditions that prevailed in Cambodia until at least 2018, we see the embryo of an Habermasian 'public sphere' of peaceful socio-political enquiry.[48] For its capacity to instill pluralistic narratives and modes of didactic argumentation, the country's diversified media landscape eventually helped its citizens to approach centers of power with a more scrutinizing eye, what McCarty calls a 'watchdog for public interest'.[49] It is for this very reason that the regime launched a media clamp down campaign in anticipation of the 2018 general elections. The danger with the media, including Internet, is that they can provide counter-hegemonic narratives and thereby help shape alternative spaces for a self-imagining community.

The process of globalization which has engulfed Cambodia since UNTAC and the concomitant development of new information technologies starting in the early 2000s, indeed led to an increase in access to information and the first cases of civic participation in the country. NGOs were the first to use Internet for advocacy purposes. The fast-growing number of Cambodian millennials who are well versed in IT technology has given rise to new kinds of

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'Training journalists in an emerging democracy: the case of Cambodia'. *Asia-Pacific Media Educator*: 82–98.

46 Throughout the years, independent initiatives like *Cambodia Daily*, with its version in the Khmer language, contributed to professionalize the sector. Regular training programs like the ones supported by the *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung* also had an accumulated impact on a widening group of journalists and media professionals.

47 McCarty (2012), 'Media development …', pp. 42–43. In some ways, the situation of the Cambodian press is comparable to that prevailing in other countries of 'restricted democracy' like in Algeria or Morocco.

48 For instance, in the equally restricted context of 1920s colonial Vietnam, Philippe Peycam (2012), *The Birth of Political Journalism*.

49 McCarty (2012). 'Media development in transitional democratic Cambodia', p. 17.

'citizen journalism' networks or forums. The introduction of a Khmer language Unicode system in the mid-2000s facilitated the expansion of this burgeoning Cambodian 'public blogosphere'. This trend was close to reach a political potential given the fast increase in Internet access in the country, including in rural areas, and paradoxically because of increased restrictions imposed by the government on mainstream medias. It is the young urbanized people who are the most active Internet users. With an annual social media penetration growth rate of 70 percent, a substantial segment of the population is part of the Internet revolution.[50] What some have perhaps prematurely described as an emerging case of 'digital democracy', with a soaring participation of young bloggers eager to demand their rights, may be considered as an autonomous political landscape that has taken root in Cambodia. Such is the trend that the degree of politically motivated exchanges in the Cambodian social media scene well surpasses that witnessed in other southeast Asian countries.[51]

Even before the July 2013 elections and the months of active demonstrations that followed, the Cambodian blogosphere was already massively filled with activists. A number of grass-root communication initiatives sprang up. They usually focused on simple causes, amplifying originally localized appeals such as those against forced evictions, or the protection of forests. The *Prey Lang – It's Your Forest Too* blog for instance, set out to save one of the last endangered forests in the country. The *Save Boeung Kak Campaign* has been fighting to defend the rights of local inhabitants forcefully evicted to give way to a massive Korean real estate development project, which was set to destroy the largest natural water reservoir in the capital city. Other initiatives developed in Phnom Penh. For example, efforts to save endangered urban heritage.[52] These

50 Facebook amounts to 25.5 percent of the country's total population. (Infographic Facebook Users Cambodia, 2017; Accessed August, 2017). On the potential political role of Facebook among Cambodian youths, see Ou Ritthy (2013). 'New Political Trend of Positive Change'. Asian Human Rights Commission. Accessed 13 July 2014. See also Ou Ritthy's blog sites: Politikoffee (http://politikoffee.com/) and Cambodia's Political Affairs (http://politicskh.blogspot.sg/).

51 On average, eight of Cambodia's ten most "liked" Facebook pages are politically minded (*Phnom Penh Post*, May 9, 2017, "Cambodia's politics play out on social media" by Andrew Nachemson).

52 The destruction of the former National Theater in 2007, in spite of protests and petitions, gave rise to new initiatives like the campaign to save the Renakse hotel in front of the royal palace. The king in person opposed the destruction of this historical and architectural landmark of the city. The building is now rotting unattended, before its foreseeable collapse (and ultimate destruction).

activities mean that advocacy movements are mostly driven from the grass root and that they usually target local causes.[53]

In general, 'new media' such as online news, social networks and personal blogs have enjoyed more freedom and independence from government censorship than mainstream media. After the 2013–14 political stalemate, the government recognized the Internet as a significant threat, resorting to blockages of blogs and websites. Cases of crackdowns on websites critical of the government or publishing information on the business associations of the Prime Minister and members of his family dramatically increased.[54] In early 2010 the Cambodian government tried to introduce a state-run exchange platform to control all local Internet service providers. The plan was postponed due to popular opposition even from within the ruling party. Internet thus still offers a space for public scrutiny that may be difficult for the authorities to fully annihilate. As Chak Sopheap wrote as early as in 2012:

> In spite of the blurred boundaries between freedom of expression and restriction, the web has become a place where those Cambodians who do have Internet access can communicate, debate and organize. A number of websites and blogs are disseminating news, entertaining the public and serving as a platform for political, economic and social discussions. New media has the potential to be a huge facilitator for change in Cambodia. However, it is absolutely crucial that it remains the free and open forum for discussion that it is today. Major changes in political will and current legislation are also needed to reduce the climate of fear that hinders broader participation.[55]

This state of relative openness has been at least temporarily restricted, if not almost fully suppressed, prior to the July 2018 general election. In the absence of the main opposition party and or of dissident voices allowed to be aired, this election served as a democratic façade. A string of actions by the regime eventually silenced some of the public voices likely to contest its power monopoly.

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53 These spontaneous actions contrast with more established sites like *Sithi*, a Cambodian human rights portal, or *Saatsam*, a virtual library of information on corruption practices, which are related to larger international political networks and receive funding from organizations like the Open Society Institute, the Asia Foundation and, in the case of *Sithi*, USAID. It is doubtful that local activists could set up initiatives like *Sithi* and *Saatsam*.

54 See for instance reports posted by the NGO Global Witness.

55 Chak Sopheap (2012). 'The rise of digital democracy in Cambodia' (http://www.futurechallenges.org/local/uprising-digital-democracy-in-cambodia. Accessed on 16 July 2014).

Although Internet and social medias have remained in principle free, the CPP authorities resorted to a series of intimidating lawsuits, a trend that climaxed with the introduction in early 2018 of a stringent anti-defamation legislation modeled after Thailand's notorious *lèse-majesté*. The objective is to scare out social media users from fraying into politics. With the other media outlets, the regime resorted to a strategy of acquisitions of independent companies including newspapers, radio and TV channels. If that did not work, it sought to close down those remaining outlets through legal channels, usually by claiming allegedly unpaid taxes. This was the tactic used against the English language *Cambodia Daily*, effectively silenced at the end of 2017. By that year, Cambodia's once numerous Khmer-language newspapers, radio and TV stations (including the U.S.-funded Voice of America, Radio Free Asia and Voice of Democracy) were either silenced or brought to tow the regime's line.

4 Non-Governmental Organizations

Onwards from 1992, Cambodia experienced a massive inflow of aid managed by International Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as locally or internationally-registered associations of all kinds.[56] With UNTAC, Cambodia became the 'humanitarian' training ground *par excellence*. The introduction of electoral democracy in Cambodia and the forced liberalization of the country's economy were matched by a considerable uncoordinated outpouring of international aid. In the political realm, the combination of these phenomena led to a general confusion regarding notions of public and private interest and, as a corollary, a degree of devaluation of the regulating role of the state. Concepts such as 'civil society', 'public good' or 'civism' gained problematic meanings. The arsenal of self-serving discourses by major international structures like the World Bank (WB), the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the United States' Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department for International Development (DFID), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), armed with slogan-like expressions in favor of 'economic development', 'civil society', 'democratization', 'participation',

56 Vickery refers to "the many foreign-backed NGOs which sprouted like mushrooms under UNTAC" (Vickery (2007). *Cambodia, A Political Survey*, p. 144). In 2008, there were approximatively 5,000 registered NGOs and organizations (1,350 are estimated to be active). In: International Center-for-Not-for-Profit Law (ICNPL 2016) – NGO Law Monitor: Cambodia. https://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/cambodia.html.

inserted themselves in the local public landscape. Their potential for subversive thinking was, however, limited.

If many of these programs officially aimed to restore the country's basic infrastructure and to initiate rehabilitation processes during the 'transition period', a number of them explicitly set out to 'develop' Cambodia's political 'civil society'. Imbued with the prevailing neoliberal paradigms of 'governance' – neoliberalism as governmentality – that sought to revise the structural role of the state in society and the economy, public and private international donors enthusiastically supported the vague notion of 'civil society' as "a model of policy reform and government accountability".[57]

These self-proclaimed 'civil society' organizations have tended to conflate exercises of democracy with those of market economy. They were established for all kinds of causes, including environmental conservation, human rights, minorities and indigenous welfare, governance and anticorruption, gender equality, socio-economic development (through micro-credit and enterprises), culture and education, among others.[58] There are as many cases as there are NGOs and other associations in Cambodia. Their impact on society varies, as well as the way the government deals with them. Those deemed non-threatening are left alone (health for instance). Those in the arena of political scrutiny and activism, or those dealing with state-sanctioned arbitrary acts such as economic spoliation increasingly attracts intrusions and intimidation by the Cambodian authorities.[59]

In the early years of 'civil-society' development, enabled by massive outside funding, a number of Cambodian NGOs began operating in refugee camps on the Thai border, to develop autonomously from the policies of the state, in some cases posing as challengers to them and the political elite. This hope largely receded with the consolidation of the CPP and its 'shadow state system'.[60] A few key foreign-funded organizations however succeeded to play

57 Thomas Parks (2008). 'Rise and Fall of Donor Funding for Advocacy NGOs: Understanding the Impact'. *Development in Practice* 18 (2): 213–222, p. 214.

58 During the mid-1990s, donors "embraced civil society development as a necessary part of democracy promotion and launched hundreds, even thousands, of projects under that rubric". (Parks (2008). Ibid., pp. 214–215).

59 After years of intimidating signals, the CPP-led authorities went ahead with the introduction of a contested "Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations" (LANGO), effective as of January 2016, that aims at controlling and restricting these organizations' activities in the country.

60 As it took shape, Cambodia's 'shadow state system' "comprised patronage networks that linked the party, the bureaucracy and the military ever more tightly as time went by". In Caroline Hughes (2009). *Dependent Communities, Aid and Politics in Cambodia and East Timor*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, p. 165.

a role as counterweights to the arbitrary practices of the regime. To name just a few: the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), Cambodian Center for Human Rights, Global Witness, et al. Their activism has made them crucial for the development of a political culture of opposition to the group in power. To these large organizations should be added smaller local entities usually receiving support from Western embassies or overseas development programs. Cambodia's 'civil society' landscape also included religious or cultural non-governmental programs.

Beyond the political role of some of these organizations and their ubiquitous presence in the country, it is the question of their long-term impact in the social and cultural Cambodian landscape that must be interrogated. There is a difference between humanitarian discourses and the actual economy of these organizations – including the Center I worked with – that sprang up in the 1990s and 2000s. Can one assume that by virtue of acting free from the state, these structures represented a positive force capable of reinforcing the functioning structures of society, and of withstanding state-originated arbitrary practices as their propaganda rhetoric usually claimed? This is a question Nut Suppya raised when studying a sample of NGOs operating in the fields of performing arts and cultural heritage.[61] Nut's assessment, though specific, is illustrative of the often-ambiguous and contested role played by NGOs in post-conflict Cambodia. (It is especially interesting because it directly relates to the subject of this book). Her essay points to a risk of neocolonialism, especially as these organizations' actions largely drew from a mainstream discourse of defiance against the state and its role in society.

In her work on NGOs active in the revival of Cambodian performing art, Nut, who is herself involved in the field, questions both the intentions and the effectiveness of some of these foreign-initiated programs, even when they were coordinated by Cambodians or created by members of the diaspora.[62] In their marketing propaganda, these organizations claimed to operate as either alternatives to state mismanagement, arbitrariness or authoritarianism, or at least as mechanisms capable of addressing problems more effectively while

61 Suppya Hélène Nut (2016). 'Intangible Heritage in Cambodia: The Role of Cultural NGOs Between Collaboration and Tension'. Unpublished presentation at the conference: "Heritage as Aid and Diplomacy in Asia", IIAS, Leiden, p. 2.

62 Most of these organizations rely on Cambodian individuals whose prominence largely derives from their claimed ability to mediate between local and international contexts, sometimes at the expense of local needs. See for instance, for religious organizations, John Marston (2011), 'Cambodian Religion since 1989', in Ojendal and Lilja (Ed.): 224–249, p. 228.

acting as spaces where societal practices and state policies could be freely mediated.

Nut notes that "the relationship between NGO s and the state could at first be seen as a 'win-win' situation" with the former, "offer[ing] a platform for actors to reformulate discourses of arts, tradition, renovation and democratization."[63] And in some ways she suggests that these projects succeeded in rooting themselves in communities. They played an important role by providing services that the government was unwilling or unable to fulfill. However, at some point in their development, some of the organizations felt self-assured enough to begin to "challenge the state as agents of change and as representatives of the 'civil society'." In their fundraising discourse overseas, at least, they stood as legitimate guardians of culture and civil society. Their fluency in English, the language of institutional legitimacy, moreover, gave them a decisive advantage. The logical endpoint of their self-legitimating narrative was that "they deserved more resources than state agencies" whose ultimate disappearance would in fact make sense.[64] The question is whether these claims could be sustained when these NGOs were not self-sufficient and relied on outside sources that ultimately controlled their agenda. Their opposition to the Cambodian state was, moreover, specious. Because they were not permanent structures, organizations were not required to support the kind of nationwide human and infrastructure investments made by state agencies.[65]

Nut's findings lead us to question the notion of 'civil society' in Cambodia and its so-called 'empowerment' thanks to organizations claiming to act 'from the grassroots'. Unless these organizations make efforts to embed their actions socially, and culturally, they were prone to go counter to the evolution of the Cambodian society. For instance, the wave of Buddhist revival and monastery building that occurred since the end of the conflict, and the popular religious and cultural energies associated with them, should have been mobilized by organizations claiming to support the country's cultural 'revival'.[66] The idea of 'empowerment' presupposes exchanges and co-production. If organizations seek to root themselves locally, and engage society *from below*, they therefore must reduce their dependency on outside (foreign) constituencies.

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63 Suppya Hélène Nut (2016). 'Intangible Heritage in Cambodia', p. 3.

64 Nut (2016). Ibid., p. 8.

65 This is especially the case for micro-NGOs working on short-term funded projects with a tiny small workforce and few sites of activity. The punctual character of their interventions cannot compare with the responsibilities of a ministry or even its regional offices – national-scale training, capacity building, infrastructure maintenance, dissemination.

66 Nut (2016). Ibid., p. 12.

Nut's insight on cultural NGOs contrasts with those presenting private cultural organizations in post-conflict Cambodia as essentially a positive factor in restructuring the society. In many ways, not only was the reliance on these non-state actors by the 'international community' an expression of their libertarian rejection of any positive role by the state, it went beyond that by ensuring the free flow of market-driven initiatives. In her assessment of the last two decades of cultural NGO work, Nut points to the risk that a new hierarchy of values has engulfed Cambodia, with these organizations and their foreign donors becoming the main civil society actors.[67]

The example of cultural NGOs shows how complex and ambiguous the role of non-state actors is and has been in post-war Cambodia. Besides the question of the substantive impact of NGOs, it is that of their massive presence in the country that for now must be stressed. Parallel to the anarchic and fast-paced developments in the educational and media sectors, one can say that the profusion of NGO initiatives, with the impact their programs created and the 'civil society' propaganda they diffused, at best contributed to a multiform Cambodian society. From this diversity, in turn, has emerged a sociological 'middle class' of local actors who enjoy a sense of autonomy, economic accountability, and a toleration for a multiplicity of legitimacies. Only in that sense, notions of 'civism', 'civil society' and 'public good' can be considered as improvements of Cambodia's social and societal environment. The negative side, as we have seen, is the systemic dependency these programs created. And more important perhaps, uncoordinated imported aid has helped to reinforce the confusing situation of an atomized social landscape and the undermining of local capacities to stand against restricted interests. Put in perspective, the phenomenon must be linked to the long-term weakening of the role of the Cambodian state and other cohesive structures, and the persistence of patron-client patterns which found a new vigor in the deleterious post-UNTAC socioeconomic phenomenon of "accumulation by dispossession" – neoliberalism's motto.[68]

After the 2013 elections, the Hun Sen regime saw in NGOs an uncomfortable presence it sought to neutralize once for all. For many years already, a number of independent initiatives by civic local or international organizations

67 Nut suggests that room exists for contextualized, locally embedded forms of citizen's cultural action that should develop in collaboration with state institutions, provided that both sides share the same vision of 'public service'. She does not address the noticed tendency toward systematic abandonment of a cultural vision and policies by the Cambodian state, itself embroiled in the process of commercialization of culture and with it, a return to private patronage. Nut (2016). Ibid., p. 13.

68 Springer (2015) *Violent Neoliberalism*, p. 16.

had encountered difficulties (for instance, the UK-based organization Global Witness). Yet, as Morgenbesser remarked, "the repression had an arbitrary, ad hoc quality; an activist who dared to speak up about abuse, corruption, wrongdoing, or anything else that put the regime in a bad light would suffer, but state action fell short of being general and systematic."[69] What changed in 2015, was the introduction of an "anti-civil society" law that followed a model introduced by countries like Belarus, Egypt or Russia. The objective was "to limit the scope of advocacy, using arcane compliance requirements related to funding, reporting, registration and political neutrality."[70] The passing of the law led to a number of crackdowns aimed at intimidating the plethora of Cambodian NGOs and other associations. In 2016, one of these iconic organizations, the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association, was targeted on the pretext of some obscure transactions also – conveniently – implicating the head of the opposition party CNRP Kem Sokha. Beyond this incident, the objective of the authorities was "to intimidate civil society actors, particularly those campaigning against environmental degradation, land seizures and political corruption."[71]

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In the three first chapters, we saw how Cambodia, while developing as a colonial and post-independence modern nation-state until the destruction of the 1970s and after the Khmer Rouge regime, underwent in parallel a long process of devaluation of the moral authority of the state, a process probably begun before colonialism. This trend resulted from a fragmented social landscape where it was accepted by a substantial section of the population, urban and educated, that the country's leaders acted more as predators than as responsible public servants. This process of secularization and atomization made post-conflict Cambodia a very special place in which the normative authority embodied by the state did not really exist. The old institutions of Buddhism or the monarchy were no longer able to play their traditional unifying role as a result of the horrors of the 1970s. The causes of the degradation of state influence must be found in the memories of past abuses accumulated from the times before and during the colonial regime, the despotism of Sihanouk, the destructive irrationalities of the Khmer Republic and the Khmer

69 Morgenbesser (2019). 'Cambodia's Transition to Hegemonic Authoritarianism', p. 162.
70 Ibid, p. 162.
71 Ibid, p. 162.

Rouge and now Hun Sen's kleptocratic regime associated with the neoliberal policies and values transmitted by many international programs.

The rise of a young, increasingly well-informed (if not always academically well-educated), urban middle class whose members never experienced war but whose social and economic existence remains precarious, with its avid use of social media and its familiarity with non-state organizational activities, amounts to a structural phenomenon that has been transforming the country's social landscape. In it coexist libertarian aspirations for local autonomy with a vague desire of collective solidarity. Beyond discussions over the role of NGOs, Cambodia under the neo-patrimonial CPP regime, in its fragmented configuration and with contradictory forces at play, remains a fertile ground for innovative modes of social interactions, especially if these bear the potential of 'self-structuration', a process described by Kheang Un as "shaped along the idea of non-political 'secondary associations' capable of building 'social trust' and generating 'norms of reciprocity' that deviate from standard patronage networks".[72]

The development of institutional infrastructures of education and culture from the French period onwards derives from the same failed line of attempts by the state to monopolize modes of knowledge production, a policy pursued by all successive regimes. The pattern was set by the French by promoting institutions delivering state-sanctioned official knowledge centered on the national-colonial ideology and built on conservative social premises. Similar patterns are found in other countries where state formation resulted from colonialism.[73] The evolution of institutional scholarship and cultural development in Cambodia must also be appreciated against the imposition of Western norms of 'modernity' upon a socio-cultural substratum indistinctively qualified as 'pre-colonial' or 'pre-modern'. This process was marked by convulsions, resistances, drawbacks and contradictory discourses. Because of their constraining character, these state-led cultural initiatives contributed to the rise and consolidation of alternative independent voices.

Indeed, if the last century and a half saw the flourishing of an elitist 'orientalist' epistemological infrastructure on and in Cambodia and its region,

72 Kheang Un (2006). 'State, Society and Democratic Consolidation: The Case of Cambodia'. *Pacific Affairs* 79 (2): 225–245, p. 225.

73 On nation-state building under and through colonialism, see for instance Partha Chatterjee (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. On the inclination of states to control forms of scientific and intellectual knowledge, see James Scott (1998). *Seeing like a State, How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

and if scholarship projects developed by the successive incarnations of the Cambodian state continued to build on it, this level of institutionalization of knowledge production never occurred without producing dissident voices, a phenomenon pivotal to this reflection on developing a post-colonial post-war cultural and educational institution. It was indeed in the liminalities of the colonial and post-colonial state, in the interstices of its power structures and discourses, that new forms of creative agency could emerge among Cambodian intellectuals.[74]

One of these early forms to emerge was that of 'amateur' scholarship, a trend that led to the distinct and increasingly diverse field known as 'Khmer studies'. The institutional knowledge on and in Cambodia gradually shaped spaces in which state and non-state initiatives competed to frame its contours. In the field of creative and intellectual knowledge production, the post-1991 context offered spaces for experimental enterprises. In many ways, the path was cleared with war-time programs in exile like CEDORECK. In the aftermath of UNTAC, a large international presence allowed for a wide array of experiments including aspects of grassroots developments in the spirit of the CEDORECK experience. This vibrant environment helped revive traditional forms while it nurtured new social and cultural practices. A myriad of cultural NGOs sprung up. Some of them operating as active agents of social transformation with, however, the risk of belittling any state actions, or of imposing commodification and empty marketing paradigms. The trend was at first experienced at the individual and local community level but soon expanded to the broader social spectrum, effectively inventing a Cambodian definition of what Ojendal and Lilja called a "moral right" to rule.[75]

This discourse of legitimacy is now being publicly voiced on occasions such as elections or social movements, although few Cambodian intellectuals or cultural figures have hitherto articulated it into a holistic political vision capable of mobilizing the floating civic society in the making. The country

74 What Stoler and Cooper call "the contingencies and contradictions of colonial [and post-colonial] rule", in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds. (1997). *Tensions of Empire, Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, p. 18. In postcolonial studies, the concept of 'the liminal' describes an 'in-between' space in which hybrid identities may form as a cultural effect of colonization on the colonized (see Homy Bhabha [1994]. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge).

75 "Given the patrimonial political culture and historical distance between rulers and ruled in Cambodia, the notion of governments earning legitimacy based on popular support in a democratic process and seeking 'power' from below is new. Indeed, "post-conflict political change has robbed rulers of the 'regular' mechanisms of generating legitimacy" (Ojendal & Lilja (2011). *Beyond Democracy in Cambodia*, p. 18).

remains in shortage of a critical mass of educated leaders capable of proposing an alternative culture of social accountability and respect. The last test is for contemporaries to strip themselves of the pervasive neoliberal contraptions – ultra-individualism and negation of society – that once accompanied their growth. It is out of this enmeshed collective drive for social and intellectual independence, with its dose of naïve anti-statism and cosmopolitanism, that an experiment that saw itself as grass root, the Center for Khmer Studies, emerged.

PART 2

The Making of a Hybrid Academic Institution

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The Center for Khmer Studies (CKS) was founded in 1999. The seemingly unruly context of Cambodia in which it was born was in retrospect a favorable environment for non-state grassroots cultural initiatives to flourish. In their host countries or in the refugee camps, many Cambodians in exile demonstrated a capacity to create new collective structures, be it Buddhist worship centers or cultural and language training activities. Lindsey French showed how the environments of the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border, in spite of extreme hardship and divisions, also served as effective anti-chambers for new organizational – Buddhist – initiatives.[1] Upon return to their home country, these 'returnees' found a distressing situation, albeit one that appeared open to new initiatives and ideas. From 1993 onward, Cambodia experienced an unprecedented flurry of projects, many around the process of Buddhist revitalization, or in the form of secular structures like NGOs. Every sector of rehabilitation and reconstruction, from health care, children's education, human rights and socio-economic development were covered.[2]

In the same vein, the realms of culture and education saw an unprecedented trend of creation of independent initiatives, many of them by returning Cambodians. To name a few of these cultural projects created around the same time as CKS: SIPAR, *Soutien à l'Initiative Privée pour l'Aide à la Reconstruction de l'Asie du Sud-Est*, founded in France for Cambodian refugees in 1982 and established in Cambodia in 1992; Sovanna Phum Art Association (founded in Cambodia by the shadow puppet master Mann Kosal, in 1994); Phare Ponleu Selpak (founded in 1986 in Site 2 Refugee Camp, Thai-Cambodian border; re-founded in Battambang in 1994); Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture (founded in Phnom Penh 1998 by artist Ly Daravuth and anthropologist Ingrid Muan); Cambodian Living Arts (founded in 1998 in Cambodia by the musician Arn Chorn-Pond); Khmer Arts Academy (simultaneously founded in Long Beach, California, in 1999 and in Cambodia, by dancer Sophiline Cheam Shapiro); Amrita (founded in Cambodia in 2003 by dancer Fred Fromberg); Bophana Audiovisual Centre (founded in 2006 in Cambodia by filmmakers Rithy Panh and Ieu Pannakar). The relatively open environment of the period made possible the establishment, in 1999, of the academic, educational and cultural program – Center for Khmer Studies.

1 French, Lindsay C. (1994). "Enduring Holocaust, Surviving History: Displaced Cambodians on the Thai-Cambodian Border, 1989–1991", PhD Dissertation in Anthropology, Harvard University. See especially Chapter 7, pp. 219–267.

2 On the development of Buddhist NGOs, see Marston, John (2011). 'Cambodian Religion since 1989' in *Beyond Democracy in Cambodia, Political Reconstruction in a Post-Conflict Society*, edited by Ojendal, Joakim and Lilja, Mona. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, pp. 224–249.

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The following three chapters focus on CKS as an organization, particularly the process of its establishment and institutionalization, and that, concomitant, of the development of activities aimed at serving its dual academic and capacity building mission. The work of setting up the Center occurred against the particular Cambodian background described in Part 1: a fragmented society divided at multiple levels, a young population, a relative absence of the state and state actors (at least in cultural and educational matters), and a fast-connected globalizing society.

My account, described in Chapters 4 and 5, is limited to the period during which I was involved with CKS (1999–2009). It is that of the gradual elaboration of a humanistic academic and educational program endowed, as it was envisaged, with the potential to achieve transformative impacts within Cambodia's educational and public civic realms. As will become apparent in the activities that were developed, especially with the CKS flagship 'Junior Faculty Training Program', the initiatives promoted by the institute aimed to overcome elements of epistemological fragmentation by offering interdisciplinary spaces of trans-cultural exchanges, and ultimately, of civic empowerment. Chapter 6 will also discuss CKS, particularly through its collaborations with other cultural institutions operating in the country. Like the Center, they sought to contribute to the rehabilitation of Cambodia's post-war society through innovative activities. Viewed from the vantage point of collaborations with CKS, this account pays particular attention to the methods of intervention used by these initiatives. Most of them operated like CKS as non-profit 'grassroots' independent initiatives.

With this second (and third) part of the book, the narrative turns into a reflection on a lived experience conditioned by multiple positionalities. This is a discussion from an individual crow's nest, with my own agency: as an academic, a cultural practitioner, and a civil society activist. If one follows Weberian categories, I was in Cambodia at the time as a 'bureaucratic authority' mediating between different interest groups – Cambodian and foreign academics, institutional funders, private donors, local institutions and policy makers, international visitors, and the public at large. I was also a cultural interlocutor negotiating between a diversity of sensibilities, sets of values and expectations. Today, a past actor turned narrator and informed by new experiences, readings and discussions with people with comparable understandings, I am also, I hope, capable of making more circumspect judgements on intricate situations I previously faced. My testimony may include retrospective critical assessments of decisions I made at the time.[3] I will therefore describe the

3 Except for the description of the early establishment of the organization, I have otherwise refrained from discussing governance, staff or budgetary matters.

processes of creation and development of an organization from the perspective of the *insider*.

What underpins the institutional and programmatic experiment of the Center was primarily a desire to see practices of humanistic academic and cultural engagement become forces of social emancipation. This was attempted through a set of local-global actions carried out by the new organization model of CKS. In discussing its case, its programs and its collaborations, I wish to reflect on the effectual capacities of a non-state social project to deliver them. The value of this account, if it can at least in part succeed, will indeed lie in its capacity to contribute to the larger debate on the emancipating potentialities of independent non-state, non-profit organizations like those discussed by Olin-Wright.

CHAPTER 4

The Center for Khmer Studies

The genesis of CKS was a five-day planning workshop organized by the World Monuments Fund (WMF) between 11–15 January 1999 in which I participated. As its name indicates, the World Monuments Fund (WMF) is a New York-based non-for-profit international organization dealing with the preservation of mainly monumental built heritage around the world. At the time of the workshop, WMF's project on the Preah Khan temple within the UNESCO World Heritage archaeological site of Angkor was the organization's most visible project. Like for UNESCO or the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), albeit exclusively dependent on private fundraising, with a number of national chapters, WMF saw Angkor as critical to enhance its global presence and the Preah Khan conservation initiative as its main public relation 'signature project'.[1]

The January 1999 workshop set out to discuss the opportunity of developing a training program with the ultimate objective to prepare Cambodians in heritage conservation.[2] The workshop comprised of about thirty participants of different backgrounds and specializations, ten of whom were Cambodian. WMF not only invited specialists in monumental conservation, but also epigraphists, historians, archaeologists, policy makers as well as representatives of institutions: UNESCO, Cornell University (Southeast Asia program), the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC, at the Smithsonian) and the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh.[3]

1 *Milestones*, Newsletter of the World Monuments Fund, 1999, Winter–Spring (6).

2 The idea of an "International Center for Khmer Studies" was first floated in 1998 in a WMF field report entitled 'Planning for the International Center for Khmer Studies'. As the report stated, the purpose of the future undertaking was "to expand the opportunities for education and training available to Cambodians and to foster exchanges between Cambodians and their foreign counterparts." The organization would have two main components: (1) "A certificate program in cultural resource management designed for Cambodian students, jointly developed by WMF, its Cambodian partners, and other American and international institutions with expertise in the field of cultural resource management"; (2) "A residence, resource center, and study facility to support the program in cultural resource management as well as an international academic fellowship program." (World Monuments Fund [1998]. 'Preah Khan Conservation Project', Report VIII, Field Campaign V, New York, p. 21).

3 Two American foundations known to support Asian studies, the Henry Luce and C.V. Starr, sponsored the event. *Milestones*, Newsletter of the World Monuments Fund, Winter–Spring, 1999 (6).

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With relatively few 'conservationists' present, the discussions quickly shifted away from the original agenda of the workshop. From the start, participants were confronted with the desperate situation of Cambodia's higher education, especially in the humanities and the social sciences along with other sectors of knowledge. An early visit to the campus of the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) in Phnom Penh, in a building barely standing, with nearly no pedagogical materials available let alone the presence of trained faculty, set the tone of the workshop's ensuing discussions.[4] In the debates, a division occurred between those wanting to restrict the role of the future organization – to architectural and archeological conservation for the WMF, or to a nationalist agenda around the problematic notion of "Khmer civilization" for some of the Cambodian interlocutors. Together with a handful of other participants, I favored a broadening of the workshop's agenda to explicitly discuss setting up an organization that could simultaneously serve academic and local capacity-building pursuits.

The future Center for Khmer Studies, as it then came to be named, was to serve as an independent platform for scholars and intellectuals of all disciplines and specializations who shared an interest in Cambodia and the academic field of "Khmer/Cambodian Studies". The late Vann Molyvann, veteran architect, former education minister and president of the governmental organization at Angkor APSARA and his anthropologist colleague Ang Choulean preferred the term 'Khmer' to that of 'Cambodian', making explicit references at the meeting to the classical disciplines enshrined in Western academia associated with the study of 'Hellenic', 'Latin' or 'Persian' civilizations.[5]

This first step crucially linked activities of intellectual investigation with the urgency for the conservation of cultural resources such as ancient monuments and other artifacts, including Cambodia's 'intangible' cultural heritage

4 As will be explained in more details later, the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) formally re-opened in 1988. By 2003, it had 1,400 students. At the time of the workshop, it was the recipient of a Japanese-funded UNESCO support program that was connected to the international Angkor preservation program. From 1993 till 2004, these support schemes contributed to improve quality in teaching and study for students in the faculties of Architecture and Archaeology. See: UNESCO Office in Phnom Penh (2017). 'Reinforcing National Capacity for the Conservation of Cultural Monuments: The Project of Assistance to the Royal University of Fine Arts'. Details available at: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/phnompenh/culture/tangible-cultural-heritage/reinforcing-national-capacity-for-the-conservation-of-cultural-monuments-the-project-of-assistance-to-the-royal-university-of-fine-arts, last accessed July 2017.

5 I imagine Vann Molyvann and Ang Choulean had already suggested the term to the WMF, as it appears in documents produced before the workshop.

ranging from food, vernacular architecture, performing arts, languages, etc., that had been severely altered by the civil war. The second crucial feature of CKS was defined when participants supported the proposal made by Cambodian contributors that the future organization should not become another first-world academic structure, a sort of foreign enclave, but emerge as a joint national-international entity and platform where national and international participants would work together, with provisions for the latter to engage in knowledge sharing with the former. Through these two linkages and references to Cambodia's past cultural heritage, the institute's mandate was thus established with an emphasis on developing local educational and cultural capacities, notably within Cambodian institutions, a process understood to be ultimately beneficial to both Cambodian and international counterparts or colleagues.

To accommodate CKS's educational responsibilities with the informal character of Cambodia's cultural and higher education environments, it was moreover decided that the institute's future programs should cover a wide range of topics, disciplines and pedagogical activities without restrictions. All would need to contribute to the promotion of a Cambodian 'voice' as part of an effort to re-center knowledge production, or rather, to promote a local perspective at debates and cultural undertakings dominated by foreign actors that primarily focused on the country and its region. CKS's dual commitment as both an international academic operation and a national-local capacity-building program gave it its unique hybrid character. Such an unorthodox model opened up new vistas for initiatives to be developed on the basis of their local significance rather than ones prescribed from 'above' or 'outside', inaugurating a progressive strategy adapted to Cambodian capacities and needs. This generous vision was, however, to expose the institute to different forces and interests.

1 Defining the Center's Mission

At the January 1999 workshop was spelt out the mission of the Center for Khmer Studies: "to promote research, teaching and public service in the social sciences, arts and humanities as they relate to Cambodia and its region, Mainland Southeast Asia." CKS's specific objectives were: "(1) to facilitate research and international scholarly exchanges through programs that increase understanding of Cambodia and its region; (2) to help strengthen Cambodia's cultural and academic structures and to integrate Cambodian

scholars in regional and international networks; (3) to promote social leaders and scholars able to contribute to the emergence of a vigorous Cambodian civil society."[6] Therefore, the founders of CKS emphatically linked the building of Cambodia's civil society with academic and cultural activities.

The difficulty – as things developed – would be to translate these well-intentioned objectives into tangible activities with visible results while creating networks and governance mechanisms that would metamorphose the Center into a sustainable organization. From the start, CKS followed the classical academic triptych of "Research, Teaching and Public Services". The institute's activities were to range from a fellowship program aimed at Cambodian and international scholars, research-led projects as catalysts for multifaceted pedagogical activities, and actions directly framed as building capacities on the ground including a library, publications, translations, conferences, training workshops and initiatives supporting other like-minded institutions and programs.

In hindsight, I realize being naïve for not seeing the extent to which these very generous ideas and the activities that were proposed, beyond general idealistic discourses, should have also been estimated as sometimes self-serving agendas. During the five-day workshop, there had been on occasion open displays of individual posturing and competition over these ideas. Some emanated from the Cambodian participants themselves, with an ostensible opposition existing between the representatives of universities and those of the newly created government authority responsible for Angkor, the Authority for the Protection of the Site and Management of the Region of Angkor (APSARA), or between that same organization and the members of the Ministry of Culture. A clear difference of vision also existed among international participants, notably between the 'conservationists' and the 'universal educationists'.

It was my enthusiastic involvement in the January 1999 Cambodian workshop – to which I had been invited, to my initial surprise, by the World Monuments Fund – and my ostensibly outward support for the hybrid agenda of CKS, that had WMF call me for a follow-up meeting in New York in March of the same year. On this occasion, though I was not privy to it, a number of conflicting interests were jostling for space to effectively lead and 'own' CKS in the future: between WMF and APSARA, for the choice of the future CKS director; within WMF, between the country director and the New York office; between WMF, the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) and the

6 Notes of recommendation, January 1999 Workshop, Siem Reap.

funding organizations that supported the idea of CKS. To this day, I am still unclear about some of the agendas that were at play.[7]

Following the New York meeting, I was subsequently hired by WMF as CKS's 'project director', as of 1 September, for an initial period of two years. I had just submitted my doctoral dissertation on Vietnamese history at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.[8] As part of my appointment, I obtained from WMF some of the seed money it had raised for initiating the project to be used to hire, for a provisional period of six months, three additional people who could help me kick start the Center. They were people of my age whom I had known at SOAS or during my time in Vietnam: Michel Rethy Antelme, a linguist; François Tainturier, an architect, and Dr. William Southworth, archaeologist. I will discuss their contribution in the creation and establishment of CKS.

As the Center's 'founding' director, I was entrusted to implement, together with my three colleagues, the rather utopian vision outlined at the January workshop: to establish an academic structure meant to simultaneously serve the production and dissemination of new contextualized knowledge in the humanities and social sciences while nurturing a Cambodian community of scholars and cultural leaders in this knowledge making process. The main challenge was to invent programs that could bring results in both academic and societal developments while at the same time be institutionally, financially and programmatically sustainable. Such an ambitious agenda, as it was entrusted to me, was plainly unrealistic. At that time, I saw it as much as a personal opportunity and responsibility rarely given to accomplish in one's lifetime as a 'postcolonial' mission that ought not to be squandered.

Though I cannot claim any pre-disposition to the job, there were developments that possibly prepared me for it. One, explaining my interest in what CKS could do, was a long-held frustration, as an 'area studies' historian, over the seemingly one-way extractive model of conducting 'field' research. Perhaps naively, I felt researchers should not simply be there to acquire data [information, knowledge, experiences] for projects whose purpose was essentially utilitarian: to fill up artificially defined academic requirements set to

7 A missing player in this competition was the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Government representatives. Marie Schaeffer, the then cultural attaché at the January workshop had left her position for health reasons. She was not replaced; the whole cultural collaboration portfolio of the Embassy having been drastically reduced as a result of the policy of state disengagement pursued at the time.

8 One unofficial reason behind my hiring was the fact that, as a French national, and someone rather neutral in the Cambodian cultural and academic scene, I would be in a better position to negotiate with Cambodian and international (i.e. French and UNESCO) partners.

prepare one's future career at home. The four years I spent in Vietnam made me, moreover, realize that I was not cut out to work in a university department, deliberating with fellow scholars about far-away places and people, like virtual abstractions, with no chances of truly working *with* them. Without conjecturing as to why I felt this way, I became prone to resist the way area (or regional) studies in Europe and the U.S. were deployed, when their programs and people were not structurally tied through joint collaborative initiatives to the societies and regions of their focus. Building a mechanism like CKS would, I thought, turn the problem around, by reinforcing local human capacities and resources, to render Cambodians active agents and equal partners in future intellectual endeavors that, in my eyes, could only be collaborative.

2 Building 'From the Bottom-Up'

Difficulties arose immediately after William Southworth and I set foot in Cambodia in September 1999. We were confronted with contradictory, if not hostile signals. These first interactions with Cambodian and Cambodia-based interlocutors impacted significantly the way we would engage with the development of the CKS. Developing the organization from the bottom up, I found myself and my colleagues having to launch numerous initiatives simultaneously that were to determine the future architecture, personality and modes of operation of the CKS.

At the very moment of arrival in Cambodia, we immediately encountered an atmosphere of overt competition, if not hostility, among many of those we thought were our partners or counterparts. Starting our mission in Siem Reap where WMF had its office, we were at once confronted with the deleterious environment engulfing different programs, Cambodian and international involved in the conservation of the World Heritage-listed Angkor site. The scramble between international state-sponsored 'national' teams largely revolved around public visibility and prestige-seeking strategies. Our first disappointing encounter was indeed with the WMF office. We initially occupied the organization's wooden house that served both as office and guest house and immediately felt the atmosphere heavy with suspicion among the Cambodian staff. The project-leader, the British architect and conservationist John Sanday was abroad. We were advised by the staff leader, the accountant Mr. Sarun, not to take any decisions or do anything before we received instructions from him. This was of course impossible given the short timeframe and the ambitious agenda that was imparted to us by the New York office. Residing in the WMF office/house, we found ourselves under continuous scrutiny. We

were not allowed to access the money designated for the project. Emails had to be drafted and sent from outside as we were not allowed to use the computer at the office. Meanwhile, our first meeting with the APSARA office was also not welcoming. We were told by our interlocutors to abandon any ideas of developing CKS in collaboration with Phnom Penh-based universities. The import was that we should basically abandon ideas of engaging with institutions other than APSARA. This was contradictory to the idea of running an institute independently, a situation that at first left us distraught.

The initial sense of being besieged gradually dissipated thanks to unexpected encounters. We regained confidence after meeting, by chance, members of a German-supported conservation project. Their house literally faced that of WMF. From them we learned not to be intimidated by the heavy atmosphere that prevailed among the teams working at Angkor. Discussions with the director of the children's organization – *Krousar Thmei* – at the restaurant it owned, La Noria, also emboldened us to take more creative decisions. I was advised to meet the director of the organization '*Artisans d'Angkor*', a European Union-supported vocational craft training program who recommended direct contact with the Ministry of Education along with the Ministry of Culture *and* APSARA.

Southworth, Tainturier, who had just arrived, and I went down to Phnom Penh. There, we encountered similar difficulties at first. I will never forget a stormy discussion with the then UNESCO representative Anne Lemaîstre whose task was to convey to us the strong opposition of the international organization to the establishment of the new "American institute", especially if it was based in Siem Reap-Angkor. A meeting with the erstwhile French ambassador, André-Jean Libourel was also arresting: "There is no need for such an institution in Cambodia", I was told. "How can a compatriot work for such an overtly U.S.-led project?" The conversation with the center left-leaning diplomat ended with his offering me the position of director of the French cultural center in Siem Reap. The hostility of both the French diplomatic mission and of UNESCO towards the idea of CKS contrasted with the lack of interest I encountered when visiting the U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh. No one had replaced Mary Schaeffer. Her position of Cultural Attaché had been disbanded altogether. In general, as will be elaborated later, a project such as CKS was of little interest for the American 'Mission'.[9]

9 I recall meeting, on a couple of occasions, the then ambassador, Kent Wiedemann. CKS was of limited interest to the Embassy only so far as it was connected to WMF and involved in the Angkor international conservation scene.

Through these initial encounters, we discovered how the envisioned project of CKS, as an independent non-governmental educational and cultural initiative that planned to uphold a dual set of activities in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap was either viewed negatively, or of limited importance by its potentially future partners. In Siem Reap in particular, near the sacrosanct site of national and international self-legitimizing strategies that was Angkor, the plan to establish CKS was regarded with utter suspicion by nearly all parties involved, including the WMF team. These early difficulties to identify understanding and reliable institutional partners made us favor a diversified set of alliances that could only guarantee the autonomy of the nascent organization. This enabled CKS to avoid falling prey to exclusive interests during its early days. It meant, however, that the new entity would need to constantly demonstrate its good intentions in the Cambodian (and international) landscape(s) without relying on any single prominent patron.

The challenge was to obtain a formal Cambodian recognition. For this purpose, I collected advice from a number of NGO directors, Cambodian and international, already established in the country. It became clear that CKS would need to be accredited by a few ministries. I remain grateful to the then Cambodia Community Center (CCC) director Carol Strickler, who helped me draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at a time when no such legal documents really existed. With the help of my colleague Antelme, we wrote a tri-lingual document that served as the basis of three MoUs signed with the ministries of Education, Culture and Foreign Affairs, respectively. A legacy from the PRK socialist administrative system that continues to affect Cambodia's higher education sector is its structural fragmentation. Each public university operates under the supervision of a separate sectorial ministry: The University of Fine Arts is under the Ministry of Culture; the University of Health Science under the Ministry of Health; the University of Phnom Penh under the Ministry of Education, etc. Connections between these institutions remain consequently loose.[10] It was thus decided that we should sign agreements with the two main public universities focusing on the humanities and the social sciences: Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), under the Ministry of Education, and Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), under the Ministry of Culture.

Meanwhile, I was emboldened by the encouragement I received during my meetings with the then ministers of Education (Tol Lah) and of Culture

10 On this state of fragmentation, see Chamnan, Pit and David Ford (2004). 'Cambodian Higher Education: Mixed Visions', in *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Philip Altbach and Toru Umakoshi. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University Press 333–361, p. 341.

(Princess Norodom Bopha Devi). The ministers – to whom should be added the State Secretary for Higher Education, Pok Than – all members of the second coalition party FUNCINPEC, showed a keen interest in seeing a U.S.-originated player in the field of culture and education. There was also a genuine curiosity and willingness to help, especially on the part of the Princess, for this new internationally-connected initiative with ambitions to engage in 'Khmer Studies'. Eventually, Princess Bopha Devi, King Sihanouk's daughter and a former Royal Ballet dancer, presided over a formal signature ceremony in the presence of the WMF President, Bonnie Burnham, on visit to Cambodia.[11] One year later, the Princess traveled to Siem Reap to formerly open the Center at Wat Damnak. I consider these early moves as an essential step that safeguarded the local establishment of CKS and anchored it in the Cambodian academic and cultural landscape.

Subsequently, CKS had to exist beyond its name and pieces of paper. The choice of its physical location was crucial. From the beginning, it was tacitly accepted that the Center should be located in Siem Reap. Although its envisioned programs aimed at the educated youth primarily found in Phnom Penh, where most of the country's educational and cultural institutions are located, there was common agreement since the January 1999 meeting that the stand-alone organization would need to protect itself from pressures of different sorts (political, intellectual, economic) as well as from sky-high expectations in a national academic environment facing a dire shortage of resources. The idea was to keep the Center institutionally independent of the universities and cultural institutions with which it sought to work.

The choice of Siem Reap has its own genealogy. The WMF operations were located there. Our team started working from the WMF facility. Being initially based in Siem Reap made the option of setting up the institute in that city both tangible and feasible. Besides, there was the issue of cost. At the time, real estate in Phnom Penh, still reeling under the international fever unleashed by UNTAC, remained wildly prohibitive. The capital city center was filled with NGOs, and international organizations headquarters as well as governmental agencies. Siem Reap by contrast was still an underdeveloped provincial town where houses could be hired inexpensively. The choice of the north-western Cambodian town had also to do with the possibility of attracting funds from tourist-related (private) sources. This was the model pursued by WMF whose presence in Angkor, thanks to the donations of international visitors, served to fund its conservation activities. To position CKS in a way that it would become

11 The agreements with the two ministries were signed at a ceremony at Le Royal Hotel, in Phnom Penh in January 2000. For the occasion, Bonnie Burnham was made chair of a newly-created CKS steering committee.

part of the tourist circuit of Angkor and thereby attract private funders became a necessity – and soon an addiction. In hindsight, I now see that the Angkor connection to CKS became one of partial dependency: on the donations, which the organization could generate from affluent tourists, and with it, on the necessity to frame its institutional profile as part of Cambodia's touristic storyline, with its 'highlight' trajectories: 'Angkor' and 'the Khmer Rouge genocide'. In that, the choice of Siem Reap as the home of CKS was an opportunistic decision. Without surprise, the first major donations the Center received were made to and through WMF – whose global visibility was largely owed to its presence in Angkor.[12] One of these initial grants came from a group of wealthy visitors to Angkor sent by the Paris representative office of WMF. The donation enabled our team to restore two dilapidated buildings in the Buddhist monastery Wat Damnak which eventually housed the Center.[13]

But the choice of Siem Reap also bore a political significance linked to the symbolic importance of Angkor in the Cambodian and Southeast Asian historical narrative. My colleagues and I were aware that an important part of the intellectual battle to reclaim knowledge production practices in Cambodia, and the region, would have to be fought on the ground, precisely where the World Heritage Site stood. Further, the opportunistic choice of anchoring CKS in Siem Reap must also be understood as an invitation to the new generation of Cambodian intellectuals and social leaders to claim some sort of ownership of the historical site and its immediate vicinity. The move anticipated the transformation of the town into an urban center – today Cambodia's third largest city – in which a critical mass of inhabitants, mostly internal migrants, would live, study, and work. The objective was that Cambodia's 'civil society' could in time reoccupy a tangible physical site that had been frozen by the colonial and the successive post-independence states.[14] The rapid pace of growth of the city and the massive increase in the number of tourists – of which the majority were domestic – that we see today could not be foreseen, though we anticipated, through the development of the city of Siem Reap, a process of 'vernacularization' of Angkor in which CKS aimed to play a part. By vernacularization I

12 At the January 1999 workshop, it was agreed that WMF would serve as CKS's provisional "steward institution" until the Center was able to stand on its feet by then becoming a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).

13 WMF France gave CKS a $10,000 grant that was matched by another $10,000 from one WMF member from France.

14 Since 1993, Angkor is a UNESCO-registered World Heritage Site. See Peycam, Philippe (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee in Angkor, A World Heritage Site as an Arena of Competition, Connivances and State(s) Legitimation'. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31 (3): 743–785.



FIGURE 2 Vihear, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM



FIGURE 3 CKS Old Library, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

mean a process in which Cambodians would be able to reclaim intellectual and symbolic ownership over the site, and with it, the capacity to re-socialize it in a way that it could no longer be solely appropriated by international or internationally-trained orientalists and conservationists or by the heritage and tourism industry.

From the point of view of many Cambodians in Phnom Penh, however, the choice to establish CKS in Siem Reap instead of the capital helped to forge an image of aloofness and elitism. CKS was seen as an institution that chose to exile itself away from where Cambodian cultural and academic life were being re-imagined. At the same time, as in the case of another important cultural project (Phare Ponleu Selpak in Battambang), CKS's choice of de-centeredness contributed to expand the scope of this intellectual revival. But then the risk of seeing CKS's independence encroached by domestic interests – economic, or political – would have been heightened. CKS's decentered character, in the Cambodian context, can be interpreted both positively and negatively.[15]

From 2001, CKS became headquartered within the precincts of the Buddhist monastery Wat Damnak, in the historical heart of Siem Reap. Linked to the decision to anchor the Center in the north-western city, the choice of restoring old buildings in a living monastery was primarily a response to the situation of urgency we found ourselves in the initial weeks of setting up the Center. To exist in a seemingly institutionally hostile environment, CKS needed to have its own independent brick and mortar visible presence. Also, to be recognized as a valid organization capable of serving its proclaimed mission, the Center needed to position itself in the intellectual and cultural landscape in a uniquely Cambodian setting. The urgency was also heightened because our team was given a restricted timeframe and limited financial resources to achieve its organization establishment mission – in that we were destined to succeed.

The move to have the Center, its offices, library and conference hall established inside a functioning Buddhist monastery was a bold one. Not only did it convey a sense of continuity between traditional and modern comprehensions, it also acknowledged Buddhism as a conduit of education. This choice bore a special meaning for Cambodians, particularly because during the Khmer Rouge, monks belonged to a separate class of people lost to the revolutionary

15 In hindsight, I think that had CKS been headquartered in Phnom Penh, and its activities more deeply embedded in the capital's cultural and educational circles, it would have perhaps limited the possibility of having its local civic role curtailed.

cause that had to be eliminated.[16] The Center was made part of the local cultural and social landscape because it had accepted the unstated yet obvious fact that traditional education, and more generally communal sociability in Cambodia, were still largely mediated by and existed through Buddhist monks. Foreigners were guests.

CKS became one of two international academic institutions operating and included in the work of a living monastery.[17] This connection contributed to position it as a local organization, one deemed to follow the "Cambodian ways". As will be discussed later, it somewhat guaranteed that the organization would remain committed to Cambodian interests. This argument proved helpful against temptations by some to restrain the institute's local capacity-building mandate. Work on the monastery's grounds began immediately upon receiving confirmation that funding was available.[18] The architects Chheng Phalli and François Tainturier, began planning the restoration of two derelict buildings that lay in the southwest corner of the compound. They were turned respectively into the Center's library and its conference hall. The surrounding grounds also received attention to provide for a welcoming site. The result of these interventions was an harmonious integration of the Center and its buildings within Wat Damnak's premise and a natural – almost organic – operative connection between them.[19]

The third condition of CKS's existence was its intellectual input. In this respect, two major functions of the institute had to be envisioned at the outset: documentation, through the creation of a specialized public library, and dissemination, though the launch of a periodical that could reach out to Cambodian, international scholars and learned individuals. The library started

16 Estimates in the number of Buddhist monks said to have perished under the Khmer Rouge and the years of civil war and U.S. bombings that preceded them vary, although Ian Harris suggests a figure over 25,000. Many more were simply defrocked. The monasteries were turned into warehouses. See Harris, Ian (2007). *Buddhism under Pol Pot*. Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, pp. 217–243.

17 The other case was the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*-led Buddhist manuscripts preservation program at Wat Ounalom, Phnom Penh.

18 Another obvious advantage of locating CKS in the monastery was that, once the old buildings would be restored, or new ones built, the Center could avoid falling at the mercy of landowners, always tempted to drastically raise rents or to replace us if more lucrative 'developments' could be made. This is a story CKS regularly experienced in Phnom Penh.

19 See for instance the following travel logs (last accessed July 2017):

https://www.travelfish.org/sight_profile/cambodia/western_cambodia/siem_reap/siem_reap/1754.

http://www.globaltravelmate.com/asia/cambodia/siem-reap/siem-reap-pagodas/678-siem-reap-wat-damnak.html.



FIGURE 4 CKS 'Campus', Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

as a modest shell. CKS first needed to build a 'reasoned' bibliography that would set a high academic standard for the future collection. This task was carried out on a shoe-string budget by Southworth at a time when the Internet was hardly available in the country. Southworth drew a list of essential titles that formed the intellectual basis upon which the CKS's library could grow. Materials on ancient Cambodia and its heritage were included as well as colonial-era 'orientalists' works, for it was essential for the envisioned collection to be inclusive of all streams of academic knowledge and that all should be made equally available. These works were matched with more contemporary materials including works on Southeast Asia. Also listed were reference materials that not just included dictionaries and encyclopedias, but also theoretical readings in anthropology and history (Geertz, Braudel, Pollock, etc.). The purpose here was to establish a humanistic encyclopedic-yet-regionally-specialized collection, with books ranging from pre-modern history to the contemporary. It was also envisaged to make available material in all social sciences and humanities disciplines, and in various languages. Another objective set from the beginning was for the CKS library to operate as a Cambodia-based repository by collecting publications produced in the country, in the past and the present. These included materials published by local organizations, makeshift novel



FIGURE 5 CKS Old Library, interior, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM



FIGURE 6 New CKS Library, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM



FIGURE 7 New CKS Library, interior, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

books and pamphlets and numerous pre-war reprints informally sold in public markets.[20]

With its new identification as the headquarters of CKS, Wat Damnak not only received support for the reconstruction of the institute's facilities, the monastery also began to undergo renovation of its religious buildings and of its elaborate landscape. In addition to housing CKS, Wat Damnak hosted a primary school and, a few years later, an NGO for underprivileged children co-managed by the Wat's monks.[21] The monastery compound is certainly one of the most pleasant and best-preserved examples of vernacular urban architecture in the city, and the country. Nine years after CKS's establishment at Wat Damnak, the monastery signed an agreement with CKS that provided free-of-charge land use for a twenty-year renewable period. The public library, an air-conditioned conference Hall, and a new administrative office and book

20 The country's first ISBN service was only established by the National Library of Cambodia in 2005. The system of legal depository, first initiated in the 1920s, yet again became compulsory.

21 The NGO is called "Life and Hope".

reserve now constitute the Center's facilities. Given the transformation that has occurred with the massive presence of tourists around it, Wat Damnak offers a rare example of a privately supported non-commercial public heritage space in the tourist-invaded town center.[22] The library holds well over 10,000 titles. It is among the three best collections in the country and the only one located outside Phnom Penh. It is a free public reading venue, with a large share of its collection accessible on open shelves. The library is under the patronage of the King of Cambodia and thus *de facto* Cambodian. It has served as an inspiration to all CKS projects.

Another tangible outcome that helped put CKS on the intellectual map were its publications. Here too, the first few months of the institute's life marked a critical departure. From the beginning, it was crucial to involve a scholar specialist on Cambodia who could set the scientific and literary standards of CKS and cement its scholarly legitimacy. At the same time, a publication format had to be developed that would be accessible to Cambodians from different social conditions and educational backgrounds. Antelme, now professor at the *Institut des Langues Orientales* in Paris, came to Cambodia to work, under stringent circumstances, to prepare the first issue of the Center's newsletter, *Siksacakr* ('Wheel of Knowledge'). The new periodical was set to come out on time for the formal opening of the Center. The first issue was published in March 2000. About 500 copies were printed in Phnom Penh. *Siksacakr* is a trilingual publication with Khmer as its first language. Articles are translated into or from Khmer, with their second version either in English or French, the two other working languages of the institute. Antelme set the tone that made *Siksacacr* a high-quality publication representing the organization. The periodical, in its early phase, contained scholarly contributions as well as news about

22 In 2002, CKS was awarded an 'Honorable Mention' under the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation. The jury citation is worth being quoted: "The elegant and restrained restoration of two Buddhist monastery buildings to house the recently-established Centre for Khmer Studies sets an encouraging example for the preservation of non-monumental heritage in Cambodia and makes a persuasive case for the involvement of private-sector institutions in conservation activities. The conversion of the French colonial era buildings competently addressed a number of technical issues and accommodated modern service necessities without compromising the integrity of the buildings. The preservation of these heritage buildings and the ongoing cooperation with the monastery and local community ably serves the mission of the Centre to strengthen the field of Cambodian studies while promoting cooperation between Cambodian institutions and foreign ones." http://www.unescobkk.org/culture/wh/asia-pacific-heritage-awards/previous-heritage-awards-2000-2013/2002/award-winners/2002hm3/2 (last accessed July 2017).

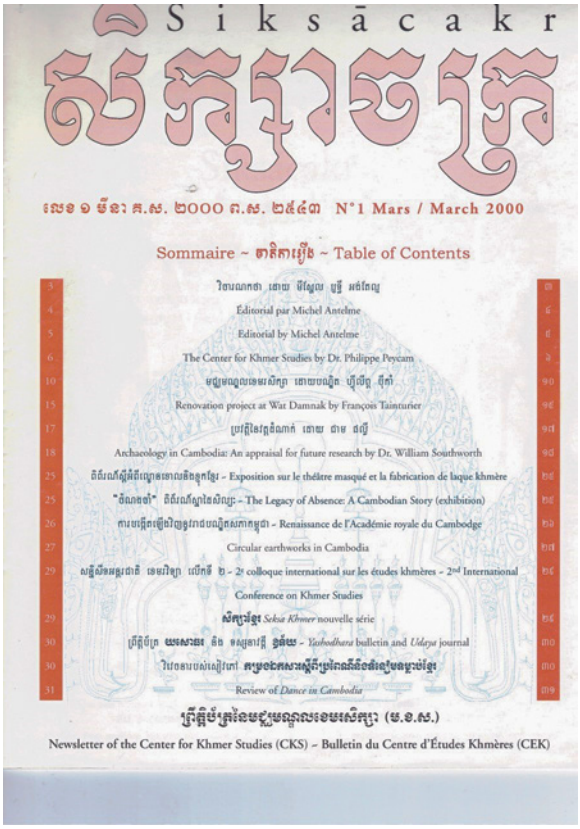


FIGURE 8 CKS Publication *Siksacakr*
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

the institution and its projects. It did not aim to become a full-fledged academic publication but rather set an 'international' standard for the academic-public discourse in Cambodia. Articles ranged from substantive studies to information based on new researches in Cambodia and outside. Authors who contributed to the early issues of *Siksacakr* included the late Michael Vickery, David Chandler, Jacqueline Filliozat, Keiko Miura, King Hoc Dy, Thongchai Winichakul, etc. The objective was to raise interest among Cambodian students who did not possess the methodological capabilities to plainly engage in academic debates. I remember discussions with Antelme over how some articles could trigger local reactions that somehow would initiate a virtuous cycle in which humanistic scholarship could contribute to public debates: for instance, the article by Keiko Miura on the story of the statue of Siem Reap's

tutelary spirit (*Neak ta*) clandestinely hidden from the Khmer Rouge by the local inhabitants. The statue was in fact thrown into the main religious pond of Wat Damnak for the duration of the DK regime.[23] Another piece Antelme thought Cambodian readers ought to read was an article by the Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul condemning biased nationalistic historical narratives written by Thai historians. The idea was to show Cambodian readers how Thai scholars engaged in contested intellectual debates, something that may inspire aspiring national historians.[24] *Siksacakr*'s didactic nature, its low, subsidized price, ensured that the periodical was adapted to Cambodian educational needs. After a few years, *Siksacakr* turned into a peer-reviewed academic journal (2004), an undertaking that has made it difficult for CKS to sustain.[25] Antelme's total dedication ensured that the journal is accessible to Cambodian readers and that the pool of authors remained as large and open as possible.[26]

A final aspect of the foundation of CKS was its establishment outside Cambodia. In the early years of 2000, Cambodia was still – legally, economically and politically – an unruly country. It was necessary to have the institute grounded somewhere outside. The idea of the dual national anchoring of CKS in both Cambodia and the United States as imagined in January 1999 became an essential feature – I later discovered, a potential structural weakness – of the Center. The involvement from the beginning of educational and cultural organizations from this country such as WMF and a number of individuals, pleaded for an U.S. anchorage of the institute. The country could provide the Center the opportunities it needed to legally exist as a non-profit organization capable of raising funds. WMF assisted in the registration of CKS in the state of Delaware, under the 501©3 status of the IRS code. In parallel to its Cambodian registration, the Center became a non-for-profit American organization.[27] Although that did not play much of a role during my tenure at the Center, the fact that the United States is home to the largest community of Cambodians

23 Miura, Keiko (2002). 'An Anecdote on *Preah Ang Check* and *Preah Ang Cham*'. *Siksacakr* 5: 18–20.

24 Winichakul, Thongchai (2004). 'Trying to Locate Southeast Asia from its Navel: Where is Southeast Asian Studies in Thailand?'. *Siksacakr* 6: 52–63.

25 *Siksacakr* found a 'competitor' in *Udaya* [Rising Sun], a multi-lingual journal published by APSARA's Ang Choulean and Ashley Thompson. Antelme generously acknowledged *Udaya*'s existence in *Siksacakr*. He did not see it as competing with the CKS newsletter. *Udaya* is a glossier and more expensive journal.

26 *Siksacakr* is no longer freely accessible online. Antelme is still its main editor.

27 As mentioned above, a provisional steering committee was set up with the WMF President as chair. The set up was meant to be temporary until CKS would have its own board and budget.

overseas, meant that CKS could eventually count on it to play an active role in its activities.

CKS's academic anchorage in the U.S. was to find its institutional expression through its inclusion in the platform network of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), whose headquarters was/is located at the Smithsonian's in Washington DC. The Council operates as an umbrella organization of over twenty institutes spread in different regions of the world.[28] Each of these organizations differs in its programs and institutional set ups. American Overseas Research Centers or AORCS include prestigious structures like the American School of Classical Studies in Athens or the American Academy in Rome. Other affiliated centers were established during the cold war like the American Center of Oriental Research in Jordan. Each has its unique institutional and funding model.[29]

An inclusive structure with what seemed to carry minimal risks of intrusion, CAORC proved an extremely helpful platform for CKS. Through its enthusiastic and ever-resourceful president Mary Ellen Lane who was present at the January 1999 Siem Reap workshop, CAORC provided a wealth of information on how to develop the Center as an academic organization. Moreover, with the diversity of institutes it represented, the network offered a wide range of institutional and programmatic models from which to draw inspiration. Equally important, CKS's inclusion in the CAORC community made it less isolated in the academic realm. It opened opportunities for peer-review funding and institutional recognition. In 2004, the Center became a full CAORC member. With its integration, it became eligible to receive U.S. State Department financial support, principally to administer a research fellowship program for American scholars to work in Cambodia. In 2007, we competed for core financial support from a fund handled by the U.S. Department of Education, the famous 'Title VI grant' program, which was obtained for four years. Known as 'Title VI', because the program was formally established in Title VI, Part A, § 602 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, these grants are provided to American academic organizations to establish and operate language and area or international studies centers, like AORC centers, by the National Resource Center (NRC) of the U.S. Department of Education.[30]

28 https://www.caorc.org/.

29 For example, the American Institute of Indian Studies was established thanks to an Indian Rupiahs fund generated out of a loan India contracted to the United States immediately after her independence.

30 [These grants] "support undergraduate and graduate programs that focus on instruction of fields and topics that provide full understanding of areas, regions or countries; research and training in international studies; work in the language aspects of professional

CKS's status as 'AORC', as we shall see, not only reinforced its anchorage to the U.S.; it also meant the Center could be primarily identified with American academia, something that had positive influences. As I gradually experienced, however, this new-found status could also act as a limitation if it sought to continue to be imbedded in the Cambodian educational landscape. In hindsight, CKS's affiliation to CAORC, which I then strongly supported as a way to keep the institute free from centrifugal forces (notably WMF), turned out to potentially weaken its original hybrid character and the balanced policy it needed to preserve. This of course very much depended on the way CAORC would be willing to let its member-institutes develop their own strategy. It was in fact the AORCs' capacity to raise funds independent of the platform that would condition its ability to influence their individual agenda. CKS's national-international model was therefore vulnerable as it could fall prey to a restrictive national[-ist] vision.

In anticipation of such risk, we sought from the outset to diversify the Center's supporting basis by building ties with institutions from other countries. As a post-war clearing-house committed to inclusiveness and openness, it was critical that the Center could simultaneously operate in a transnational and a regional arena. CKS's geographical location, moreover, commanded that it cultivated close connections with Southeast Asian and Asian partners. Very early, we built strategic associations with universities and organizations in Thailand, Singapore, as well as Japan and India. This effort proved challenging.

To limit myself to the Southeast Asian region, the differences of situations, living conditions and perceptions between each of the countries led to contrasted sets of connections. Historical legacies were particularly important with regard to Cambodia's closest neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. In the former, close in many cultural, linguistic and religious aspects, Cambodia continued to project an image of backwardness and wilderness whilst in Vietnam, the memory of this country's recent occupation of Cambodia was fresh in the minds of people. One realization was the general lack of reciprocated interests among Southeast Asian neighbors. This perception may be slowly changing today, at least in economically affluent countries like Singapore, but also among the increasingly prosperous and educated urban middle classes of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and even Vietnam. This new market-mediated national and regional collective identity – thanks to a commonality of interests

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fields and research; instruction and research on issues critical to current world affairs. These NRC grants are awarded on a quadrennial schedule, through a nation-wide competition." See: U.S. Department of Education, National Resource Centers Program https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsnrc/index.html (last accessed August 2018).

in consumption, inter-regional travels, social media use and educational background, also includes a Cambodian component.[31]

Beyond Asia, France was an important point of anchorage for CKS. Not only did relations between this European country and Cambodia remain strong since the time of the 'Protectorate' (1863–1953), but France is also home to a large community of Cambodians. In addition, a significant number of returned French-Cambodians were involved in the post-war reconstruction of the country. Critical to the launching and early support of CKS were French-Cambodian academic personalities including Michel Rethy Antelme, Suppya Nut, Son Soubert, and King Hoc Dy.

By early 2001, CKS was established as what appeared to be a sound and promising organization. It was formally recognized as a non-governmental educational and cultural institution under the Cambodian ministries of Education, Culture, and Foreign Affairs, and under U.S. law as a non-profit establishment. Parallel to these achievements, carried out by a very small team in Cambodia, efforts were concentrated on anchoring the Center within international academia. In the United States, WMF and members of a provisional CKS 'Steering Committee' approached the well-known scholar on Cambodia David Chandler who had recently retired from Monash University in Australia and was visiting professor at Cornell University. Chandler's involvement with CKS was later formalized by his appointment as 'Senior Advisor' to the Center's future board and to the director.[32] In hindsight, I see this decision of attaching a major area studies Western academic figure like Prof. Chandler to the nascent organization at the outset, however well intended, as potentially problematic. Very quickly, the Center – myself in the midst of it all – became torn between two contradictory quests: to function as an established international academic structure serving the needs of first-world scholars, or to primarily operate as a local educational and cultural civil society program. As will be later explained, this dual objective was not without frictions and difficulties.

In conjunction with Chandler's hiring and the completion of CKS's institutional establishment, we decided that the Center should organize its first international gathering marking its launch into the big league. The event would

31 On this rise of a Southeast Asian middle class, see Shiraishi, Takashi (2004). 'The Rise of New Urban Middle Classes in Southeast Asia: What is its national and regional significance?' RIETI Discussion Paper Series 04-E-011. Tokyo: Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry. See also, Shiraishi, Takashi and Pasuk Phongpaichit (2008). *The Rise of Middle Classes in Southeast Asia*. Kyoto Area Studies on Asia, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University (Vol. 17). Kyoto: Kyoto University Press.

32 A grant from the Henry Luce Foundation secured Chandler's involvement with CKS for three years.

coincide with the opening of the new facilities at Wat Damnak in January 2001. The conference, or 'workshop' as it was then called, aimed to open CKS to the larger community of intellectuals and scholars from Cambodia and abroad. Further, its purpose was to map out future areas of academic interventions for the institute with the long-term ambition of expanding the reach of 'Khmer studies'. Entitled "State, Practice and Future of Khmer Studies", the event brought together about 130 participants organized in 11 disciplinary or thematic panels, including: Ancient History, Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History and Conservation, Libraries and Archives, Linguistics, Literature, Modern History, Philosophy and Religion, Plastic and Performing Arts and Vernacular Architecture.[33]

This inclusive approach offered a close-to-complete picture of what had been written or covered in and on Cambodia and what was still missing. In each group, recommendations were written to assist CKS in its future mandate as both a catalyst of the field and a promoter of Cambodian voices. Held in the country, with about one third active Cambodian participants from Cambodia and abroad, and a contingent of university students from Phnom Penh, the 2001 Workshop was critical in setting milestones for a new way to engage with post-cold war area studies scholarship: each thematic panel attracted a diverse mix of individual backgrounds. Participants were asked to recommend new subjects of inquiry that would support a more Cambodian-driven academic agenda. The event also included scholars from Asia – Japan, Southeast Asia, India – with the underlying idea that CKS would not be simply dominated by European and American scholarly and intellectual priorities. Likewise, efforts were made to include a high proportion of young promising scholars as well as women scholars. Like in the January 1999 founding workshop, the recommendations that came out of the meeting displayed a shared concern that scholarly endeavors and the Khmer Studies academic field in general should contribute to the human and institutional rebirth of Cambodia's intellectual life. To a large extent, the Center's future capacity-building initiatives derived or were inspired by the 2001 workshop's recommendations.[34]

This chapter has laid out the founding steps taken to establish CKS as a full-fledged organization. I have tried to show how, from the onset, its strength – but also its weakness, and ambiguity – resided in its hybrid character: an international academic area studies institution and a local civil society capacity-building facilitator; a Cambodian and an American entity; a cultural and an educational mechanism. The 2001 opening Workshop, the facilities at

33 See the inaugural workshop's report in appendix.

34 See the list of recommendations in appendix.

Wat Damnak, *Siksacakr*, the library and the administrative registration of the Center both in Cambodia and the U.S., constituted the founding pillars upon which CKS was to develop as an independent institute. These achievements, in just over a year, were substantial and visible. They augured well for the future of the experiment. For the access to materials it offered, for the open reading space it provided the local community of students, scholars and members of the public at large, for its function as a repository of old and new materials, but also as a visible outlet in a sacred and historical place – a monastery in the heart of Siem Reap – the CKS library and with it the periodical *Siksacakr*, gave the Center, regardless of the power struggles that were to occur in its midst, a sense of collective achievement that transcended particular interests or designs. They also contributed, in a small reflection of the Angkor heritage site, to the idea of CKS as an aesthetically and morally attractive 'trophy-project' whose control by different stakeholders was worth fighting for.

Probably the most striking aspect in the success of establishing CKS was perhaps indeed its performative tangibility: the built facilities, the library, the publications. This early sense of solidity and institutional establishment contrasted with the organization's multiple allegiances, networks and purposes and the relative fragile basis of its human and financial capabilities. This would mean that the area of maneuver of the Center's team would paradoxically become more restricted. It put pressure on me and my colleagues on the ground to privilege the performative (visible) aspect of CKS while we sought in the meantime to deploy an ambitious strategy aimed at anchoring the Center in a complex web of fleeting supports and dependencies. It was like building a castle on quick sand.

CHAPTER 5

An Integrated Capacity-Building Program

One of the main objectives of CKS was to contribute to the promotion of a community of young Cambodian scholars, educators and social leaders who could be engaged at different levels of society. The objective was to prepare them to act as future counterparts (and also counterweights) to not just international academics but also to cultural professionals, policy makers and other social actors to shape a civic culture of accountability through their involvement in a revived, rationally articulated public sphere. Despite many constraints, of which time and funding were the largest, CKS succeeded in developing programmatic initiatives that touched on parts of its multi-faceted missions relatively rapidly. But to set up programs that would match the organization's hybrid institutional model proved complicated and haphazard at first. What was particularly difficult was to imagine ways to build sustainability into initiatives, especially when their outcomes could not be foreseen. The issue was not limited to funding opportunities *per se* – I will get to that point later – but to the institute's capacity to generate coherence between independently conceived, and funded, activities. It took at least five years of incremental experimental initiatives to reach a level at which a unified programmatic model could confidently overcome CKS's initial fragmented role and deliver on its promises.

1 Programmatic Genesis

The expectations articulated at the 1999 founding meeting began to find a programmatic translation when the idea of a hybrid Cambodian-international, academic-civil society structure was embraced by a few recognized international funding institutions, notably the Rockefeller Foundation in New York and the Toyota Foundation in Tokyo. This process of collaboration by funding agencies, especially with Rockefeller, was gradual.

I remember vividly my first meeting at the Rockefeller Foundation's office in midtown New York in the fall of 2000 with Bonnie Burnham, the president of WMF. I felt perplexed at the rather open-ended and sometimes suspicious questions that were being asked by the two officials only to discover that they were gauging the spectrum of action that CKS, a newly-created entity, could

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take for the breadth of transformations they were envisioning for Cambodia.[1] I think the argument that won their support was my explicit emphasis on creating programs that would not simply promote traditional academic outputs, but ones that would support the development of basic intellectual infrastructure for a society deprived of them as a result of the decimation of its creative members. A shared understanding that no quick results could be expected, and perhaps also the belief that this hybrid institute could embrace the local cultural context and not act in isolation were, I believe, what got the Rockefeller officials to see CKS as potentially an effective instrument of social and cultural facilitation in Cambodia.

This meeting marked the inauguration of a long meaningful relationship. From 2001 until 2010, the Foundation's 'Creativity and Culture' Program worked with us in a comprehensive and far-sighted collaboration that enabled the institute to grow and its programs to progress to maturity. If it was not for the dedication and constant encouragement of the officials who supported the Center from its baptismal depths and helped us refine our ideas into concrete projects – Lynn Swaja and Joan Shigekawa, and later Alan Feinstein – CKS would not have turned into this unique model of an academic structure that was also a local 'citizen' institution. This first interaction with the Rockefeller Foundation must be put into context. It was the end of the Clinton administration, a period characterized in the U.S. by economic prosperity and a sense of confidence, something that was to drastically change in the aftermath of the George W. Bush election and the September 11, 2001 events. The optimism that characterized this period, though as we now know largely built on economic sands, was palpable. It animated many international programs like those of the Rockefeller which, under Gordon Cornway's presidency, still carried a universalistic interventionist agenda which included support for the humanities and culture with a progressive edge – probably the fact that many of its members, like my interlocutors, Lynn Szwaja and Joan Shigekawa, belonged to the generation whose political education was shaped by the movements of Civil Rights, Feminism and anti-Vietnam war.[2]

1 Part of the circumspection of the Foundation's officers had to do with their mixed feeling vis-à-vis WMF and its intension towards CKS. Beside evaluating CKS, they were also assessing my capacity, as field director, to operate independently from WMF.

2 Swaja and Shigekawa were respectively trained in religious studies and in the arts, a strong background in creative knowledge that probably gave them the sense that CKS was on a meaningful social development track. This was before the Foundation abandoned its progressive engagement for a neoliberal version under Judith Rubin. I will return to this later.

The first grant proposal to Rockefeller was a classical one. It was written in the fall of 2001 and formally submitted by WMF on behalf of the Center.[3] Its design was the result of numerous compromises between David Chandler, the new 'Senior Advisor', WMF and some of the scholars that sought to be associated with it. The stated objective was to train promising Cambodians in three under-represented areas of academic investigation selected out of the recommendations from the January 2001 inaugural workshop: urban youth culture, vernacular architecture and pre-Angkorian history. Emphasis was put on research and individual leadership skills, with a strong international academic input. This choice was equally determined by the availability of Cambodian and foreign scholars in these fields. The method was about training future Cambodian scholars to perform leadership in research activities.

The three-part program developed unevenly. Archaeology relied on a close collaboration with scholars from the University of Hawai'i. Vernacular architecture involved the participation of last-year undergraduate students from the Royal University of Fine Arts' architecture and anthropology faculties.[4] Three young Cambodian researchers conducted the Youth Culture project under the supervision of anthropologist Judith Ledgerwood from Northern Illinois University.[5] The outcomes of these three projects carried out through a period of three years were manifold. As far as institutional and programmatic developments of CKS were concerned, their simultaneous run helped CKS learn to coordinate multiple activities and peoples, between Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and overseas, this at a time when Internet access was still problematic.[6]

3 The Foundation agreed to transfer the funds to WMF on the express condition that during the term of the grant CKS would formerly operate as an independent institutional entity and would therefore be eligible to receive new contributions.

4 Respectively under the supervision of Bion Griffith, University of Hawai'i and François Tainturier, deputy director of CKS.

5 Ledgerwood, together with Cambodian PhD candidate Kim Sedara, agreed to take on a distance coordinating role after the initial candidate for the position declined to do so for he expected an international consultant working fee, something an NGO like CKS could not afford. Tensions over salary rates are symptomatic of international aid-dependent countries like Cambodia and the distortions these situations can bring to the educational sector. This discrepancy in operating costs between NGOs like CKS and international programs funded by UN agencies, the World Bank and others, is reminiscent of the equally considerable gap existing between salaries offered by local universities and those by international NGOs.

6 A major conference and the establishment of a solid team of like-minded young Cambodian archaeologists who for the first time studied ancient Cambodia *before* Angkor is probably the main achievement of the first of the Rockefeller projects. The establishment of a multi-disciplinary collaborative platform between architects, anthropologists and historians focusing on vernacular wooden Cambodian architecture (houses and monasteries), with the publication of the first bilingual study on the subject, is the main result of the second project.

With regard to programmatic determination, this first program was primarily research-based; it was orientated toward the training of individuals (rather than being embedded in universities) and was driven by a focus on research determined by or with foreign scholars. Beyond the projects themselves, I can say in hindsight that such pre-definition of subjects by international academics was not sustainable unless it was being accompanied by intense training in research methodology. From the outset, the limited duration of the grant, and the costs of involving outside scholars restricted the ambitions of the program and the kind of long-term cultivation CKS aimed to achieve. Even so, new spaces of inquiry were opened. For at least the archaeological and the architectural projects, publications and conferences were developed that contributed to shift the interests of scholars, Cambodian and international, beyond the subjects of Angkor and the Khmer Rouge.[7]

Another early grant was made to CKS by the Sainsbury Family Trust to set up its first training program in 'cultural heritage management'. Designed by John Miksic of the National University of Singapore, the program was essentially a training and educational capacity-building exercise aimed at supporting emerging individuals and their institution of affiliation, the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA). Miksic conceived of the original concept based upon broad 'cultural resources management' ideas: not just archaeology or conservation, but also notions of cultural heritage, both 'tangible' and 'intangible'. The program comprised a three-level course repeated three times, over three years, with the best students selected to move to the course's second- and third-level sessions.[8] The design and implementation phases of the courses were team-based. Combining theoretical discussions on heritage and conservation in the Cambodian and Southeast Asian contexts, the program was held on the RUFA campus in Phnom Penh although it was open to students from other institutions. Nearly two hundred of them benefited from its classes in the first year alone. At the end of the three-course process, the two best students were sent to take a full graduate degree in the English-language Southeast

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The project on youth culture was the least successful of the three, largely because of the difficulty in providing regular supervision from afar. Still, the three young researchers involved in the project benefited from the exposure provided by CKS when the Center facilitated the organization of a World Bank-sponsored national conference on Quality Education in 2002 (see below).

7 Another characteristic of the three projects was the level of collegiality and absence of hierarchy that was attained between international and Cambodian participants.

8 The other two instructors were Kyle Latinis, archaeologist at National University of Singapore; Pinna Indorf, from the School of Architecture, NUS, and Beng Hong Socheat Khemro, urban planner at the Ministry of Land Management.

Asian Studies program at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.[9] The 'Sainsbury program' as we called it, set the model of running independent courses in and with local universities. It also introduced the exercise of running independent selections, in agreement with partner universities. The inclusive and sequential model was helpful in reaching a wide range of students while serious participants selected for the second and third levels were given a chance to work in small groups. Parts of the courses were later translated into Khmer. Their format became a prototype for subsequent CKS training activities. As a regular, inclusive, university-embedded education that was not framed by disciplinary research foci, the program was primarily designed to elicit critical analysis and multi-positionality among students. It was at the end probably more adapted to the local needs than the first Rockefeller program, hence its immediate success.

Another foundational program for CKS was developed with the Toyota Foundation (TF): it addressed the crucial question of knowledge infrastructure, especially publishing and translation, and more generally, the 'book culture' in Cambodia.[10] This Toyota-funded project was meant to revive the academic publishing sector in Cambodia. Named Publishing in Cambodia (PIC), its origin stems from the poor quality of human and technical infrastructures in publishing and communication in the vernacular language. Launched in 2002, the project was set up as a partnership between CKS and the Phnom Penh-based art and publishing institute Reyum with the involvement of the Toyota Foundation.[11] For many years the Foundation had supported academic publications in many Southeast Asian countries. The project included the commission of a survey to be conducted on the activities of publishing and

9 Tan Sodany and Seng Sary, were the first MA students supported by CKS. Later, they benefited from other CKS initiatives while they contributed to the reinforcement of CKS's capacity-building programs. Sodany became a professional scholarly translator while Sary joined a Thai-sponsored university in Beantey Manchey Province where he served as professor and dean while he acquired a Thai-accredited PhD. He later moved on to head an NGO dedicated to farmers' skills sharing.

10 Another project was later supported by TF that focused on training final-year university students. I will allude to it when I discuss the Junior Faculty Training Program. The two TF grants were made during the tenures of Alan Feinstein and Rie Nakamura.

11 The model for this program was suggested by Alan Feinstein, the then officer at the Toyota Foundation (before his move to Rockefeller Foundation). Not merely subcontracting the project to Reyum and CKS, the foundation also served as one of its three coordinators. Our counterparts at Reyum were the late Ingrid Muan and Ly Daravuth, co-(founding) directors of Reyum. The survey became a reference for every institution interested in the question of publishing in the country. It was published and updated in three languages (Khmer, English and French) with the financial support of the French Embassy.

reading in Cambodia. Meant to serve as background material for future strategies in the sector, it was the first survey combining qualitative and quantitative information of its kind.[12] A national conference brought representatives of the different branches of the Cambodian book sector as well as experts from other countries to discuss the results of the survey and make strategic recommendations. The establishment of a professional trans-sectorial publication association was suggested as well as the development of a national academic publishing sector. As such, the PIC program contributed to supporting infrastructure knowledge as a condition for other academic endeavors. It helped CKS to work with non-academic cultural institutions like the organization Reyum, the National Archives of Cambodia, the newly-created Book Federation of Cambodia, and other NGOs. It also helped the Center to position itself not just as a mediator between international and local scholarship but also as a facilitator of knowledge dissemination across the larger public landscape of Cambodia with academic scholarship playing an inclusive role. In that sense PIC was important for the development of the institute's position and role in the country.

Taking the PIC program as a first step, CKS later solicited a small grant from the Open Society Institute, New York, to conduct another research focusing on the publishing subsector in the humanities and social sciences.[13] This 'Academic Publishing Program' (APP) revealed how the work of Cambodian university students and educators were seriously hampered by a near total absence of specialized materials available in Khmer. Their poor knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, and the general low level of education, made it unlikely that these students and teachers would access sources in foreign languages. APP recommended the translation of essential reference texts in a variety of disciplines to be used as accompanying pedagogical literature with the production of related glossaries so that key terms would be streamlined for future use. The survey also recommended a five-year program capable of kickstarting economically-viable translation and publication of tens of titles. Since no institutional funders, including the Open Society or Toyota Foundation, were willing to follow up on these recommendations, CKS, out of its own means, embarked on the translation of essential texts on Cambodian history, Southeast Asia, as well as reading materials in anthropology, religious studies, political sciences, et al. The translation of the first two monographs,

12 The research was coordinated by the archivist Peter Arfanis and the librarian Helen Jarvis. It followed a model developed by the Soros Foundation in Mongolia.

13 This project was led by the professional publishers Christiane Lalonde and Nhean Lakhana.

David Chandler's *History of Cambodia* and Milton Osborne's *Southeast Asia: An Introductory History*, took respectively four and three years. It revealed to us the complicated, tedious and yet critical process of interpreting basic reference material into a vernacular language.[14] The result of these projects was that CKS nurtured a very competent group of young academic translators.

CKS's second aspect of its identity, that of an American academic structure, led to the development of a parallel set of programs aimed primarily at U.S. and international scholars. These activities also contributed to building CKS as an institution. At the urging of the American academic members of the Center's newly-created board, CKS, still under the World Monuments Fund's 'stewardship', applied and received in 2001 a first grant from the Henry Luce Foundation to support, as mentioned earlier, an academic 'CKS Senior Advisor' – David Chandler. The remainder of the money was dedicated to the introduction of the Center's first doctoral field fellowship program, for American young researchers. In all, four PhD fellows, whose selection was coordinated by Chandler, benefited from the initiative.[15] After three years of operation, the program established CKS in the field of Southeast Asian studies in American academia. The presence of these young researchers in its midst contributed to position CKS as a respectable academic institute in Cambodia. Their contribution to the organization's local capacity building, however, remained limited. The incumbents, on a field research fellowship, were primarily busy working on their personal project. They were usually scattered across the country for most of the duration of their stay. This first Luce-funded doctoral fellowship was perpetuated after CKS joined CAORC in 2004, thanks to the doctoral and post-doctoral field fellowship program supported by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). The new scheme allowed the Center to gain in academic legitimacy.[16]

The American exclusivity of both the Luce and ECA fellowship grants certainly contradicted CKS's foundational claim that it would serve as an open clearing house on Cambodian/Khmer studies. The grant the Center obtained

14 Funding came from the Van Waveren Foundation, NYC, the U.S. Embassy and a number of private supporters of the CKS. Board member Olivier Bernier played a major role in raising funds for these initiatives. Both authors and publishers waived their royalties. The translation process would have never succeeded without the work deployed by Rethy Antelme and the CKS editor Kheng Pitou Kethya.

15 The four fellows, selected in a one-year interval were: Sokhieng Au (UC Berkeley), Jennifer Foley (Cornell University), Eve Zucker (London School of Economics), Tyrone Siren (University of Madison, Wisconsin).

16 A perception that outlasted the duration of the Luce grant was that CKS was 'David Chandler's institute'.

from the Florence Gould Foundation, New York, to match the ECA funds for the benefit of French citizens did not really resolve this ambiguity. What was most problematic with these fellowship schemes restricted on the basis of nationality, was that there were no parallel funding mechanisms for the Center to provide Cambodian nationals with research fellowships overseas. From its inception therefore, the risk of CKS merely becoming a Western academic entity had to be confronted.[17] What was of considerable concern for us at that time was that the Center's original vision of combining activities of local transformation with support for international academic activities would not be hampered by the internal workings of institutional (international) academia – a risk I fathomed from the outset.

In 2003, the Luce Foundation came to support another CKS initiative: a 'Junior Summer Fellowship Program'. The plan, which lasted for six consecutive years, consisted of hiring an American 'Visiting Scholar' and five U.S. undergraduate students to spend a couple of months every summer at the Center to get accustomed to Cambodia's society, language and culture.[18] A similar grant from the Gould Foundation supported five French undergraduate students to work alongside their American colleagues.[19] Thanks to the support of a small organization, the Cogut Foundation, New York, the exercise changed in content and meaning when five Cambodian students were able to join the Summer Program. It was this combination of international and local students spending two months together, without the exclusive filter of international mediators such as the Visiting Professor and the foreign CKS staff that made all the difference. It not only helped expose foreign students to the social realities of the host country, Cambodian participants, for their part, could get a taste of American and French academic life while they felt a responsibility to introduce their international counterparts to Cambodia and her society. The freshness of these undergraduate students, not yet pressed to find their professional paths, made them very receptive to one another, and very supportive of CKS in general. Long-term ties with and between them were forged. Additionally, because

17 A few years later, thanks to campaigns by CKS, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Harvard-Yenching Institute agreed to offer respectively MA and PhD positions for Cambodians.

18 The idea for such a program, at least for its American and French participants, came from Lois de Menil, the new chair of CKS.

19 The Florence Gould Foundation's mission is to support French-American mutual understanding through cultural and intellectual activities. It was successfully argued that one way to reinforce mutual intellectual understanding – at a time of political tension between the two countries following the invasion of Iraq – was to have scholars from France and the United States share their academic approaches over Cambodia, a country where French scholarship was traditionally strong.

a substantial number of the French and American participants were of ethnic Cambodian or Southeast Asians backgrounds, interesting connections took place in ways that their parents, first generation refugees, would never have imagined. French- and American-Cambodians were able to learn from their respective experiences as to what it meant to be 'of Cambodian background' in these countries. As such, the Summer School program, made up of three different grants, succeeded in mixing Cambodian and international students and became one constitutive pillar of the CKS.[20]

As I came to realize, these fellowship schemes, undergraduate and graduate, even when aimed at non-Cambodians, provided recourse to a critical intellectual life that helped make the institute a real clearing house. They brought academic legitimacy to the Center and all its associated 'services': the library, the facilities at Wat Damnak, its publications. Inter-individual connections, moreover, led to new ideas and new projects. For a hybrid structure like CKS, the presence of these international students and researchers was also an opportunity to expose face-to-face hands-on Western scholarship to aspiring Cambodian academics while it offered the chance for at least some of these researchers to take interest in the institute's long-term local engagement. On some occasions for instance connections borne out of these fellowships led to the hiring of future Visiting Professors for the Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP), CKS's most complete capacity building undertaking.

It is however true that the impact these activities had on the local society and people remained limited. Linking them with Cambodian capacity building deliverables was one of CKS's missions. It did not always come easily. As the local 'broker', it fell upon CKS the responsibility to figure out ways to act as true connector and mediator capable of overcoming situations of imbalance. Even with the most creative networking abilities, – the *raison d'être* of the Center – structural restrictions associated with funding mechanisms and academic polarization through institutions, disciplines and the format of activities came together to maintain an unequal division between its targeted beneficiaries. These were structural impediments to CKS's original aim to shape a new community of engaged intellectuals and scholars, beyond differences of nationality and background.

20 To my knowledge, no tracking of these former summer students was ever undertaken, which is a shame. The three former students whom I kept communication with after leaving CKS continued to be in close contact with members of their respective summer schools.

2 The Junior Faculty Training Program (2004–2010)

In order to overcome the pitfalls of CKS's seemingly contradictory mission – a resource for highly-trained international scholars from northern countries, and a promoter of social transformation through education and culture for young Cambodians – a new integrated programmatic model was developed, the Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP). The initiative, which ended to epitomize CKS's dual commitment to scholarship and to local capacity building, would promote a critical mass of Cambodian individuals to become future counterparts to their academic colleagues worldwide, while American and international scholars, in turn, would be encouraged to move beyond their prescribed scholastic assignment by performing educational activities aimed at Cambodians.

Out of the numerous projects initiated in the first three years of CKS's existence (to which should be added the continuing running of the trilingual newsletter and the development of the library in Siem Reap), our big-picture objective was to shape a coherent body of activities that would reflect, and made good of, the hybrid standing of the Center and ensure its viability as an institution. In so doing, new connections as they would come along were opportunistically explored. The first version of this umbrella program was entitled 'Building Institution Capacity in Cambodian Higher Education' (BIC-HE). It started in the form of a three-year grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, ran from February 2005 to August 2007 and was succeeded by an additional two-year grant known as 'Junior Faculty Training Program' (JFTP), the duration of which was from February 2008 to the end of 2010, thanks to an extension negotiated with the Foundation.[21] The differences between BIC-HE and JFTP were minimal. The former was initially opened to any Cambodian universities while the latter focused primarily on four selected ones. The topics chosen and the process of their selection was also different. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the whole program as 'JFTP'.

The launch of JFTP could not have been timelier. Its initiation must be connected with an event that provided CKS with a pan-national perspective on the higher education situation in Cambodia. It followed a failed World Bank-led effort to fundamentally reform the country's education sector by proposing a national policy framework based on quality control. Basic

21 The end of the program corresponds to the closure of the Rockefeller Foundation's 'Creativity and Culture' initiative following drastic programmatic changes brought about by a new president, Judith Rodin. I will discuss these changes and their implications for CKS in Part 3.

standards, in the form of a common 'foundational' university first-year, or an independent mechanism of accreditation were to guarantee against an otherwise free-for-all moneymaking sector. Against agreement by the government to set up independent evaluation mechanisms, the World Bank (WB) was to provide Cambodia with a thirty-million-dollars loan to help implement the reforms. CKS became indirectly involved in this negotiation by providing strategic organizational support for a national conference on 'Quality Education' that took place in Phnom Penh, in 2002, under the aegis of the ministry of Education.

The conference, as well as subsequent events that followed, helped to raise awareness among many Cambodian educational administrators of the importance of sustaining proper standards. These could be effectively carried out through national and international peer-reviewed progressions with the aim of avoiding creating new cohorts of badly trained people as it happened in the 1960s. At the event, which managed to gather around 500 participants, CKS supported, partially at least, the vision promoted by the WB for what it could achieve in terms of qualitative improvements at Cambodian universities. By contributing to the organization of the meetings and in the selection of speakers, we made sure a humanistic education centered around creative knowledge in the 'liberal arts', together with complementary activities such as academic publishing and libraries, were not omitted from the discussions.[22] The ensuing rejection by the Hun Sen government of the Bank's plans maintained the *status quo* of a weakly regulated sector, allowing the CPP tycoons to continue to run their lucrative self-styled 'universities' without concerns for the quality and credibility of their education. A few provisions contained in the WB proposal were nonetheless included in a national law passed in 2003. The principle of a national accreditation body – though not independent and not linked to international bodies – and of a common 'foundational' university first-year were subsequently implemented albeit in a clumsy fashion.

The experience of running a number of parallel educational and academic activities for four years, as we saw earlier, combined with a growing knowledge of the challenges Cambodian higher education faced, notably as far as its humanities, social sciences and artistic components were concerned, was

22 CKS facilitated the inclusion of participants from UNESCO, the Japanese and French cooperation – the largest donors in this sector at that time, originally omitted from the WB's list – as well as of personalities such as Kieth Rethy Chhem (then at National University of Singapore), Alan Feinstein (Toyota Foundation) and David Chandler (CKS). The event proved beneficial to CKS, then in its second year of full activity, for it positioned visibly in the eyes of many national and international actors (universities, embassies, et al.). I will return to this event and CKS's relations with the World Bank in Part 3.

part of the origins of the CKS-coordinated Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP), a program which, in its fundamental articulations, took at least one year to be conceived in close collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation.[23] CKS's aptitude to integrate different pieces of a larger puzzle indeed convinced the Foundation that only the Center was in a position to locally anchor an ambitious series of complementary activities aimed not merely at strengthening education in the humanities at Cambodian universities, but also at supporting a sizeable community of local public intellectuals and social leaders. A complex programmatic architecture built for the long term with a view on the increasing role of the local universities, was conceived to meet this ambition. Initially isolated projects supported by separate funding schemes were brought under one common umbrella thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation.

Aimed primarily at young Cambodian university educators, the program indeed made CKS play a critical role in assisting local institutions in the development of their humanistic education. It also provided room for intervention for international scholars, particularly the younger lot, to engage in teaching and public services. Guaranteeing a transparent selection process, JFTP was to focus on research and teaching activities supported by knowledge dissemination and international exposure. The initiative was academic as far as it aimed to prepare 'promising' aspiring faculty while considering the absence of recognized standards between and within so-called (Cambodian) universities. It acknowledged the often-shaky functioning of local higher learning institutions by being open to individuals who were not directly affiliated, with the hope that some could embrace a career at university or in other educational programs. These included individuals working for NGOs who could combine their work with academic and cultural activities, or trainees from provincial teachers' schools. While it sought to support the institutions with which it cooperated, the program also intended to nurture individual scholarly and educational talents regardless of their affiliations. With JFTP, CKS introduced them to interactive debates, international collaborations, research and teaching methodologies – including comparative ones – while it encouraged them to be involved in knowledge dissemination in and beyond the world of universities. The description that follows attempts to render the different aspects of a uniquely conceived and humanistic post-conflict empowerment program. The outcomes it envisioned depended on the time span it was thought would

23 For this program, I worked primarily with Joan Shikegawa and Lynn Swaja, from the New York office. From 2006, CKS benefitted from the experience of Alan Feinstein, who joined the Foundation's regional office in Bangkok.

be needed to operate: at least double of the five-year duration with which it was conceived. It is therefore the story of an unfinished process, but one that nonetheless produced important results both for Cambodians and the Center.

2.1 *Organization of the Junior Faculty Training Program*

JFTP was organized in sequential training sessions of six months focusing first on inter-disciplinary questions, and later, upon a request from the partner universities, on disciplinary topics. An average of 15 participants attended each semester-based session. The program followed an integrated architecture combining elements of teaching, research and dissemination activities. Each session included a combination of interactive seminars and methodology training workshops followed by individual field research projects that resulted in individual (or group) papers. The seminars took place at the CKS Phnom Penh office or, more rarely, at one of the partner universities. Because the program was meant to bring young faculty up to international academic 'standards', most Visiting Professors (VP) were recruited internationally. Towards the second half of the program, Cambodian and Southeast Asian scholars filled these positions.[24] The VPs were in charge of selecting their session's reading materials. They met with students at least one and half day per week. Saturdays were allocated for full-day seminars.

The first three months of each session were devoted to reading, analyzing and discussing theoretically significant materials in their area of investigation. An additional research methodology class was provided during the first part of each session at the end of which individual research proposals were submitted to the VP. The second half of the session was spent on regional study tours, short field-research trips and writing of papers interspersed with weekly tutorials with the VP. Participants were encouraged to attend scholarly workshops or conferences organized in conjunction with the seminar. There was also the possibility of applying for training or exchange opportunities with overseas institutions. Field projects consisted of at least one group trip to one of Cambodia's neighboring countries, and two weeks of individual research in that country in collaboration with a local host institution. Subsequent fieldwork was conducted in Cambodia, followed by writing an individual or a collective paper. Sessions culminated in workshops and conferences

24 Charnvit Kasetsiri (Thailand), historian; Joseph Tach Deth (France-Cambodia), linguist, and Ly Vanna (Cambodia), archaeologist, served as VPs between 2007 and 2008. The difficulty was to find scholars willing to serve as VPs during their short sabbatical period. The limited remuneration ($1,500 per month) did not serve as an incentive. The position worked best for researchers residing or wishing to reside in Cambodia.

held at Cambodian partner universities and at the CKS center in Siem Reap. Interdisciplinarity, interactive exchanges, cross-cultural and comparative approaches were emphasized.

In the first JFTP (BIC-HE grant), the emphasis was placed on building cross-disciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations through intellectually enticing thematic topics. The aim was to promote research and teaching agendas that could be shared by individuals from different departments, universities or activity sectors. The topics selected included: "Comparing Southeast Asian Political Systems" (VP: Duncan McCargo, political sciences); "Comparative Religious Studies in Southeast Asia" (John Marston, anthropology); "Urban Southeast Asia" (Kate Frieson, geography); "Minorities and Peoples in the Margins" (Peter Hammer, law); "National Cultures and Identities" (Penny Edwards, historian). Participants were encouraged to work collegially irrespective of their institutional affiliation. The objective was to build up their personal knowledge so as to enrich their curriculum, pedagogy, and future research agenda, particularly for those seeking to further their (graduate) education overseas. The program thus combined training, field research and dissemination based respectively on building content skills, research methods and applied training as well as conference and publishing-related exposures. It followed a bottom-up approach. Institutions were expected to improve their standards thanks to a better trained teaching staff.

From the onset, the program was coordinated by Chean Men, a trained medical anthropologist. A Cambodian-American who had resettled in Cambodia, Chean's role as mediator and facilitator became central to the development of the program. His youth coupled with a legendary affable composure inspired trust among participants and a sense of informal collegiality that became a trait of the JFTP. As far as institutional collaboration was concerned, the idea was that CKS and a number of local universities would jointly oversee the program which at first was inclusive of all higher education institutions in the country that wished to participate in it. Representatives of those interested institutions were admitted in the program's 'Advisory Council'. After the first three years, however, it became clear that only four institutions were committed to JFTP. Priority was then given to these institutions to suggest names of participants (who would nonetheless go through the same independent selection process),[25] or for the choice of topics to be covered in future sessions. Three of these institutions were public: Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP); Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) and Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC). One of them was private: Pannasastra University of Cambodia (PUC).

25 Members from other institutions could of course apply on an individual basis.

A brief introduction of these institutions can help situate their interest in being part of JFTP.

2.1.1 Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)

Founded in 1960, the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) for a long time assumed the role of the foremost higher education institution in Cambodia. Following the Khmer Rouge's closure of educational institutions, RUPP re-opened in 1980 as a Teachers' College. In 1988, it was restored as a full-fledged university. By 2015, the university had 10,000 students. A public institution, RUPP operates under the Ministry of Education. Of its 260 faculty, 60 per cent on average hold at least an MA and only 20 hold PhDs from various national and international institutions. The university offers a wide array of courses, including hard sciences, language training and social sciences. RUPP receives government support for its undergraduate programs. There is no budget allocated for graduate-level education. In 2010, RUPP operated eight Master programs in the social sciences, all funded externally, or thanks to volunteer international faculty.[26] Like universities in most 'developing' countries, there is no funding allocated for faculty seeking to pursue further training or education, let alone for conducting research. Because of low salary levels, a number of teachers are also working outside the university, either for private institutions or at NGOs. The risk of their leaving the university completely is mitigated by the status they gain in being registered as faculty. This, however, does not guarantee a high level of engagement in that same institution.

2.1.2 Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA)

The origins of this university have been discussed in Part 1. Re-established as a university in 1989, RUFA prospered for a time again thanks to the support of the Japanese 'Trust in Fund' to UNESCO (1992–2000). For eight years, in spite of recurring conflicts and difficulties of all kinds, the faculties of Archaeology and Architecture benefited from the involvement of international scholars,

26 (1) Tourism Development (with Bologna University); (2) French Language and Linguistics (with French government cooperation); (3) Cultural Studies (with the Buddhist Institute – discontinued); (4) English Language (RUPP's own program); (5) Sociology/Anthropology ('New Humanities', Catholic organization); (6) Development Studies (RUPP's own program); (7) Education Administration (with University of Minnesota); (8) Biodiversity (Darwin Foundation).

(I am grateful to Neth Barom, the then Vice-Rector of RUPP, who provided me with this list, Phnom Penh, January, 2010.)

a period that corresponded to RUFA's second 'golden age'.[27] Other faculty such as Visual and Performing Arts did not benefit from this support channel. With the end of the UNESCO-supported program, the university was once again confronted with questions over its viability. RUFA's northern campus, dedicated to Music and Performing Arts was moved away from the city, leading to its slow demise.

2.1.3 Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC)

Founded in 1961 by Norodom Sihanouk, RAC was originally set up as a conservatory of Cambodian classical culture, especially with regard to the promotion of Khmer language. It was modeled after the French *Académie*. Its role in higher education in Cambodia remained negligible. In 2000, RAC was resurrected by Prime Minister Hun Sen. Its new mandate can be compared with that of the Vietnamese, Chinese or ex-Soviet academies of sciences at which scholars in any discipline are appointed as academic civil servants. Any doctorate holder of Cambodian nationality is in theory eligible for membership. Many of RAC's current members used to teach at universities. Under the new system, however, they are no longer required to do so and can theoretically devote themselves to full-time research. In mid-2000, RAC decided to develop its own postgraduate programs, particularly MAs and even PhDs in spite of an obvious paucity of resources and a problematic separation from the university system, saddled with a weak structure and some questions over its long-term viability as an institution of higher learning. From the start, the move was seen as an attempt by the CPP leadership to develop a community of 'organic intellectuals' – against those trained abroad or deemed too independent. Functioning independently of universities, RAC is not required to follow the guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education and the National Committee of Academic Accreditation. Today, RAC has over 150 students in 'MA' and 'PhD' programs. Doctoral programs are offered in a few disciplines only.[28]

2.1.4 Pannasastra University (PUC)

PUC is the only private institution selected to participate in the JFTP. Founded in 2000 by the Cambodian-American returnee Kol Peng, Minister of Education from 2003 until 2010, PUC, aimed to emulate the American university system

27 Under the program, 14 lecturers – 8 paid and 6 volunteers – taught at the faculties of Archaeology and Architecture. Major international or foreign trained scholars funded by UNESCO to teach at RUFA included: Michael Vickery (history, epigraphy); Ashley Thompson (history, cultural studies); Son Soubert (art history, archaeology); Ang Choulean (cultural anthropology), and Long Seam (epigraphy and linguistics).

28 By the end of the 2000s, RAC and RUFA began to move towards closer collaboration.

with its curricula entirely delivered in English. Originally, the institution was devoted to teaching English, Management and Computer Sciences for paying students. This successful profit-making activity led PUC to move towards the development of departments in the social sciences and humanities. Like other newly-created private universities, PUC was required by the National Academic Accreditation Committee to initialize its first-year 'foundational' program. Despite its incomplete structure as a university, PUC has shown a dynamism that has contributed to positively affect the country's higher education sector. Its reliance on international faculty and on Cambodian teachers trained at RUPP and RUFA has made it, however, dependent on external human resources. At the time of the second installment of JFTP, we saw the concomitant growth of a private university like PUC and that of public institutions like RUPP and RUFA, as a development worth encouraging. Because their faculty could work in more than one institution, because PUC offered higher (albeit per-hour) incomes and a drive towards academic quality, the presence of PUC in JFTP was seen as mutually beneficial, especially for the underpaid staff at public institutions. On the other hand, PUC's institutional standing required that it further integrate its mission and its teaching programs within the larger Cambodian educational landscape. It could not simply function as an 'international' enclave.[29]

An underlying ambition of JFTP was to encourage cooperation between these Cambodian universities. In hindsight, it is now clear that this task was beyond the capacities of an independent structure like CKS. As explained earlier, the original organization of public universities under the umbrella of separate ministries combined with the post-UNTAC neoliberal logic of competition between establishments made any attempt at collaboration between universities an almost impossible task. Against this reality, JFTP merely sought to promote exchanges between individuals from these institutions and build a professional community of young faculty. The group JFTP targeted was made of young academic educators and aspiring ones, many of whom had gone through previous CKS initiatives.

The long-term objective was to strengthen teaching standards by setting up a virtuous cycle in which motivated private universities would first recruit young faculty fresh from the program. This was to entice public institutions in which many positions were filled with incompetent staff, to begin to recruit new personnel, particularly those trained by JFTP, on a more 'meritocratic'

29 CKS saw a leading role for PUC in projects like publishing and translation, something that unfortunately did not materialize, probably due to the narrow managerial, profit-making focus of the private establishment.

basis. The program pushed this approach by introducing rational strategies *within* and *between* universities against prevailing cronyism. By agreeing to combine an independent selection process that lent academic credibility to JFTP, and some form of institutional endorsement of their administrative capacities, these institutions were encouraged to link training of individuals with their own internal development. A transparent process of selection was also critical to the success of the operation. Recruitment was done through direct outreach within each partner university, in the local newspapers and through word-of-mouth publicity by previous participants. An external academic committee that included the VP, selected the applicants based on the quality of their application (which included a narrative proposal, a CV and a record of English proficiency). Pre-selected candidates went to the CKS Phnom Penh office for an interview. Only individuals with very good written and spoken English were accepted. Participants needed to be actively engaged in university teaching or express a serious desire to become teaching staff at a university. As was to be expected, it was people with limited prospects of personal development who held most of the 'professorial' positions at public universities. They were not interested in joining JFTP. On the contrary, those 'outside', working at private institutions or in NGOs were keen to seize the opportunity. By the sixth year of JFTP, about 130 Cambodians had participated in the academic sessions.[30]

2.2 *Contradictory Intellectual Debates*

One of the strengths of the JFTP was that it was embedded within the larger framework of the Center's activities. The program was envisioned as more than a scholarly training mechanism but also as a process for civic initiation. It did so by providing participants with the opportunity to learn to intellectually engage with each other without hierarchical barriers as are usually encountered in Cambodia. Students were encouraged to develop their own research agenda, drawing comparisons with neighboring countries whose societies and people they discovered as part of the program. They were also encouraged to reach out to a diversified audience: (a) the wider Cambodian public, through publications and translations, interventions in local (including social) media;

30 In addition to the four institutions listed above, affiliated participants came from varied organizations including Norton University, National Institute of Education, Buddhist Institute, Open University, Teacher Training Centers and NGOs working in the area of education, culture and applied research (Cambodian Development Research Institute, Reyum, etc).

(b) the academic community at large, by participating in international conferences where they would present their work in to international scholars.

Always present in the minds of most participants was the opportunity to continue their training in a graduate program overseas. Because they were exposed to the multifaceted activities offered by CKS, it was understood that their participation in JFTP should be constitutive of a broader drive towards nurturing a community of like-minded social actors, in a national context where an emerging educated urban middle class – of which they were part – was growing everyday more estranged from the corrupt elite in power – an 'elite' they chose not to directly confront. The participants' first discovery, when they entered the program, was indeed the possibility to argue their individual case but also to listen to others' opinions in a collegial yet challenging fashion. More than any other initiative of the Center, JFTP was where individuals could engage in truly interactive intellectual debates. This process aimed at breaking social conventions between ages, genders, and social groups that perpetuate hierarchized relations outside the classrooms. What indeed the program offered, was a space where individuals learned to confront and argue their points even when challenged by others.

There is much to be said about an entrenched Cambodian – also found in other post-conflict academic environments – culture of avoidance of open confrontation. In Cambodia, a local academic culture of minimum intellectual interactions, to be equated with the general reluctance to openly criticize people in power, surely hampered the wider aspiration towards a more debate-oriented and dialectic higher education: in the classrooms, in research and teaching agendas and in the intellectual public sphere in general. How could this systematic avoidance of open argument be effectively challenged? The presence of outside 'brokers' from overseas, especially JFTP Visiting Professors, was a helpful solution to this problem. These international interlocutors, because they were not necessarily held to follow expected local norms of Cambodian academic behavior, could prove helpful in opening otherwise frozen subjects of discussion. The fact, moreover, that CKS operated as an inter-cultural clearing house in which national and overseas scholars partook in different activities, helped to sustain a healthy climate for individual confidence building.

Some of the international scholars who served as Visiting Professors proved especially effective in triggering truly participatory exchanges. I recall the case of Duncan McCargo, a political scientist specializing on Thailand and Southeast Asia from Leeds University, who was the first recruited VP of the program. I met him in 2003 at the International Convention of Asian Scholars in Singapore. His willingness to engage beyond the academic ivory tower, made

possible that his teaching could be anchored in the local political landscape. JFTP offered him a concrete opportunity to do that. As a specialist in Thai politics, his situation as a newcomer in Cambodia was perfect. It helped him set an independent standard in his evaluation of candidates and in his teaching. From the onset, he chose to involve his students as colleagues, and engaged them, sometimes in a provocative way, compelling them to cast aside fears and assumptions. This tonic attitude contributed to forge a real team spirit among students that set the right tone for the following sessions.[31]

As it was the first session, I was closely involved with the various steps taken. McCargo's natural style was that of an outspoken instigator of exchanges, not afraid to provoke his interlocutors. His stand forced participants to articulate their point of view, argue them, and, in the process, learn the painful path of open contradictory expression through rational debate – the very weapon of which leaders of all kinds were afraid of, especially in Cambodia. On one occasion, McCargo asked me to teach an introductory course on Vietnam, an obviously sensitive topic due to the contentious history existing between the two countries (and the exploitation of anti-Vietnamese feelings by the Cambodian media and political groups). I was concerned about how this would be received by the group. My position was seemingly precarious as I was both the director of CKS and a Vietnam scholar. Given the prevailing level of suspicion over the neighboring country, this could raise eyebrows among my Cambodian interlocutors, always prone to detect Hanoi's shadowy influence. That was what McCargo wished to achieve. I was no longer the director but an equal fellow member of the group discussing a topic of shared concern. Resorting to tell the 'Vietnamese Story' as one block-narrative as I saw it – that of a nation and a society forged through history, with its own continuities, breaks, contradictions, glories and disasters, I was hoping that my Cambodian interlocutors would appreciate it independent from its influence on their own country. I think I nearly succeeded. There was a genuine interest among them to grapple with a country they had learned to mistrust, if not to hate.[32] At some point, I was asked about the border disputes between the two countries and the suspicion that Vietnam was still encroaching into Cambodian territory. One could neither confirm nor deny these allegations. Instead, I pointed to

31 In many ways, the program as drawn out in the proposal was very much construed and constructed in abstraction. There was no way we could be sure that interpersonal 'chemistry' would catch on. The success of the implementation of the program largely depended on the roles played by the Director, the Program Director, and the Visiting Professors.

32 A chapter of Keith Taylor's *The Making of Vietnam* was later translated into Khmer to that effect.

the fact that local populations from southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia would always cross this artificially created border drawn by the former colonial power. What people would see as territorial intrusions may in fact be spontaneous, localized, settlements. Yet, what also needed to be acknowledged was the historical tendency of the Vietnamese to pursue their southward colonization – known as *Nam Tiên* – internally and externally, at the expense of non-ethnic Vietnamese communities. This would have to be contrasted with the discourses on a deliberate plan by Hanoi to take Cambodian land. I am still not sure if I succeeded in convincing my incredulous colleagues. In these interactive debates, however, I believe participants learned to appreciate how fallacious ideas of cultural homogeneity or historical teleology were being framed and used by the political class. Instead, alternative analytical approaches appeared more suitable to comprehend those socio-political phenomena: elements of historical continuities, socio-political strategies of control, diverging gender, geographic and class perspectives, transnational flows, etc.

2.3 *Practicing Fieldwork* (*and Comparing Cambodia and Its Neighboring Countries*)

Another transformative feature of JFTP was the chance it offered the participants to travel to at least one of the neighboring countries to meet counterparts from local universities and to undertake research. This meant they would develop a transnational comparative research framework that would integrate their work within the region's intellectual scene. The first experience was perhaps the most vivid, again under McCargo's term as VP. I accompanied his group to Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City due to Chean Men's reluctance to go there. This was the first time CKS Cambodian fellows were sent to this country as a group. They were to work side-by-side with final-year Vietnamese students from Vietnam National University's Ho Chi Minh City branch.

Similar to the way he liked to intellectually provoke his interlocutors, McCargo sought to have the Cambodian and Vietnamese participants openly wrestle with issues associated with the way their countries were perceived on either side of the border. I witnessed what could be considered some sort of group therapy. After moments of hesitation following Duncan's opening questions, the Cambodian side, already accustomed to his style, began to voice some of the long-held prejudices about Vietnamese in Cambodian popular culture: as being "land grabbers, thieves, arrogant and cunning". The Vietnamese retorted with similarly crude conceptions about Cambodians as "cruel, lazy, and Vietnamese haters". After some time, all began to laugh about

these stereotypes widely shared among their compatriots, acknowledging their fallacy but also their ingrained existence in the collective psyche of people on each side of the border. They instead sought to find common ground in a shared disbelief of their political leaders, partaking the same grim views about domestic corruption, including their institutional systems, and a shared concern over their capacity to find employment in or after university.

Of course, not everything could be addressed in a few days. The fact, however, that participants from the two countries were asked to eat and share rooms together, work and discuss a number of issues – duly selected by McCargo – led to the breakdown of mental walls. At the end of the five-day stay, it was clear that the participants from both sides felt the importance of what had happened. They contributed to the experience by putting together a makeshift performance of sketches mocking some of the derogatory misconceptions about the others prevailing in their respective societies. I understand from Cambodian participants that some of them kept in touch with their Vietnamese counterparts.[33]

Also noteworthy is one of the last sessions I fully experienced, with Charnvit Kasetsiri of Thailand as VP. A highly respected historian, former president of Thammasat University in Bangkok and a public intellectual, Kasetsiri took courageous positions against the divisive nationalist discourses of a number of Thai politicians on numerous occasions. In 2008, he agreed to serve as VP in the CKS program by overseeing a group of young Cambodians teaching or wishing to teach Southeast Asian history and contemporary politics.[34] As it happened, the semester when Kasetsiri served was a time of extreme tension between Thailand and Cambodia over the question of the ancient Khmer border temple of Preah Vihear.[35] Kasetsiri was already involved at home in a movement to counter exalted anti-foreign feelings.

The historian's well-known views on the Thai-Cambodian border crisis and the fact that he was regularly traveling between the two countries during his visiting professorship exposed him to great risks in his home country.

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33 Following McCargo's example, similar regional interactions among young scholars of different fields took place. Myanmar/Burma and Laos (respectively in the sessions led by Penny Edwards and Ly Vanna) were added to the list of regional countries to be visited.

34 Kasetsiri has been campaigning in favor of reverting to the pre-1939 fascist-influenced naming of his country as Thailand (the land of the Thai ethnic majority), from the more inclusive and neutral former name of Siam.

35 This 10–11 centuries old Khmer temple has been the object of regular friction between nationalists of the two countries since French geographers incorporated it into Cambodia's territory in 1904. Nationalist circles in Thailand have regularly contested a 1962 decision by the International Court in The Hague that decided in favor of Cambodia's sovereignty.

Included in his tenure was the participants' trip to be organized to his *alma mater*, Thammasat University. The experience was an eye opener for the Cambodian participants, who too chose not to yield to the hysteria that was taking hold in Cambodia after the first skirmishes took place on the border in October 2008.[36] It was against this tense background that, with CKS's full support, Kasetsiri invited Benedict Anderson, author of the classic *Imagined Communities*, a retired historian of Southeast Asia from Cornell University, to discuss his views on nationalism in the region. All current and past JFTP participants attended Anderson's two presentations. The first was a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of nationalism, very much inspired by the author's seminal book on the subject. Anderson's second talk consisted of a sweeping review of the different forms of nationalisms across Southeast Asia. In this second discussion, the historian carefully avoided any references to Cambodia while he extensively discussed the cases of Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar/Burma, China and other countries. At the end of the talk, students anxiously asked: "What about Cambodia?" Anderson skillfully answered the perilous question by himself asking his audience a question: "When you are visiting Angkor, what do you feel?" This led to an animated debate in which discourses over the temple complex enshrined by successive regimes' propaganda machineries as the cradle of Cambodian nationhood were considered critically and in academic terms.[37]

After six years of operations, participants in the JFTP developed personal connections with at least one of the neighboring countries they visited and conducted research. If at first many felt uncomfortable about going to Vietnam seen as Cambodia's existential threat, as time went on, participants showed a growing interest in the country.[38] Generally speaking, the comparative

36 In Siem Reap during the summer of 2008, we witnessed an impressive procession of army trucks crossing through the city on their way to the border. In this country so dramatically battered by war, I was shocked at the scene of cheering civilians encouraging their soldiers – most of them very young and showing no enthusiastic compulsion to be sent into battle – to go and fight on the frontline. Few years earlier (2003) in Phnom Penh, I also witnessed a similar spat of collective anti-Thai nationalism, this time in the form of angry mobs targeting Thai interests in the capital city, including the Thai embassy which was partially burned. These incidents followed a provocative speech made by a Thai actress over the ownership of Angkor Wat. It seems that the potential for anti-foreign nationalist eruptions in Cambodia tends to primarily target Thais and Thailand.

37 Anderson's two presentations, together with a selection of articles by Thai historians, were later translated into Khmer and published by the program.

38 In a similar vein, as the program went on, participants tended to prefer the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai to the capital Bangkok, less prone to sparks of anti-foreign violence and somehow demystified from its national centrality.

exercises assigned to participants during the training program encouraged them to frame their regional/international experience on rational, empirical grounds. To frame one's own academic education through comparison, particularly in the 'humanistic' social sciences, is something that every 'Southeast Asianist' somewhat learns to recognize at the onset of his or her specialization. This has largely to do with the sheer diversity of cultures and countries existing in this artificially bounded region and the complex political configurations that resulted. Methodological comparison was encouraged by the JFTP. It enabled future Cambodian academics – and intellectual leaders – to project their thoughts *beyond* arbitrary categories, especially those framed by the colonial and post-independence references to the nation-state. This capacity of performing comparisons, also found in the program's international events or in the selection of texts discussed in class, helped them, moreover, to appreciate how one's own society operates notwithstanding the superficial public views.[39]

2.4 *Translating, Publishing, Disseminating*

The JFTP also enabled CKS to develop the kind of training scheme envisioned by the Publishing in Cambodia and Academic Publishing Program reports: to prepare enough individuals as specialized literary translators in the social sciences and the humanities capable of critically rendering important learning materials into Khmer. In addition to training skilled translators, the objective was to widen the reach of the seminars by making accessible in Khmer, at affordable cost, foundational pedagogical materials to students, professors and the public at large. This was one of the 'public' features of JFTP. The bibliographical effort was made easier thanks to the CKS Library's holdings: with its collection of international master and doctoral theses on Cambodia and the region, its sets of specialized monographs and articles, the Library served as a resource for all JFTP participants and their VPS. Documents could be extracted while the Library was able to acquire additional materials for the sessions when needed. Participants were asked to visit the Siem Reap library in conjunction with their fieldwork, to conduct literature reviews, or to take advantage of the online journals accessible through JSTOR.[40]

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39 On the virtue of comparison in Southeast Asian studies, see Benedict Anderson's introductory text in *The Spectre of Comparisons, Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (1998). New York: Verso, pp. 1–20. For a broader discussion on comparative theory and methods of comparative literature and cultural anthropology and their impact on the humanities – including history – in the face of the present globalization, see: Feltski, Rita and Susan Stanford Friedman (Eds.) (2013). *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

40 JSTOR access was also available at the CKS Phnom Penh branch. The Center benefited from a Mellon Foundation-supported program targeting a number of CAORC centers.

In fact, JFTP allowed for the development of a real translating team at CKS. Beginning with Chandler and Osborne's monographs, these first translators were joined by participants from the successive thematic sessions. They were selected based on their English-language skills and their writing ability in Khmer. Besides the monographs, the participants-turned-translators worked on a collection named *JFTP Readers*. Prior to their arrival, VPs were asked to select a few articles, chapters or reading texts, which they thought should be made available in Khmer, considering the relevance of these materials for Cambodian readers. Exceptionally, excellent papers written by participants at the end of the session were also published. After obtaining permission from international publishers, CKS translators (under the coordination of Tan Sodany) worked on a peer-review basis, through different editing phases, with the ultimate review carried out by the linguist Michel Rethy Antelme. A central part of the whole process was a meeting, usually held at the end of the semester session in which selected participants-translators and the VP discussed the material to be translated in detail. Theoretical difficulties were closely debated; concepts in English and Khmer were reviewed as well as specialized words and expressions. The aim was about reaching a common understanding of the texts to be translated.

Beyond the translation exercise, the objective was to maintain working relationships with and between the participants after their training period ended. This process succeeded in nurturing a circle of committed translators and publishers. The exercise did not always go smoothly. It sometimes led to heated arguments between translators over the rendering of terms or ideas. The translation and publishing activity, along with the training courses, in some ways represented the necessary steps towards the constitution of a viable community of academically trained social actors. In addition, the CKS-funded translation program provided reliable part-time occupation for former participants. The entrepreneurial skills of the publishing coordinator, Kheng Kethya, contributed to a process of professionalization of what was originally envisaged as a training exercise. Even amid sometimes tense discussions, a sense of common purpose was shared by a group of participants-translators who continued to work together and fruitfully after the JFTP ended.[41]

To support this collective effort, CKS teamed up with a number of specialized organizations. For instance with the French NGO SIPAR, it ran a joint training session in publishing and translation with professionals from the sector.[42] A similar exchange took place with the Chiang Mai-based Mekong Press

41 Interview with Kheng Kethya, August, 2015.

42 SIPAR (in French *Soutien à l'Initiative Privée pour l'Aide à la Reconstruction des Pays d'Asie du Sud-Est*) has done a lot in reviving Cambodia's reading culture, in Khmer, among the



FIGURE 9
Junior Faculty Training Program Reader
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

Foundation, with the regular visits of Ms. Trasvin Jittidecharak, its director and head of the academic publishing house Silkworm Press.[43] Training sessions were also organized at the International Foreign Language Center of the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Linguistics Department under Prof. Sylvain Vogel. In addition, under the Visiting Professorship of French-Cambodian linguist Joseph Thach Deth, one full JFTP semester was devoted to translation training approached from the point of view of linguistics.

The process of translation and publication took a long time and, as mentioned above, was a painful one. Yet, its outcome was multifaceted, with, at the end, tangible materials in the vernacular language made available for generations to come. The model, as an integral part of JFTP, left a durable mark for it helped to forge a motivated and dynamic group of scholar-public entrepreneurs while contributing to the diffusion of reproducible course materials of the program's sessions beyond the presence of VPs and the immediate circle of people involved. When CKS decided to do away with translation and publishing activities by outsourcing them to private contractors, the young translators and publishers organized themselves by supporting the establishment of a

youth. Its work spans over two decades with tens of educational titles published. See: www.sipar.org/.

43 Mekong Press Foundation, with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, has played a critical role in facilitating the publication of high-quality English language academic publications focusing on Mainland Southeast. The foundation publishes many first books by young regional authors while it seeks to locally reproduce titles that have appeared in major international presses. See Mekong Press Foundation: www.mekongpress.com.

Cambodian PEN chapter, and by setting up an independent publishing house called *Nokorwat* Publishing.[44] Unfortunately, the economic volatility associated with the production of quality educational publications in Khmer, coupled with a lack of institutional and financial support, proved at the end too strong to bear. *Nokorwat* Publishing closed in 2013.[45] I consider this decision to end subsidies of the translation and publication program and resort to the business model of 'outsourcing' for money-saving reasons, one that fundamentally undermined the efforts of CKS to sustain, through JFTP, an integrated capacity-building model and a withdrawal from the original organization's vision of fostering a group of committed academics-cum-public actors.

2.5 *International Exposure*

The JFTP enabled CKS to host regular international conferences. In the spirit of the program, these events served a dual purpose. To (re-)direct the flow of international scholarly knowledge about Cambodia and Southeast Asia to the region, in direct contact with future local scholars, thereby helping to 'decenter' the traditional circuit of academic knowledge hitherto dominated by institutions from the metropolitan 'North'. The other objective was to provide first-hand exposure to promising Cambodian academics to international scholarship while conversely, enabling international scholars to know the works of their colleagues in the region.

One word on the need to 'decenter' or rather 're-center' the process of knowledge production as it pertains to Cambodia and Southeast Asia in general: it corresponds to a local demand to correct a geopolitical historical imbalance that led to a trend of 'metropolitanization' of Cambodian and Southeast Asian studies away from the region as we saw in Part 1, a process that can be traced from the heydays of colonialism, with major institutional centers developing in European 'mother' countries. The waning of European influence after WW2, and the new context of the Cold War led to the establishment of new academic centers in a number of American universities. Comparable national programs spread to Australia, Japan, Britain, France, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia and later Korea and China. Today, China is the new candidate for the systematic development of national area studies infrastructures, a new one-sided – potentially hegemonic – model concentrating flows of scholarly knowledge about other regions of the world, especially Southeast Asia. This latter development, and in general the proliferation of these 'centers' across

44 The work of Kheng Kethya and his colleagues at *Nokorwat* Publishing appeared in the IIAS Newsletter (56), Spring 2011, p. 11.

45 Interview with Kheng Kethya, August, 2015.

the world paradoxically call for a re-centering of mechanisms of academic production and dissemination in and from the countries and regions of study themselves.[46]

The JFTP program was structured in a way that each thematic semester session was to lead to a publication and an international conference held in Cambodia. A few selected papers from participants were presented alongside those of international scholars chosen by an academic committee usually co-chaired by the VP after a call for abstracts was sent out. Conferences were organized into sub-theme panels and ran for two full days. They were in general held at the Center's conference hall at Wat Damnak, or on some occasions, at one of the universities in Phnom Penh. CKS would always make sure that a contingent of undergraduate students from Cambodian universities was added to the session's attendants. When possible, U.S. and French research fellows present at the time were also encouraged to contribute. Some of these events proved memorable like the one on Southeast Asian cities, co-organized by VPs Penny Edwards, Kate Frieson and Abdul Maliq Simone (in Phnom Penh); on religious practices (VP John Marston); or on minorities and marginality (VP Peter Hammer).[47] In the spirit of JFTP, the CKS conferences always had a regional focus, seeking to integrate Cambodia within its wider Southeast Asian environment.

An issue that divided the CKS board was whether the institute should engage in some form of 'affirmative action' to ensure that a significant proportion of participants from Cambodia were provided with the opportunity to take part. That was my preference. I thought it was important for those who did well in JFTP sessions to be encouraged to engage with international counterparts. It was equally critical for those local participants to be surrounded by colleagues from Southeast Asia and other Asian countries so that they could integrate regional networks. The situation was changing, however. If at the beginning of the decade few Cambodians were undergoing graduate studies abroad, the possible risk that conferences would only feature non-Cambodian or non-Southeast Asian participants had by the end of the decade receded. Locally held events, as those put together by CKS became more

46 On the subject, see for instance Anderson (1998). *The Spectre of Comparisons*, pp. 8–9.

47 Exact titles and dates of the conferences: "Living Capital: Sustaining Diversity in Southeast Asian Cities", conference held in Phnom Penh from 10–11 January, 2007 (the event was organized in collaboration with The New School University, New York); "Local Practice and Trans-National Dynamics in Mainland Southeast Asian Religions: Historical and Contemporary Patterns", CKS, Siem Reap from February 23–24, 2007; "Cambodia and Mainland Southeast Asia at its Margins: Minority Groups and Borders", Siem Reap from March 14–15, 2008.



FIGURE 10 CKS Conference, Wat Damnak
PHILIPPE PEYCAM



FIGURE 11 JFTP Lecture, CKS office, Phnom Penh
PHILIPPE PEYCAM

regular, featuring a wider diversity of profiles with an ever-growing presence of Cambodian researchers. As discussed above, a Cambodian (and Southeast Asian) presence was especially important because, through its international symposia, CKS sought to contribute to a re-balancing of the political economy of regional studies, effectively steering away from a northern-style 'area studies' in which knowledge of the 'other' tended to be objectified, with peoples or societies reduced to 'field research'. Ironically, this process was made possible in Cambodia thanks to the Center's internationalism and its wide network that included many northern academic centers. Among the younger generation of scholars on Southeast Asia in these centers – a number of them of Cambodian and Southeast Asian descent – there is indeed a shared feeling that this knowledge ought to be framed in close spatial and societal interactions, *with* members from the region, and in a *global* transregional context, with regional, national and cultural backgrounds recognized as multilayered and blurred.[48]

2.6 *Follow-Up Studies Overseas*

An essential intention of the JFTP was to encourage Cambodian participants to connect with the outside (academic) world. One way to achieve this goal, as already mentioned, was to include some of them in the summer training program in Siem Reap. Thanks to the support from the Cogut Family Foundation, five Cambodians were offered this opportunity every year. The program offered participants direct access to undergraduate students from some of the best schools in America and France. During the two-month immersion program, they also attended credit-bearing courses provided by a guest scholar as well as intensive English classes. In 2007, nearly 30 Cambodians had benefited from six consecutive summer sessions. Twelve of them went on to successfully enroll in overseas MA and PhD programs. Four out of the five who participated in the first four years of JFTP and the Summer Fellowship Program received a MA fellowship from CKS. The difficulty here was financial, as few universities offered to fund students working towards a Master's degree. Opportunities were sought on a case-by-case basis. Through JFTP, one MA position was offered annually. In total, five students were sent to Chulalongkorn University (Thailand), two to Magadh University (India) and three to Chiang Mai University (Thailand). A number of other JFTP participants were able to receive funding from other sources to pursue their graduate education outside the country. At any rate,

48 Since 2014, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) has been working on developing a program seeking to translate these multiple changes into new global humanistic pedagogies. The Mellon Foundation-supported program is entitled: "Rethinking Asian Studies in the Global Context" (http://www.rethinking.asia).

the limited number of those who went abroad does not reflect the number of participants who deserved to continue their studies. We were restricted by the lack of funds.

In addition to the problem of securing funding for MA positions, we were confronted with bureaucratic rigidities such as restrictive tests imposed by public universities in the U.S., or the Malthusian set of requirements imposed by the National University of Singapore for their ASEAN fellowships. From the Cambodian side, it was often prejudice that prevented candidates from seeking to study in countries like India or Philippines, despite the high quality of teaching there. Motivating Cambodians to apply was indeed a challenge: to search for and apply to multiple opportunities was difficult. Partly this may be due to a culture of 'donor dependency' and the expectation that foreigners should do it for them. Contributing to this were feelings of inferiority. There was also a sense of reluctance to 'compete' with peers. With a young and fashionable program like CKS, Cambodian candidates 'expected' to go to Thailand, Singapore, Japan or Western countries.

A role that CKS was asked to fulfill was that of referee for JFTP participants applying to international educational programs. During my tenure at the Center, foundations and other programs often contacted me to recommend candidates or to help to set up their own selection operations in Cambodia. These included the United Board for Christian Education (Hong Kong), Hong Kong University of Journalism, Southeast Asian Studies Regional Program (Manila), the Ford Foundation-supported Asian Scholars Fellowship Program (Bangkok) and the Toyota Foundation (Tokyo). For reasons that I failed to fathom, the Fulbright program at the U.S. Embassy, though aware of CKS's JFTP, and drawing many of the program's participants, always declined our offer to help with their selection and orientation processes – when it could have helped CKS in its efforts to reinforce its local partner universities.

Regarding PhD positions, following repeated efforts to raise our Cambodian JFTP affiliates' profile overseas, CKS succeeded in convincing the prestigious Harvard-Yenching Institute (HYI), to agree to offer at least one annual fellowship position for a Cambodian candidate to undertake a full doctoral program at a university of his/her choice, in the U.S. or elsewhere. The fellowship includes three years of tuition fee, travel costs and stipends. This program had been in operation in East Asia, Vietnam and Thailand for many years where it significantly contributed to the development of humanistic academic education in those countries. This original HYI-CKS collaboration entailed direct involvement of the four partner universities collaborating in JFTP, with the Center acting as a facilitator. Applicants were pre-selected by their university although many of the candidates went through JFTP.

The first CKS-trained laureate was Chhom Kunthea. She had been sent by the Center to take an MA in Sanskrit Studies in India (thanks to a fellowship co-funded by CKS and the Indian Embassy). She was later selected by HYI to take her PhD in Epigraphy at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* in Paris. Here, the Center's capacity to serve as a reliable mediator between local institutions and international programs helped leverage its own training programs. Eventually, HYI developed its own independent selection procedure, in collaboration with the National University of Singapore, while maintaining its direct collaboration with Cambodian institutions. Every year, at least one Cambodian, if he or she passes the selection requirements, can benefit from the program.[49] However small is the number of people actually impacted by the program, the inclusion of Cambodia in the list of countries benefitting from the HYI grant program must be seen as something which, in the long run, is contributing to the process of re-centering of scholarship mentioned above.[50]

Some of the Cambodians who graduated from overseas universities sent by or with the help of CKS are now teaching at universities in Phnom Penh. Although it was never made compulsory, successful candidates were strongly encouraged to return to Cambodia to teach at their affiliated university for at least three consecutive years. In most cases, fellows returned home. The Center's numerous initiatives, from JFTP, to the Library, its publishing and translation and other research-based initiatives could provide these returnees with part-time job opportunities, as in the case of Tan Sodany, who, upon her return from Bangkok after receiving a MA from Chulalongkorn University led the CKS's translation program for three years. As in other comparable post-war situations in which local universities are institutionally weak, the difficulty for overseas graduate returnees often lies in their capacity to withstand hostilities on the part of colleagues who may feel threatened by their international education. CKS, as an open local-international meeting-ground, had a commitment to provide them with support while its links with the outside academic environment projected a sense of belonging that was very important. Given the relatively short period of the JFTP's operation, it is difficult to assess the

49 One of the first beneficiaries of the NUS-HYI joint doctoral scholarship program, Theara Thun successfully completed his PhD in History at NUS (2018). Theara participated in the JFTP during the session led by Prof. Charnwit Kasetsiri. After JFTP, he received a fellowship from Rockefeller Foundation to take his MA in Southeast Asian studies at Chiang Mai University. This is an example of the lasting impact of JFTP long after its demise.

50 The idea of including Cambodia and Cambodian scholars in the list of HYI grantees received the strong support of Huê-Tâm Ho Tai, Professor of Vietnamese History at Harvard University and a member of the HYI's board. Prof. Ho Tai, originally from Vietnam, is herself a former HYI grantee.

extent to which the program was able to play that role. However, a number of people who participated in earlier projects supported by the Center and who had gone to take a Master's degree overseas, chose to return to participate in other CKS activities, including in JFTP.[51]

An obvious challenge awaiting overseas educated and other high performing Cambodian scholars was that they would often be hired by NGOs, national and international organizations and businesses for better salaries, even if those activities were totally unrelated to their education or their initial intent to contribute to education and academia. The relatively short duration of JFTP, and of my time at CKS, do not allow me to draw sweeping conclusions on that quasi-structural challenge. One thing that was clear is the propensity of many highly-trained individuals to gain prestigious positions in the government (ministries, or national structures like APSARA) or in university administrations from where they were hardly inclined to pursue educational activities, in classroom or through public means of dissemination.[52] For a country in massive economic and social transition like Cambodia, with huge discrepancies in salary and work load levels, the phenomenon, particularly for those trained in humanistic education, was almost structural. It could not be easily resolved. The vocation of an organization like CKS was to train enough individuals with the hope that a sizeable number of them, even if a minority, would return to teach or engage in forms of public education. CKS's presence in the country would also help them in their academic and public growth.

2.7 *Supporting a Community of Social Actors*

Beyond the specific training objectives of JFTP, the overall vision was to oversee a variety of mechanisms that, put together, were capable of weaving and shaping a real community of young Cambodian intellectuals who, as a group and a network, were more likely to have an impact on their country's societal and institutional environments, both in the academic as well as public arenas. Needless to say, this community had to remain autonomous vis-à-vis the spheres of state and elite power. To an extent the scope and scale of JFTP and CKS helped this process of reclaiming autonomy through a diverse range of built-in activities mutually leveraging each other. The two successive grants

51 This would include, among others, Seng Sary, Tan Sodany (already mentioned), or Hun Pen.

52 A case in point is that of the former rector of RUFA, who obtained his PhD in archaeology at the University of Hawai'i and who, upon his return to the country, became dean and then rector with few or no chances of teaching. Likewise, a large number of foreign-educated PhD scholars in the humanities have found positions at APSARA, including Chhom Kunthea (epigraphy), or Ly Vanna (archaeology), both participants in JFTP.

by the Rockefeller Foundation enabled the Center to refine the program's effectiveness. Hundreds of individuals benefited from CKS's capacity-building programs while many more did so through reading the literature it produced, by attending its numerous conferences and workshops, by accessing the CKS Library and website, by joining its research or institution support projects or, indirectly, through the teaching imparted by its trained participants. Once the momentum gained steam, CKS became a natural magnet for smaller ancillary initiatives, academic or cultural, which themselves further reinforced its overall vision and its effectiveness to act as clearing-house. An example of collaborative initiative supported by CKS was the introduction of Cambodian writers and publishers to the international writers' organization PEN International and ultimately the establishment of a PEN Cambodian chapter in 2010.

If one were to take a close look at the program and its aftermath, it is clear that JFTP was an effective mechanism capable of forging long-term interpersonal ties among participants. This was achieved irrespective of institutional and professional affiliations, social origins, age or gender.[53] In turn, this kind of interpersonal chemistry informed decisions made by the CKS staff, contributed towards strengthening the bonds built on a sense of community around the Center. Participants of different CKS programs, JFTP in particular, were provided with study materials, useful information and individual advice whenever possible. The Library made available copies of reading materials free of charge to any faculty who needed them for his/her teaching. Adding to the element of collegiality, usually indispensable in the nurturing of networks, CKS provided free lunches and dinners during training sessions or events. Also important was the need to maintain a gender balance and a sizable representation of minorities of all sorts. In the heydays of the program, when the Center had its facility in the Tuol Kork district in Phnom Penh, it served as an inclusive public – working and meeting – space, a safe haven for tens of individuals.

In hindsight, CKS shaped a small but highly conscious community of about 100 to 200 independent-minded intellectuals, social leaders and educators. The program's short span of activity did not, however, allow the group to consolidate into a more proactive social force. Nevertheless, from what I hear from former participants, the group has continued to grow. Each participant and VP interviewed for interim evaluations to Rockefeller Foundation praised the strong level of interactions that existed between them and the members of

53 Couple partnerships and even marriages were contracted among participants as a result of the program.

their session.[54] This has translated in the participants' continuing interaction with the CKS staff as a whole establishing a sense of collective ownership of the institution and its programs. To this day, I keep – irregular – connections with a few JFTP and other CKS projects' participants. The high degree of usage of social media among former participants, most of whom highly skilled in harnessing the full potential of New Media makes me believe in the possibility of permutation of these interactions into a collective public consciousness.

Through JFTP and its earlier academic programs, CKS achieved the original ambition of being an organization that functions as an inclusive platform, a meeting ground where Cambodian members could mingle intellectually with each other and with international partners with a sense of shared purpose, beyond everyone's individual fortune. This was the kind of civic spirit that animated many of these young Cambodians. This is what kept me and my colleagues believing in the transformative possibilities of an autonomous structure like the Center. Despite its short span of operation, JFTP succeeded in instituting a group atmosphere that was truly devoid of authoritarianism, the top-down, one-leader model often encountered in Cambodian institutions. The informality of these interactions was sometimes disconcerting for outsiders. At the end, it guaranteed that the Center could serve its role as a citizen's institution, an intellectual public space in the country.[55]

The JFTP was designed to operate for a few more years, with, as it was initially envisioned, an increasingly proactive role played by the local universities. A decade, or a cycle of three to four three-year grants (made first to CKS, and, I can imagine in a second phase, to the core group of four Cambodian universities) was the minimum time span originally discussed with the Rockefeller Foundation officials. Unfortunately, this cycle was interrupted half-way. The Program came to a formal end one year after my departure as 2010 drew to a close. A premature conclusion was expected since CKS obtained a 'departing' two-year grant in 2008. The cessation of the program corresponds to that of the Foundation's commitment to long-term capacity-building in the areas

54 In the course of the six-year program, a few individuals repeated their participation in more than one JFTP session. This was something I did not favor, although Chean Men, the Program Coordinator, thought it necessary to maintain standards and a sense of continuity between the different groups. In the end, relations of trust and solidarity, coupled with a shared intellectual camaraderie amongst participants was what mattered most.

55 In 2006, the UNESCO's World Heritage International Committee issued a 'Special Resolution' through the UNESCO General Secretariat congratulating CKS, together with the Japanese and French governments, for their numerous capacity-building efforts in humanistic education in favor of Cambodians. This was only a statement in the big Angkor scene and one of the only times CKS was publicly acknowledged by UNESCO.

of humanistic education and culture in the "Greater Mekong Sub-Region" following radical changes of orientation brought about by its then new president, Judith Rodin, after she took over in 2005. In 2008, Alain Feinstein, the regional director at the Bangkok office was replaced. I will discuss these ideologically driven changes and their implications for grassroot programs like CKS in Part 3.

One thing that should in hindsight validate the JFTP's vision and model is its proximity to other successful capacity-building initiatives that were developed in comparable historical and social contexts. Dissimilar in some of its operating modalities, above all in its scale and time span, the CKS-initiated JFTP could indeed be paralleled with a successful Ford Foundation-supported academic training program that was developed in Indonesia in the 1970s, following recommendations made by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In a footnote in a book reminiscing his years in the field, Geertz describes the initiative "Social Science Policy in a New State: A Program for the Stimulation of the Social Sciences in Indonesia" and its outcome in the country:

> The plan [...] was for four to five [...] research stations at promising locations outside of Jakarta, and for the most part outside of Java, each of which was to be headed for a year at a time by an established Western (i.e., American, European, or Australian) scholar and a senior Indonesian scholar working in harness, to which a half-dozen or so junior Indonesian scholars from other regions of the archipelago would be seconded, also for a year, to carry out supervised empirical research in the locality involved. The stations, which eventually amounted to [...] four, were indeed set up, under the supervision of an Indonesian committee, and for twenty years were a significant force in the formation of what is, by now, an impressive social science community in Indonesia. Beginning in the late 1980s, they began to be disbanded, local university institutions having grown to be able to take over their function.[56]

56 Geertz, Clifford (1995). *After the Fact, Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 179–180.

CHAPTER 6

A Citizen's Institution

At the core of CKS's local capacity building was the JFTP. It was surrounded and facilitated by the intellectual dynamism brought about by the presence of mainly American and French research fellows. It found in the Wat Damnak facilities the kind of structural foundation that enabled it to blossom, in collaboration with the institutions in Phnom Penh. Yet, in addition to helping Cambodian universities and emerging individual social educators, CKS served another function. Moving on to the broader question of involvement in the building of the civil society and the fact that the organization evolved in a context of vibrant cultural renewal, it was normal that, as a 'citizen's institution', it should support, through collaboration, a number of external projects when they appeared to match its vision and complement its core activities. The goal here was to reinforce cultural and social initiatives, whether they belonged to the private sector or were state-managed, for their community-building impact and their contribution to knowledge dissemination *beyond* the realm of institutional academia. The consideration was that CKS, primarily a scholastic organization, could, by collaborating with other programs and organizations, contribute to their work – thereby suggesting that humanistic scholarship, area studies, if collaborative and properly explored, could effectively assist local community-building efforts. Having been set up as a versatile and inclusive platform, thanks to its hybrid CEDORECK-like model, CKS could work *with everyone* – Cambodian or international, public or private, educational or cultural – individuals and institutions to enhance its vision. This multifaceted-ness, pragmatism also, contrasted with the way most Cambodia-based projects operated. Their range of activity or their areas of intervention were usually restricted: a visual art institute was only going to do 'visual arts'; a library was only to work on collecting books. Added to that was the fact that some did not seek to collaborate with others even when their actions were complementary.

In a fragmented Cambodian social environment, with the state not playing its role as mediator between private initiatives and interests, the desire to seek synergies and collaborations between different sectors and partners was an exception. In education, for example, the proliferation of for-profit private self-proclaimed 'universities' was matched by a no less disproportionate number of often phony-sounding institutes of all sorts. A number of organizations moreover, had chosen to go it alone with few attempts made to work with other

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programs or to even acknowledge their existence. For instance, an enterprise as worthwhile as the Documentation Center of Cambodia ("DC-Cam") had a reputation for refusing to collaborate with other Cambodia-based programs. Its objective of "searching for the Truth" on the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge certainly should have benefited from connecting with institutions like CKS or Bophana, the best audiovisual cultural organization in the country. I now rationalize this attitude first and foremost by the structural race for funding these projects were caught in (and with it, their inability to question the priorities of institutional donors). Part of the problem may also have been the sheer number of NGOs and other players (foreign and domestic) adding to confusion and competition rather than coordination. As I will discuss in Part 3, while some of the Cambodia-based projects appeared to have fallen prey to particular strategies and agendas, the majority of them had their operations limited due to their dependency on funding schemes.

CKS's collaborative strategy was carried out with the objective of reinforcing some of these independent structures or programs in order to enhance their community-building impact and their ability to contribute to public knowledge dissemination. The main consideration was whether they could impart a sense of shared cultural value and communal solidarity, and whether CKS could add to their efforts. These collaborations were carried out bilaterally or through the involvement of third-party partners. In the section that follows, I will show through a discussion on selected collaborations with CKS, the diversity of these engagements in the field of cultural action. This chapter is therefore as much about CKS as it is about individuals and their organizations that, like the Center, against many odds, sought to foster common good through culture. CKS collaborated with institutions and programs in three areas: (1) Conservation and Access of Endangered Written Materials and Artifacts; (2) Expanded Creative Knowledge through the Arts and Crafts; (3) Local Community Engagement in the Siem Reap-Angkor area. In many ways, these interventions were determined by urgency reflecting the poor level of state support for Cambodia's cultural heritage, or by the constrained actions of social actors, local or international, a consequence of Cambodia's entrapment in the neoliberal order, or in the continuation of neocolonial practices in its midst. Subsequent parts of this book will try to critically assess these collaborative activities as they unfolded during my tenure at CKS.

1 Conservation of (and Access to) Written Materials and Artifacts

Facilitating access to cultural and historical sources of knowledge for research and educational purposes and, on priority, ensuring their physical conservation

lay at the heart of CKS's original mandate: to reduce the restriction of knowledge access inherited from colonialism, war, and predatory privatizations. I already inferred on the need to re-center the map of knowledge production on and in Cambodia, in the extreme context of the country and the desolation of its cultural institutions. Anyone interested in learning about her cultural and artistic past productions would rather consult collections in libraries or museums in the United States, France or Japan. CKS sought to help correct this imbalance. First, by building its own specialized public library collection and second, parallel to this effort, by supporting the work of the National Library of Cambodia, the Buddhist Institute and the National Museum of Cambodia, all of which are state institutions. The extraordinary role they perform as public repositories of source materials, written or artifacts, developed within Cambodia's society needs to be recognized. Like in other 'southern' or 'developing' societies, their operating conditions are terribly precarious with low financial capacities and ill-trained personnel. I want to especially highlight the work carried out in their midst by individuals, Cambodians for the most part, who often, away from the general view, toil to resurrect these institutions.

1.1 *Inventorying the Collections of the National Museum of Cambodia*

The National Museum of Cambodia is a colonial museum whose role was to display the 'treasures' of Cambodia's ancient past according to European orientalist cannons of knowledge and their obsession with antiquities. Founded by the art historian, curator and author George Groslier, the museum opened its doors in 1920. The French ceded control of the institution to the Cambodians in 1951, and like all the other educational and cultural institutions, it was closed in 1975, but re-opened, almost untouched, in 1979. The building and the original open-air exhibition area are unique. The collection of antic stone, bronze, wood and gold Khmer artifacts, held at the Museum, is breathtaking.

The collection display, despite punctual interventions, remains that of colonial curatorship. In that, its intrinsic intellectual value resides as much on the quality of the artifacts exhibited as on the way Cambodia's historical narrative was shaped by the colonial state and its successors. Reflecting the ideology of the early 1920s, it succeeded in conveying the image of a Cambodia overshadowed by its past Angkorian magnificence. Today, as mentioned in its website, the objectives of the museum are (a) to "promote awareness, understanding, and appreciation of Cambodia's heritage through the presentation, conservation, safekeeping, interpretation and acquisition of Cambodian cultural material", and (b) to "house one of the world's greatest collections of Khmer cultural material". The direct filiation of the modern state of Cambodia to the Angkorian past is clearly underlined. In its attribution as a national institution, the Museum also embraces the task of "addressing the needs of the community

by not only functioning as a repository and showcase for Khmer cultural material, but with its collection of important Buddhist and Hindu sculptures, it also provides for religious needs as "a place of worship." (This latter statement refers to the new room housing a number of post-Angkorian wooden statues of the Buddha placed in a way that visitors could perform acts of worship, an indication that the museum aimed to link the Angkorian past of Cambodia with its 'Middle' period).[1]

A research initiative centered around the need to debunk this official genealogy through an alternative curatorial program, and with it, a strategy to transform the museum into more than a repository, would have been an exciting project for CKS to facilitate which I regret not to have undertaken. The role of CKS focused instead on addressing urgent technical conservatory needs. In 2006, with support from the Leon Levy Foundation, New York, CKS engaged in the systematic inventory of the museum's collection. The erstwhile museum director Hap Touch, together with the Australian art historian Darryl Collins and a number of young Cambodian conservationists managed the project. Its objective was to assist the institution to use new technologies and new methodologies, including linguistic tools, to carry out technical conservation activities in its midst and in its provincial branches. A Khmer language inventory and with it, a translated technical glossary, were developed. Supported for six years, the program significantly helped in the modernization of the institution and the restoration of its central position as one of the loci of representation of Cambodia's past. In this case, the emphasis was as much on the conservation of artifacts as on the reinforcement of the institution's operations. This initiative must be viewed in parallel with other important support projects: EFEO's workshop on stone conservation; a metal laboratory backed by Freer and Sackler at the Smithsonian, Washington DC; an Australia-supported textile conservation lab; the Toyota Foundation and U.S. Embassy's funding for the re-organization of the museum's library.[2]

1.2 *Supporting the Buddhist Institute*

As explained in Part 1, the French established the Buddhist Institute (BI) to centralize research on Cambodian literature, language and Buddhism. Its role in establishing the foundations of new, secular, Cambodian knowledge, notably

1 See Museum's website: http://www.cambodiamuseum.info/en_information_visitors.html.

2 The EFEO-supported workshop especially, thanks to its director, Bertrand Porte, has had a major impact in framing the post-war role of the museum. More than just restoring stones, the workshop, with its direct involvement in the organization of exhibitions, contributes to a sense of continuity with the pre-Khmer Rouge past and the narrative, as seen in Part 1, of France's longstanding involvement as Cambodia's cultural 'midwife'.

by collecting materials as well as producing new ones in the vernacular language became critical in the shaping of modern Cambodia. Tragically, the BI's unique library collection was destroyed during the Khmer Rouge regime. This constituted a disaster for it was the country's only repository of ethnographic contemporary – mainly rural – knowledge. To this day, the records compiled under the former "Mores and Customs Commission", which included transcripts of oral forms of history including folk tales, have not been recovered.

The need to see the BI and its collection resurrected from their ashes was recognized as early as the 1991 Peace Agreement. With support from the Japan Foundation, Taiwanese and Japanese Buddhist associations, the Asia Foundation of the U.S., and the Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany, a new functioning BI was reestablished. New facilities were created and the library was partially reconstituted thanks especially to the efforts of one man, Thonevath Pou, a (East-) Germany-trained Cambodian librarian and scholar.[3] Today, the BI presents itself as a "research and documentation center of Khmer culture, responsible for research initiatives, but also for publication and education projects". Its goal, as advertised on its website, consists of "encourage[ing] independent research; develop[ing] public understanding and preserv[ing] national identity".[4] The latter function refers to the central role Buddhism is supposed to play in the definition of the country's post-war culture. Although the new BI posits itself as "a key research center of Khmer culture producing research to the highest international standards (…)", its influence is considerably lower than before the war, as present-day Cambodian society has drastically lost its Buddhist religiosity. Like the monarchy, the *Sangha* continues to play an important role, but more at the personal level and in rural areas. A metaphoric albeit real example of the general neglect in which the BI is held by the present uncultured Cambodian elite in power is the way its new building is being physically surrounded – besieged would be a better word – by the massive Malaysian-owned casino NagaWorld, an enterprise that receives far more attention from the same people in power.[5]

CKS's support to the BI was discrete and indirect. Its Siem Reap library was developed in a way that it would complement that of BI. For many years, the first CKS librarian, Chheng Pharin, a former BI librarian trained by Thonevath

3 For three years, Dr. Pou served on the CKS board. He continued to play an important role in the development of the CKS library.

4 The Buddhist Institute's website: http://www.budinst.gov.kh/.

5 Yamada, Teri S. (2015). "The NagaWorld Casino in Phnom Penh: The Ideology of Unmitigated Development and its Ethical Implications". Workshop organized by IIAS and CKS, *Beyond the State's Reach: Casino Spaces as Enclaves of Development or Lawlessness?*, 21–23 August 2015, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Pou, worked with his former colleagues to develop the CKS collection. Not only did CKS buy published materials from the Institute, it also duplicated materials for its library.[6] The Center also helped the BI by offering training to its newly-hired professional researchers under JFTP, notably during Penny Edwards' session as Visiting Professor. Unfortunately, these researchers, and Pou himself, found it too difficult to work with the BI largely because of the neglect it encountered on the part of the authorities. Still, the BI remains an important institution for the intellectual reconstruction of Cambodia. Its publications in Khmer and its library, in the heart of Phnom Penh, are cultural resources too rare for the public to let down.

1.3 *Digitizing Materials in the Khmer Language* (*with the National Library*)

Whereas the Buddhist Institute collects, produces and disseminates materials extracted from Cambodia's indigenous society, the National Library of Cambodia (NLC), in spite of its name, served for a long time as a collection of generic Western knowledge specializing on Cambodia and the 'Far-East' and of more universal nature. This has to do with its colonial background and the fact that NLC's original readers, as opposed to those of the Buddhist Institute, were mainly Western or Western-educated Cambodians. The collection saw a steady growth in Cambodian publications after independence, although it continued to be marked by its French influence, which only began to be superseded by English after the 1970 coup, and after the Vietnamese invasion, in Russian. Shut down during the Khmer Rouge, the NLC was used as accommodation by members of the regime. Many books were ruined while materials from the Sihanouk and Khmer Republic regimes purposely destroyed or heavily damaged. In comparison, publications from the French protectorate were kept in relatively good shape. In 1980, the NLC was re-established with the assistance of the Soviet Union and its propaganda services in foreign languages. Today, poorly managed by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (and its 'Directorate of Cultural Publications and Reading'), it is not the dynamic institution Cambodia would need in spite of sporadic international initiatives and the dedication of a few Cambodian staff. One of them was Dr. Pou, who, under the French-supported Federation of Cambodian Librarians, tried to ensure that the NLC could reclaim its role as the national legal repository of publications. The process of systematic ISBN registration was carried out

6 Similar collection support initiatives were conducted for other Phnom Penh collections, especially the Royal University of Phnom Penh's History Department and the Royal University of Fine Arts's library.

under his aegis. Today the NLC holds over 100,000 copies in various languages (Khmer, French, English, German); special collections comprise 8,327 national documents, including documents published in French between 1925 and 1970, plus some books and documents published in the Khmer language dating between 1955–1975. There is also a special collection of 305 *sastra* or palm leaf manuscripts, which are available on microfilm.[7]

In 2007, CKS supported a small yet strategic initiative of digitization of extremely rare and fragile materials in Khmer held at the NLC from 1945–60. The project complemented an initiative led by the French Embassy, aimed at digitally recording French language materials in the three countries of the former Indochina.[8] The CKS-supported project was financed by a modest grant from CAORC. A reasonable number of essays, textbooks, grammar books novels and pamphlets were digitized while rare periodicals in the vernacular language from the period were also saved from decay or destruction. These included the first periodical aimed at farmers *My Village*, the country's first women's magazine, and a major part of *The Cambodian School Teacher* magazine, all published by the late colonial and newly independent state. The initiative also funded the translation into Khmer of the search engine's interface devised by the French program. CKS also commissioned a strategy plan for the digitization of *Kambuja Sorya*, the journal of the BI and arguably the most important Cambodian literary periodical of the pre-war period (some of the journal's issues only survived in three or less copies in Western collections).[9]

The role played by CKS towards state-managed institutions such as the National Museum, the Buddhist Institute and the National Library was therefore a benign albeit minor one of facilitation. The objective was to help in the basic rescue and recovery of the country's intellectual and cultural infrastructures. In no way a private small actor like the Center could act as a substitute to the role imparted to the Cambodian state to support and maintain them.

7 See the National Library website's http://culture360.org/organisation/national-library-of-cambodia/.

8 The French Project named VALEASE (*Valorisation de l'Ecrit en Asie du Sud-Est*) promoted reading and writing in South-East Asia. It created a pan-Indochinese virtual library of colonial-era materials, something of potential use for researchers from the three countries of former French Indochina.

9 Another institution located in a building adjacent to that of the National Library is the National Archives of Cambodia. It is another collection critical to nation-building founded by the colonial regime that, starting in the 1990s, benefited from the dedication of a few people, including the Australian archivist Peter Arfanis and the Swiss historian Greg Muller. The NAC's resurrection is an encouraging development that should entice future Cambodian historians to research on their country's recent history. National Archives of Cambodia website: http://www.camnet.com.kh/archives.cambodia/English/welcome.htm.

There was little chance in any case for the Cambodian state, in the hands of a predatory oligarchy and corseted by imposed neoliberal "small state" policies, that it would transform itself as a benevolent guardian of the country's *public* cultural and intellectual heritage.

2 Expanding Creative Knowledge: Working with Artists and Craftsmen

Art is often regarded in the West as an autonomous area of human activity that can be conceived – and therefore mobilized – differently in other cultural settings. In Cambodia, activities such as dance, music, visual arts or other applications of creative imagination coined as 'aesthetic' or 'artistic' are imbedded in life practices. This led CKS to seek to bridge these mental barriers by including artists and craftspeople into intellectual dialogues with scholars, as co-producers of humanistic knowledge and shared values in society. During my tenure, CKS facilitated many works referred to as 'visual' or 'performing' arts. A remarkable network of art-related activists had for long gravitated towards post-UNTAC Cambodia. Just like in scholarly matters, the challenge was much about restoring and transmitting what was in danger of being lost as about promoting and producing new works. It was also to avoid the reproduction of extractive works for individuals primarily connected with market-driven forces.

For these projects and their initiators, the role of artists and craftspeople in post-conflict Cambodia must be emphasized for they held the potential to contribute new civic and pedagogical spaces of debate as well as new models of 'embodied knowledge', beyond traditional institutional and discipline-based academic methods. The participation of artists with CKS to enhance its capacity-building mission remained a 'work in progress'. The invocation of these interactions reveals the extent to which the Center could have involved itself more with artists and craftspeople as agents of crucial social change, if especially they could engage with more 'traditional' scholarly disciplines like those of historians or anthropologists. At the same time, such involvement would not have realistically taken place in the first few years of existence of the Center, particularly when we found ourselves confronted with situations in which conserving endangered cultural forms and practices called for urgent response. Though it was a 'work in progress', CKS's connection with artists must be underlined through, for instance, the relationship it maintained with an organization like the Asia Cultural Council.[10]

10 This collaboration continued under the directorship of Krisna Uk (2012–2016).

2.1 *Collaboration with the Asia Cultural Council*

The Center's collaboration with the New York-based Asia Cultural Council (ACC) was meaningful in that it contributed to enlarge its role as a facilitator of transcultural and inter-disciplinary dialogue. Like the Rockefeller Foundation, ACC is a private corporate-originated program that allows space for the expression of art forms to foster public engagement. ACC is an offshoot of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Headquartered in New York city, it maintains offices in Hong Kong and Tokyo with partner Foundations in Manila and Taipei.[11] The Council supports research and creative projects "across a wide spectrum of the performing and visual arts and across both traditional and contemporary concentrations". Its unusually far-sighted mission, "to support international dialogue, understanding, and respect through cultural exchanges and to nurture the individual talents of artists and scholars in the United States and in Asia", made it one of the few transnational non-academic organizations that sought to engage creatively with the CKS. More than a grant-making foundation, ACC plays a unique mediating role between 'the West' and 'Asia', between state-supported institutions and individual social mediators or artists. Its small size makes it able to select a few people and their projects, follow their career, and serve as a resource and network platform for otherwise isolated and institutionally un-recognized individuals. Thanks to the ACC's support, CKS was given opportunities to bring artists and craftsmen to engage in dialogue with scholars, contributing to frame a unique corpus that was at once transcultural, interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral. Partially thanks to ACC, the Center became more closely associated with the Royal University of Fine Art's faculties of Plastic Arts, Choreography, Architecture and Archaeology. Each of them benefited from the support of the New York-based organization.[12]

The engagement of the CKS with ACC was multifaceted. It took first the form of two major international conferences held at Wat Damnak with artists from different parts of Asia in 2003 and 2005. The first event brought together a large number of ACC grantees from all over Asia. They were 'matched' by ACC and CKS with identified up-and-coming young Cambodian artists and scholars. The second conference included American artists (many from the Asian diaspora). It was organized in collaboration with the New England Foundation for the Arts and its director, Sam Miller. The events helped put CKS on these artists' map. The diversity of the profiles represented certainly had an

11 See the website: http://www.asianculturalcouncil.org/.

12 ACC is another example of the paradoxes of American philanthropy that I will discuss in Part 3. I thank ACC's former director, Ralph Samuelson, and in particular its dedicated program officer Cecily Cook, whose involvement from the very inception of CKS contributed to elevating my interest in linking CKS with the art community.

impact on the way some of the young potential Cambodian artists, some of them affiliated to RUFA, came to define their own work. I especially remember the impact some of the works that were presented at the events, particularly those from China, had on the participating Cambodians. In turn, the introduction of Cambodia to regional artists led to new connections and the inclusion of the country and its history into their art works. For instance, one year after the 2003 event, Singapore theater artists Ong Ken Seng and Tay Tong from the TheaterWorks company spent months at CKS to interview, film and rehearse old Khmer ballet dance masters. Their presence elicited exchanges with the participants in the first Summer School session.

The collaboration with ACC consisted primarily in sponsoring a number of Cambodian and Southeast Asian artists or scholars recommended by either partner. One example includes the then ballet dancer Hun Pen, who, under CKS's supervision, earned an MA in Southeast Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn in Thailand, while she continued to practice at the Royal Ballet in Phnom Penh; she later joined the CKS Summer School program (and unfortunately, gave up professional dancing).[13] The ACC was also of invaluable assistance to CKS any time it sought to reach out to members of cultural and artistic communities in Asia, and the United States, with, in the case of the latter, the important role being played by members of the Cambodian and Southeast Asian diaspora. One such mediating individual I was introduced to by ACC was the now internationally acclaimed Vietnamese-American artist Dinh Quang Lê. Dinh Lê (as he is usually called) first participated in the ACC conference hosted by CKS. A Khmer Rouge survivor who grew up in one of the border villages located on the Vietnamese side, bombed by Pol Pot in 1977, Dinh Lê presented a project on his own memory of the war. His imagination on the recent past of Cambodia was vivid. It was coupled with the trying years he endured after the invasion of the Saigon regime by the northern Vietnamese army in 1975 and his own escape as one of the "boat people". As an artist from Vietnam, his feeling towards Cambodia was tainted by a sense of responsibility for what his countrymen on many occasions inflicted on Cambodia. It was also marred by the realization that his new country of citizenship, the United States, was equally responsible for the destruction and suffering of both Cambodia and

13 ACC and CKS also co-sponsored a unique group made up of Vietnamese and Cambodian archaeologists, under the co-direction of archeologists Phong Kaseka, RUFA, and Trân Ky Phuong, former director of the Danang Archaeological Museum in Vietnam, to work on Cham-Khmer ancient sites in Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. Such a research-based initiative led by scholars from formerly antagonistic countries aimed to contribute to a trans-national historical narrative of the region. I was not able to see the conclusion of this program.

Vietnam. At the crossroads of these contradictory and yet painful trajectories, Dinh Lê's art, like his involvement in running an open space for independent artists in Ho Chi Minh City, was a testimony to the possibility of transcending shared post-national and postcolonial traumas, beyond official discourses. In hindsight, I wish CKS could have engaged more creatively with Dinh Lê and some other artists' works. We could have coupled them with other forms of discursive narrations under a program like JFTP. Better than words, Dinh Lê's work, if duly contextualized, holds enough power to impart critical intellectual engagements among scholars and the larger public. It should have served as an extraordinary educational device for discussions. CKS should have asked him to serve as one of the program's visiting professors. Quite often, unfortunately, the object of CKS's action was less about engaging in experimental dialogues through the arts, than toiling with the urgency of saving forms of creative expressions and symbols of collective identity under threat of disappearance. The Center was involved in a number of such initiatives. I will focus on two of them: one dealing with the survival of the traditional craft of silk weaving; the other, on the practice of transmission of traditional *ballet* dance.

2.2 *Institute of Khmer Traditional Textile*

Physically headquartered in the provincial town of Siem Reap, the Center became involved, through its scholarships, in local activities supporting craft revival or more precisely, the rehabilitation of vernacular forms of artisanal knowledge and their transmission. For its socio-economic integrative role and for the civic and cultural values it naturally imparts on society, the craft-making practice was indeed singled out as an essential activity the Center should be associated with, especially if it was connected with more classical academic – textual – expertise.

One such collaboration involved the Institute of Khmer Traditional Textile (IKTT). Founded in 1996 by a Japanese master-dyer Kikuo Morimoto, IKTT was a rare organization engaged in assembling and transmitting knowledge on traditional textile making, particularly manual silk weaving, and an essential part of Cambodian life that was severely ravaged during the war. Originally, silk was considered an elite commodity. Like dance, the status of silk weaving, or in Khmer *Hol*, changed after the civil war to come to symbolize the continuity of national culture. For years, Morimoto collected pieces of silk woven through *Hol*, the Khmer traditional art of weaving silk. He searched surviving master weavers, first in refugee camps in Thailand and then in Cambodia when the country re-opened. Morimoto originally settled in Takeo Province near Phnom Penh, which was the pre-war silk weaving center. Eventually, he moved to Siem Reap where he could attract visibility among the emerging tourists to enable

him to pursue his enterprise. Thanks to his tenacity, he achieved recognition. His silk products, however expensive they were to buy, were soon regarded as closest to those produced in Cambodia before the war.

A Rolex Prize in 2004 enabled him to embark on a radical undertaking: to assemble a utopian silk making and learning community settled next to a forest in which the entire production process would take place – from planting of mulberry trees to the processes of weaving and dying. Most of the natural materials can be found in forests. Morimoto thus wished to re-connect the war-interrupted silk-making process to the social and economic solidarities that existed among village communities within their ecological environment. In so doing, the Japanese master openly stood against business-orientated models supported by development organizations like the World Bank or the European Union, as these models, as he saw it, run the risk of turning the imperiled craft tradition into a culturally disincarnated commodity for global 'consumers'. In some ways, Morimoto introduced to Cambodia the kind of craft ethics encountered among Japanese master artisans from his native Kyoto.

This task of building social cohesion is at least as endearing as the story told and the beautiful fabrics created by the IKTT-sponsored weavers. It touches on one of the dilemmas of today's Cambodia: to survive as an original cultural and social body past the changes brought by the war, or to 'adapt' to these changes and, with them, to the new homogenizing forces of economic globalization. Morimoto's kind of puritanism or conservatism, if intellectually and politically questionable, effectively imparted a unique form of civism vis-à-vis the Cambodian and international hosts. It has proven powerful enough to stand as an alternative post-war community building model. At its heart is its capacity to restore a sense of worthiness among common, rural working peoples and their attachment to a cultural heritage that has come to symbolize Cambodian resilience.[14]

It was the strength of this model that had CKS interested to engage in collaboration with IKTT. In December 2003, the two institutes organized a joint conference that brought together scholars and master weavers along with professionals in craft preservation. The conference entitled "*Hol*, the Art of Cambodian Textile, a Blending of Two Aesthetics: the Khmer and Cham Senses" referred to the importance of the Khmer textile tradition which, as Morimoto pointed out, was the result of the confluences between Buddhist (Khmer) and Muslim (Cham) traditions. This point emphasized the diversity of Cambodia's culture. The conference was more than a succession of paper

14 Morimoto passed away in 2017. His organization, IKTT, continues to operate. See: https://www.ikttearth.org/.

presentations. Initiated with a Buddhist ceremony "*Sampeiku*" in the memory of one of the master weavers who had recently passed away, the meeting was held at the Wat Damnak CKS precincts. Speakers and students from the Royal University of Fine Arts attended the event along with random auditors and artisans demonstrating their art on looms in the garden. This set the stage for a fascinating dialogue between anthropologists, historians, artists, artisans and other craft practitioners. The gaps in education levels and scholarly (i.e. textual) references to be expected between those presents were overcome thanks to the unconventional exchanges that sometimes even did away with languages but used gestural demonstrations. This unusual mode of interactions in which craft masters mingled with scholars largely owed it to the then IKTT Coordinator, Noriko Ogawa, who succeeded in inspiring a sense of respect among all participants, regardless of their professional position or status. An otherwise argumentative and sometimes vindictive contributor like the historian Michael Vickery found a setting for dignified and constructive conversations that he hardly displayed in meetings I previously attended. The Cambodian spiritual connotations associated with silk weaving, moreover, were rendered in a concrete manner to all participants conveying a sense of respect and self-restraint rarely found in academic events.[15]

2.3 *The Khmer Dance Project*

One the most structured initiatives of CKS in the arts was the Khmer Dance Project (KDP). In today's Cambodia, dance has become a symbol of 'Cambodian-ness' to the citizens of the country and to the members of its diaspora. Originally a sacred art form performed for the royals at the court Palace, the practice of dance was considered by the Khmer Rouge as antiquated and reactionary (even though Pol Pot was the son of a dancer). The physical killing or psychological annihilation of most artists and the dismantling of dance companies, including the Royal Ballet – renamed National Ballet after the 1970 coup – nearly destroyed this important cultural tradition. It was among

15 A similar kind of interactions took place with the ephemeral organization National Center for Khmer Ceramic Revival (CCKCR), run in Siem Reap by the Belgian ceramist Serge Rega. Rega, a craftsman rather than a scholar, had been 'discovered' by the more traditional academic specialist of Southeast Asian ceramics, the late Roxana Brown. With NCKCR, CKS hosted two conferences on ancient ceramics in mainland Southeast Asia, highlighting the artistic and technical value of these artifacts while stressing processes of historical evolution of the region through yet another form of vernacular artisanship, from the ancient times to today. Here too, archaeologists, ceramists, social anthropologists, economists worked alongside master ceramists in a surprisingly harmonious fashion.

Cambodian refugees, especially those in the refugee camps in Thailand but also in scattered communities in America and France, that Khmer ballet was resurrected and reinvigorated with new modes of expression. Foreign observers noted this curious urge among Cambodian communities of different political persuasions to set up dance classes. Within these communities, it acquired a new social meaning no longer limited to court or elite culture. As refugees returned to the country, dance came to embody, in the minds of millions, the collective body of Cambodia.[16]

After the war, RUFA's Faculty of Choreographic Arts was reinstated with the support of three successive cultural ministers.[17] Plagued with financial and human shortages, the faculty struggled to restore elements of a training curriculum. Under the leadership of its dedicated dean, Proeung Chheang, a former dancer, the program continued as the state-supported official stream of transmission of what was left available of this ancestral knowledge onto the young generations.[18] A few internationally-supported private initiatives also operated on its periphery. The program at RUFA remained however tenuous and regularly at-risk due to a chronic lack of resources and a clear lack of interest from the leadership of the university.[19]

A critical blow came when in 2007 the authorities sold the northern university campus which housed the Choreographic Art School as well as the School of Music, to real estate developers. A new 'campus' was built 14 kilometers away. This was a devastating setback for the only state-supported dance-training program in the country. Parallel to this development ran the insidious – and matching – process of commercialization of the Khmer dance tradition along with other forms of performing arts, mainly as a result of burgeoning tourism. Here, the Cambodian situation contrasted with that of a place like Bali and Balinese dance culture, equally affected by the intrusive nature of mass tourism. In the Indonesian island, the chain of technical (and spiritual) knowledge

16 "Dance has become a key symbol for the Khmer, and as such, constitutes one focus of their efforts to assert and recreate their culture, their identity, and history. Dance is perceived by many in Cambodia to have the power to 'save' Cambodia, its heritage, its identity, its most true essence." (In Shapiro, Toni (1994). 'Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia'. PhD Dissertation. Ithaca: Cornell University, p. 4.)

17 Chheng Pon, Nouth Narang, and Princess Norodom Bopha Devi, herself a former *Danceuse Étoile* in the 1960s.

18 RUFA received outside support from various international organizations including Asia Cultural Council.

19 The fact that the Ballet enjoyed the personal involvement of Princess Bopha Devi, who regularly visited the school for training sessions may have been regarded negatively by the CPP-leaning government or university officials.

transmission was never entirely broken as a result of the suppression of artists and destruction of the social fabric as it happened in Cambodia under Pol Pot.

The news prompted CKS to act. Some of us considered essential that new generations of Cambodians be given the opportunity to relate to this essential part of their cultural heritage as it was transmitted across previous generations, in spite of the war and its aftermath. Iconographic, audio-visual and textual documentation materials relating to earlier dance traditions are today scattered between Western and Asian collections. A number of post-war independent initiatives resulted in interviews and recordings of the work of surviving dancers (for example, the work carried out by TheaterWorks mentioned earlier). These sources constitute a substantial corpus of knowledge to which should be added testimonies by surviving master performers before they pass away. Because no inventory of these resources existed and almost none of the materials were digitized, a program aimed at creating an easily accessible online repository needed to be developed. Thus, was born the Khmer Dance Project (KDP).

The KDP was established as a collaborative venture between CKS, RUFA, the Dance Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts and Bophana Audiovisual institute. The New York Public Library of Performing Arts, with its Jerome Robbins Dance Division, is one of the largest collections on dance in the world, with a highly professional staff.[20] The Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, as its name indicated, has been instrumental in collecting film and audiovisual archives "to enable [Cambodians] to understand their past, build their present and invent their future." Located in Phnom Penh, Bophana is one of the most important independent cultural public spaces in the capital city. It was established in 2006 by the Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh. The archive collections of Bophana are made available to the public while the center organizes public events. The organization also promotes high quality Cambodian film productions. It is the only organization in the country to train young people in filmmaking and broadcasting techniques.[21]

The professed aims of the KDP were "to identify existing documents relating to Khmer dance; document the dance of the Khmer people as it is practiced and remembered by Khmer dancers today; preserve the Khmer dance heritage for future generations of Khmer people and for the world; bring the Khmer dance heritage to the attention of a global audience." Nut Suppya, the French-Cambodian historian (and former dancer), was appointed to lead the multi-year program which was supported by the Anne Bass Foundation.

20 New York Public Library of Performing Arts: http://www.nypl.org/locations/lpa.

21 See Bophana's website: http://bophana.org.

The nature of the KDP, like IKTT for the textile tradition, was primarily reactive and conservatory. It was about finding a solution to an irresponsible decision by the authorities to end the Performing Arts program at a public university. But it was more than that. The program set out to embrace the wave of interest in the post-war revival of performing and visual arts across the country and abroad, with the idea that new information technology could help revive popular interests. Yet the danger that awaited KDP, (like in the case of IKTT for artisanal textile), was that it could be perceived as 'traditionalist' (and also socially exclusive) because of its focus on preserving a cultural form that was essentially framed by the canons of court dance masters rather than supporting more 'democratic' creations as they developed in the refugee camps. These new forms of dance and performing arts were also supported thanks to a number of dedicated organizations.[22]

In the end, the choices we made addressed the imperatives of conservation and open transmission against the danger of irremediable disappearance and the dilution of the tradition through commercialization. I was aware of the danger this stance entailed, especially the risk of freezing contemporary Cambodian artistic expressions. We experienced the same dilemma for some of the other initiatives described earlier. What was perhaps missed in the case of KDP was the opportunity for CKS to act as a neutral and open platform, through for example the organization of an interdisciplinary conference, like the one on textile, in which different interpretative approaches by practitioners in dialogue with historians, anthropologists and others, could engage in a dynamic debate over the place and role of the *Ballet* dance tradition in contemporary Cambodia. The discussion would be part of a larger debate on the issue of Cambodia's cultural heritage, a contested field that would reveal different strategies of legitimation and claims within the social body. The involvement of specialists from other societies from South and Southeast Asia would have widened the perspectives of the discussion. For instance, the danger of fixating Cambodian *Ballet* tradition as a state-sanctioned attribute of a nationalist discourse, as it turned into when the Cambodian government succeeded in inscribing it as a UNESCO 'Intangible Heritage' in 2003, could have been openly debated.[23] Unfortunately for the Center, the dangers of commercial commodification, combined with the absence of state structures

22 Among these projects were Amrita (Performing Arts), Khmer Arts Academy (performing arts and especially dance), Sovanaphum (shadow puppets), Cambodian Living Arts (music).

23 This registration was used by the authorities to nationalize the dance tradition against similar claims by the Thai government.

dedicated to support traditional cultural forms, compelled it to prioritize a conservatory and access-focused approach. Many of us at that time believed that the Center ought first to act as a repository and a disseminator, even if some of these forms could be considered by many as frozen in time.[24]

3 Community Engagement in Siem Reap

Talking about heritage as a contested subject, the role played by CKS within the community in which it set its roots – in a living Buddhist monastery in the heart of the city of Siem Reap, in the shadow of the world heritage site of Angkor – deserves to be narrated. Indeed, running public events and operating a library in the *public* space of Wat Damnak, made the CKS a *de facto* civic institution that became part of the life of this community. As such, it engaged, initially quite unintendedly, in what can be described as community empowerment action. Of its numerous modes of engagement, this aspect of the Center's operations, for their direct local impacts, was its most openly political-as-civic implication. This does not mean that CKS engaged in the Cambodian domestic power game. It means that the organization could contribute its scholarly *public* endeavors and its deliberative and reflective capabilities to the benefit of sizeable sections of a community defined by geographical proximity rather than by its sector of activity. If CKS took part in national debates, or if, by virtue of its involvement in knowledge production and dissemination it was a nation-wide provider of critical enquiry, we remained mindful of keeping our distance from the strategic center of power in Phnom Penh. CKS's most overt civic interventions were focused on its immediate surroundings, the community of Siem Reap-Angkor.[25]

24 The socially inclusive character of the Center was demonstrated by its interest in 'popular' Cambodian cultural forms, like for instance when it supported the study of vernacular wooden architecture.

25 An exception to this focus on Siem Reap was the Center's involvement in the development of a local community-run archaeological museum in Sre Ampil, south of Phnom Penh. The villagers of Sre Ampil live on a rich archaeological site where pre-Angkorian remains are regularly unearthed by farmers. The project was as much about pedagogy as it was about building capacities at the community level. It consisted in supporting a long-term collaboration between the village's inhabitants and the students and faculty of the Royal University of Fine Arts to co-manage the small museum (located in the precincts of the local monastery) and to facilitate the collection and preservation of the newly found artifacts (against their illegal trafficking).

3.1 *Collaboration with the Buddhist Monastery Wat Damnak*

A permanent experiment in local democracy and community participation is the way in which CKS negotiated its relations with the monastery Wat Damnak in the precincts of which its headquarters was based. It also assisted the monks in carrying out their role as social mediators. This collaboration was two-sided and reciprocated. In some subtle and indirect ways, the Wat contributed to 'making' CKS out of the different parties that operated within it, by instilling among all its members – board, staff, academics – a humbling mode of interaction. Both parties, the Wat and CKS had to respect each other's distinct role, their internal functioning and personalities. I previously described the choice of having the Center set up in a Buddhist monastery. Here, I reflect on the way CKS, representing academics and cultural actors, coexisted in harmony with Wat Damnak and its community of religious (mostly) men.

One of CKS's local objectives, as it sat in the midst of the community of Wat Damnak, was about assisting the monastery to regain its past prestige as a social and spiritual haven amid the local district (*Kum*) of the same name, in Siem Reap. The Center helped the Wat in various ways. It first helped to rebuild or restore some of its historical facilities including the edifices that were to house its library and conference hall, but also the monastery's central Prayer Hall (*vihear*), once at risk of being torn down, or an old two-story classroom building. CKS also erected classroom facilities for the primary school located in the southeastern corner of the Wat's compound. It helped to embellish the site of the monastery by landscaping half of its surface. This action triggered a virtuous process. The Wat community followed suit by taking care of the remaining (northern) sections while they had the upper hand in the improvement of other facilities such as roads, gates, fences and structures in the monks' quarters.

After years of discussions, the monastery allowed CKS to build a new library space and an office extension. On this occasion, an interesting exercise of truly balanced – democratic – collaboration took place that taught CKS's own 'community' to act in unison with the Wat. For some time already, we had expressed an interest in building new facilities that would house the institute's expanding library collection and provide it with decent office space. The principle was agreed upon by the monastery's council of *Achars* (laymen). However, every time an architectural idea or project was presented to them, it was rejected (as was often also the case with the CKS board). As it turned out, the Western-educated architects commissioned to design the project proved oblivious to the special environment in which this project would be realized. They were often more interested in making an aesthetic 'statement' than in meeting the local conditions. At the end, it was a Japanese woman architect,

Yoko Koide who, after months of personal immersion in the lives of both the Wat and the Center, discussions with the monks, the CKS staff and users, was able to create the kind of space that respected both the monastery and the Center's demands. This longwinded collaborative process with the Wat further cemented the relationship, and the mutual respect, that existed between the partners. I take it as an example of concrete community work.[26]

Otherwise, CKS played a discreet role in supporting the various activities performed by the monastery, especially under the leadership of two young deputy abbots, Ven. Somnieng Hoeurn and Ven. Choeung Chhun, together with the council of laymen (*Achars*), whose agreement had to be secured for any secular matters to proceed. A scholarly entity itself, CKS supported the intellectual revival of the monastery. It made regular the support to its educational activities – including the idea, once cherished by its deputy abbots, to set itself up as a high training school for monks.[27] A number of pre-war Buddhist Institute volumes dealing with religious practices, originally donated to CKS by the late British philologist Judith Jacob, were offered to the monastery's own library. The Center also assisted "Life and Hope", the NGO founded by Ven. Somnieng Hoeurn. Life and Hope promote basic and vocational education for poor families, single mothers and unprivileged children.[28]

My interactions with the Wat's authorities, as director, were regular. They were marked by a sense of mutual respect and a desire to find commonly agreeable solutions. Overall, CKS and Wat Damnak shared a similar appreciation of the importance of education and the sense of social empowerment it brought to the beneficiaries. This made the collaboration sustainable in the long term. Dealing with the Wat's community, moreover, made us bound to act as good citizens and as good hosts. This capacity to 'behave' when dealing with the monastery – against the always possible risk of being chased out of its precincts – earned CKS enough respect from the Wat to be granted a long-term, renewable lease.[29] From the side of the Wat Damnak monastery, a decade-long trouble-free association with CKS saw the enhancement of its central position in the local community. The opening of the library extension by HM Norodom Sihamoni, King of Cambodia, in 2010, not only marked a consecration for the organization, it was also a gesture of recognition by the head of state of Wat

26 Yoko Koide lives and works in Siem Reap.

27 To my knowledge, this plan has not materialized.

28 Former CKS's Visiting Scholar Peter Hammer became the Life and Hope Association's chair of the Board. He later joined the CKS Board as well. See Life and Hope's website: http://www.lifeandhopeangkor.org/.

29 The agreement owes much to the personal involvement of Son Soubert, professor of Art History at RUFA and CKS board member.

Damnak and its community building achievements – of which its skillful collaboration with the Center was an important one. As I now see it, community collaboration as it existed between CKS and the Wat ascertained a sense of reciprocity and respect, a case of local democracy through which the reconciliation of diverging interests through mutually-beneficial arrangements could occur. It was a two-sided collaboration, but one where the local actor's views counted as much as that of the outsiders. I assume this unique relationship continues today. It is a far cry from the community collaborations often performed by many mainstream international development programs.[30]

3.2 *In the Shadow of a World Heritage Site* (*Angkor*)[31]

Beyond its vicinity, CKS engaged in a more 'political' mode of community development activism. The social situation prevailing in Siem Reap, where the Center is headquartered, is in many ways determined by the unique concentration of history surrounding the city. This history mixes the conspicuous presence of the ancient monumental ruins in Angkor, testimonies to past periods of glory and, as we saw in Part 1, spatial arrangements made by different Cambodian states since colonialism to enshrine these monuments, the scars of civil conflict and mass displacements, and more recently, the anarchic impact of mass tourism. Siem Reap indeed concentrates the exacerbated features of a global tourism industry forced upon a community of disoriented ex-villagers, now mixed with scores of newly-arrived internal migrants lured by the wealth this industry attracts. There are numerous publications narrating Cambodia and Siem Reap's entanglement in heritage tourism.[32] Against this background,

30 There were other examples of CKS's engagement in local community development beyond academic pursuits *per se*. Many were of fleeting nature, from joining participatory initiatives aimed at supporting the preservation of historic buildings in Phnom Penh, hosting Siem Reap-based initiatives like the environmental organization Osmose (https://www.osmosetonlesap.net/english/accueil.php), sharing documentation or else introducing local interlocutors to international specialists in relevant fields of investigation (with the Water Management direction of APSARA, for instance). The CKS library, as a space where collections are openly accessible to the public is itself a formidable resource provided by the Center to the community. A more recent example of community project involving the CKS library was initiated by director Krisna Uk (2012–2016). It involved the establishment of a reading space dedicated to children, in the old library building of the Center.

31 The points narrated below closely relate to my article: Peycam, Philippe (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee in Angkor – A World Heritage Site as an Arena of Competition, Connivances and State(s) Legitimation'. *Sojourn* 31 (4): 743–785.

32 See for instance: Winter, Tim (2008). 'Post-conflict heritage and tourism in Cambodia: the burden of Angkor'. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 14 (6): 524–539.

CKS, itself a recent presence in the city, and a product of modern globalization, sought to stand as a facilitator of cultural continuity and social inclusiveness.

One instrument of political control introduced by the West in Cambodia is spatial zoning. Founded in 1923, the archaeological site of Angkor was – as a consequence of the 1992 Paris Peace Conference – registered as a World Heritage Site (WHS) by UNESCO in December of the same year. Under the aegis of UNESCO, a regulatory legal framework in the field of heritage conservation, tourism management and urban development was established, above the heads of Siem Reap's inhabitants. Indeed, one of the conditions of inscription of Angkor on the World Heritage List, was the creation, in 1993, of an 'International Coordinating Committee' (ICC), co-chaired by the representatives of the French and Japanese governments – at that time the main donor countries to Angkor – to 'represent' and 'coordinate' the various national and international management efforts conducted within the WHS. The ICC was flanked by a Cambodian counterpart, the 'Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Management of the Region of Angkor' (APSARA National Authority), a state agency, also unaccountable to the local populations.

This national-international bureaucratic configuration has led to a scenario in which coexist different administrative entities distinguished by status with separate authorities and interventions: the 'archaeological park', representing a perimeter of about 401 sq. kilometers including the most prominent monumental sites; the remaining territory organized in a constellation of different zones; the Province of Siem Reap, of 10,000 sq. kilometers, as well as an overlap of jurisdictions and prerogatives between APSARA's 'departments' and national ministries. In this labyrinth-like administrative and spatial construction lies the urban concentration of Siem Reap. To this day, although the third most important city in the country, Siem Reap does not have a municipality of its own with elected representation.

For those living in the area, this bureaucratic top down construction has resulted in a *de facto* alienating dichotomy between the WHS and its dependent surroundings. 'International cooperation' and policies led by the different authorities coupled with un-controlled private investments had led to the effective disempowerment of the inhabitants of Siem Reap-Angkor. This situation of people living "in the shadow" of a WHS, has been the object of numerous critical research investigations.[33] An inclusive policy involving from

33 Esposito, Adèle (2012). 'Invention et fabrication d'un lieu de tourisme aux portes d'Angkor'. École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture. Paris Belleville; Hauser-Shäublin, Brigitta (Ed.) (2011). *World Heritage Angkor and Beyond: Circumstances and Implications of UNESCO Listings in Cambodia*. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, pp. 9–31; Keiko, Miura

the start the local residents could have harmonized both instances of heritage conservation and urban development. Over time, tactics of competition and collusion between administrative entities and through them, powerful unofficial actors have presided over decision-making processes both in the park and in the town. The city-temple ensemble of Siem Reap-Angkor is an arena where multiple unaccountable international and national players can engage in opaque arrangements. This situation has long contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement among the populations. Not surprisingly, local people, in private conversations, tended to invoke the Khmer Rouge regime as "at least clean" and "for sure, Khmer", a discourse symptomatic of a deep-seated sense of alienation, and a magnified reflection of many of the ills plaguing neoliberal Cambodia.[34]

Against such a backdrop, CKS's community-orientated position appeared awkward. As an 'international' project, the Center gained a seat in the UNESCO-sponsored ICC. When I began to attend ICC meetings, they were not as closed and as exclusive as they later became. ICC meetings are convened twice a year: one 'technical', usually held in the spring and one, more political, each fall. Leading a non-governmental structure amid this collection of national and international state-sponsored programs, I had to fight my way in. At ICC meetings, CKS was eyed with suspicion for it represented a different institutional animal, an alternative to the top-down state-sponsored model

(2004). 'Contested Heritage, People of Angkor'. Doctoral Dissertation. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London; Keiko, Miura (2010). 'World Heritage Sites in Southeast Asia: Angkor and Beyond'. In *Heritage Tourism in Southeast Asia*, edited by Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael Parnwell. Copenhagen: NIAS, pp. 103–29; Keiko, Miura (2011). 'World Heritage Making in Angkor: Global, Regional, National and Local Actors, Interplays and Implications'. In *World Heritage Angkor and Beyond: Circumstances and Implications of UNESCO Listings in Cambodia*, edited by Brigitta Hauser-Shäublin. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, pp. 9–31; Peycam, Philippe, and Eric J. Heikkila (2009). 'Economic Development in the Shadow of *Angkor Wat*: Meaning, Legitimation and Myth'. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 29 (3): 294–309; Peycam, Philippe (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee in Angkor'. In Part 2, I already listed the works on Southeast Asian sites.

34 This phenomenon of disenfranchisement of the local populations in the face of global tourism is not unique to Cambodia. However, the scale of Angkor makes it particularly serious. To limit oneself to the Southeast Asian region, see the situation of WHSs such as those of Luang Prabang, Laos: Berliner, David (2012). 'Multiple nostalgias: the fabric of heritage in Luang Prabang (Lao PDR)'. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18: 769–786; Hoi An, in Vietnam: Avieli, Nir (2015). 'The rise and fall of Hoi An, a UNESCO World Heritage in Vietnam'. *Sojourn* 30 (1): 35–71; in Borobodur, in Indonesia: Kyioko, Kanki, Adishakti, Laretna T. and Titin Fatimah (Eds.) (2015). *Borobodur as Cultural Landscape: Local Communities' Initiatives for the Evolutive Conservation of Pusaka Saujana Borobodur*. Transpacific Press.

of UNESCO, APSARA, and the diverse 'national' archaeological and conservation teams operating at Angkor – under the shielding eyes of their diplomatic patrons also present at the meetings. As I will explain in more detail in Part 3, CKS's institutional and programmatic independence was a source of incomprehension. The simple fact that it stood as a hybrid Cambodian-American NGO that could engage in genuine intellectual and cultural activities through its public events and its library in Siem Reap, without the benediction of these official institutions, was for them, to say the least, a continuing embarrassment. Located at the cradle of Cambodia's official national mythology that was Angkor, CKS proved that collective meaning could be achieved both *in* and *with* the local communities.

This unusual situation found its best expression on the occasion of an international academic-civil society roundtable on Siem Reap, "In the Shadow of Angkor" in 2008. The event was organized by CKS under the auspices of the Pacific Rim Council on Urban Development (PRCUD), an international network of urbanists working on Asia, in collaboration with prestigious partners such as the Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, the Superior School of Architecture Paris-Belleville, and APSARA's Urban Development unit. The roundtable sought to address the unruly urban growth of Siem Reap, a city with a population that had expanded tenfold in just a decade, but whose development was subordinated to the remote ICC and the state agency APSARA. That such politico-administrative apparatus did not allow for the 150,000 plus inhabitants to be heard or represented was precisely the kind of issues the roundtable aimed to tackle.

Invited to the roundtable were representatives of various local communities ranging from small business owners, private investors, NGOs and Buddhist monasteries. The event also included members of national and international institutions: APSARA, the World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the province's Governor, and UNESCO.[35] Such an unusually inclusive platform, with the presence of scholars and civil society actors, allowed for a uniquely interactive and open debate which provided the framework for a truly participatory model to take hold. For most of the local participants, this event was the first occasion on which their voices were heard. At some point in the roundtable, one of the APSARA representatives, who was also the owner of the hotel where the meeting took place, realizing the democratic character of the exercise, tried to undermine the open flow of discussions by attacking the 'foreigners' behind the event – CKS, PRCUD, Paris Belleville,

35 Although informed in advance, no one from the UNESCO office participated or attended the meeting.

Getty Foundation. This was the usual stance for local potentates, but it failed to move the majority of local participants present.[36]

The extent to which this CKS-led initiative caused unease among the official circles of power was revealed during the ensuing ICC meeting when neither the APSARA leader who had co-chaired the roundtable, nor anyone else, even referred (or responded) to the roundtable and its propositions. The representative of the Paris-Belleville Architecture School, Nathalie Lancret, was prevented from talking. By that time, I was no longer working for the CKS. Still, the roundtable left a mark in the minds of those who participated as demonstrated by the discussions that continued through social media for a least a few years. Today, the triptych of UNESCO-embassies-Cambodian Government is largely criticized for its refusal to base its actions on any kind of participatory process involving the local inhabitants. ICC's ubiquitous self-praising propaganda continues to maintain the illusion of an open 'cooperation'. Yet, unlike the current regime in power, its grip on the site is elusive and marked by a fundamental political irresponsibility.

Today, the assertiveness of the Hun Sen regime to do away with any pretenses of open deliberations, thanks especially to the growing influence of China in Cambodian affairs (and within UNESCO), has found in ICC a comfortable arena of self-legitimation. This development threatens to hasten the already advanced process of commodification and 'heritagization' of Siem Reap-Angkor, its anarchic development and its near-colonization by millions of international tourists, all at the expense of the local inhabitants (and of the physical integrity of the temples). This tragic evolution was probably not foreseen by the initiators of ICC at UNESCO and in the French and Japanese diplomatic missions. These two countries have since seen their influence significantly reduced.[37]

The 2008 Angkor-Siem Reap roundtable amounted perhaps to the most overtly political attempt by the Center, as a Cambodian 'citizen institution', to directly confront the disempowering political nomenclature that today rules over Cambodia. Its failure to even be heard or to impact future actions is,

36 The Roundtable's background document, written by two international CKS-affiliated fellows, the PhD candidates Sylvia Nam (UC Berkeley) and Adèle Esposito (U. Paris-Belleville) and its final report, written by CKS-affiliated PhD candidate Paul Rabé (U. of Southern California) are available online at the PRCUD website: https://sites.google.com/site/prcudweb/roundtable-forums/siem-reap/.

37 This tendency may have worsened since the passing of Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, Chairman of APSARA from 2001 until his death in 2017. APSARA, and the multi-million tickets sale treasure it manages are now nominally under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture.

sadly, a good illustration of the limits of direct involvement by an independent cultural program like CKS. What an institute like the Center can achieve is primarily to mediate by providing multi-stakeholder spaces of interaction, like the 2008 roundtable, for future initiatives borne forth by local actors.

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In the three chapters of Part 2, we saw that, in its first ten years of activity, CKS, as an experimental program, succeeded in establishing itself as a potent, locally engaged but globally connected academic and capacity building clearing house, a model in the creative realm of the arts and humanities. What may have made CKS distinguishable was, like its predecessor CEDORECK, its multi-faceted capacity enabling it to operate free from state or commercial pressures. As an open and inclusive structure, CKS could always respond to new demands from its constituencies. A scholarly institute, an educational facilitator, and a citizen-organization working collaboratively, CKS became involved all at the same time, and because these functions were complementary, in works of cultural conservation, dissemination, pedagogical experimentation, local community engagement and, basically, of mediation between social, cultural and educational actors.

These activities had their own internal mode of operation, their own temporality. The multifaceted transformations a program like JFTP could accomplish should only be assessed once its impact on the careers of its past beneficiaries can be fully appreciated: probably half of a generation span. This was different from assessing the more immediate impacts of restricted operations like an international fellowship program, a Summer School for undergrads or of developing a new catalogue for the National Museum – although, in these three cases, there are also long-term outcomes, difficult to trace, that can prove that most of what the Center did was rooted in the *longue durée*. The main difference with JFTP is that no institution funding those initiatives could expect CKS to report in a time span of half a generation.

Beyond this question, it is the realization that CKS's operations were fed by a considerable demand, even hunger, on the part of its academic and cultural constituencies, Cambodian and foreign, for doing things *differently*, outside the traditional tunnel-shaped disciplinary and sectorial modes of action. When, for example, CKS engaged with communities in Siem Reap, the issue of a model of 'development' imposed upon these communities came to the fore. What made a difference was the Center's capacity, through its concomitant involvement of academics and civil society actors, to open the floor to a multiplicity of equally legitimate perspectives and approaches. This inclusive way

of 'doing things' corresponds to socially engaged academic practices that bear the potential of shaping alternative models of learning and transmitting free from compartmentalization or rigid assigned models. Likewise, the Center's unique engagement with artists, for example by having local and international students interrogating the work of the southern Vietnamese artist Dinh Lê, the debates over the role and cultural and social positionality of Khmer ballet dance, or the creative interactions between craftspeople and scholars. CKS was experimenting, with new materials and new methods of engagement to produce locally contextualized knowledge free from artificial fragmentation – between theory and practice, disciplines or institutional hierarchies.

Even in retrospect, I am at pains to find overt methodological, and indeed epistemological, flaws or failures in what the Center – and other comparable contemporary grassroot programs like Reyum Institute or Bophana – undertook provided that their works would not be judged in the light of immediate quantitative evaluation criteria, like those hanging over most educational institutions like a Damocles' sword in present times. What I saw and experienced, precisely due to the hegemonic utilitarian discourse that today prevails in many spheres of institutional power, is the limited – yet real – space of action that can be allocated for experimental projects like the Center to accomplish their job to the fullest extent possible.

PART 3

Social Responsibilities: Scholars, Funders and Diplomats

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In the previous part, I described how the CKS model, in its experimentation into a viable academic and cultural institution sought to serve as a potent local-global mechanism of transformation. Through its creative capacity-building programs or its multiple collaborations, the Center, as a citizen organization embedded in the community, somewhat demonstrated its valuable role as both mediator and facilitator capable of advancing simultaneously and in a complementary fashion, the interests of different constituencies in Cambodia and beyond.

As such, the Center included a specific set of internal organizational properties. Its activities were based "on principles of participation, empowerment, and individual and collective responsibility".[1] These attributes of an independent non-profit non-state organization like the Center, while evolving in a market-driven economy, ran counter to the dominant neoliberal ideology. CKS and other contemporary independent organizations in Cambodia demonstrated the potential for a non-marketable humanistic collaborative experiment that could not be easily reduced into quantifiable stock.

Nonetheless, when discussing an organization and program model, one must, without falling into the 'evaluation' trap, address the question of its organizational 'sustainability' – above all, the way it could be aligned with the agendas of other social players, partners or constituencies, and at what cost. Aside from the Cambodians and Cambodian institutions as its main immediate beneficiaries, CKS needed to account to international 'stakeholders' or partners. The Center had in fact little interactions with representatives of the Cambodian state other than for ensuring its official recognition as a local NGO, paying courtesy visits to ministers – especially those of Culture and Education – or to the formal Patron of the Center's library, Cambodia's official head of state, King Norodom Sihamoni. Except on specific cases, there was generally little to discuss with or expect from the people in power. Even though on a number of occasions, connections were made with representatives of the Hun Sen-led government, no concrete outcomes were sought – a healthy distance we chose to maintain while at the Center. By contrast, international partners played a crucial role in determining the existence of the organization. They were, in order of importance and closely aligned with its mission: academics, funders, development agencies, and state diplomacies. The focus of this third and last part of the book will be on these international institutional contributors and the constrains, and opportunities, that could be expected from their involvement and support.

1 Neamtan, Nancy (2005). 'The Social Economy: Finding a Way Between the Market and the State'. *Policy Options* (July–August): 71–76.

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One way to formulate this structural aspect of CKS's existence is to ask to what extent this experiment, as an international collaborative undertaking, could be integrated into the strategies and actions of these 'supporters' and 'patrons'. In answering the question, it is the degree of their social autonomy, and responsibility, particularly that of the academic individuals and their universities but also of philanthropists, foundations, development organizations that must be deliberated. Also, crucial to the matrix were diplomatic cooperation programs which played a key role in the larger debate over state-society interactions and the ideological underpinnings it necessarily contains. This signifies, from the point of view of a grassroot program in post-war Cambodia, the question of social legitimacy of established Western actors in the light of their commitment in favor of the reconstruction of the country and their capacity to stand to their stated role and social worthiness. Of these institutional interlocutors, I will turn in particular to the group that, in principle, ought to be the most receptive and supportive of the CKS initiative: the academics, particularly those in the social sciences and the humanities associated with the inter-disciplinary field of 'area' or 'regional studies', with their *raison d'être* built on the premise of the need to foster inter-cultural understanding and the implicit recognition of the role of culture and history to foreground any meaningful space for collaboration and transformation.

CHAPTER 7

Socially Engaged Scholars?

As explained in the Part 2, CKS aimed to promote a critical mass of young Cambodians to serve as active academic and public agents in their country while contributing to scholarly exchanges and the reinforcement of the field of area studies within the framework of Cambodian and Southeast Asian studies. Thanks especially to the Rockefeller-supported Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP), the Center sought direct engagement from members of the international academic community. An inevitable question this engagement raised was whether internationally trained academics and their institutions were prepared to act as responsible social facilitators or role models within Cambodia's post-war settings. I earlier described the contributions of individuals like Duncan McCargo, Charnvit Kasetsiri and the other Visiting Professors who suspended their career plans to serve in the JFTP. For each of them, the main motivation was a sense of commitment towards the society subject of their scholarship. It transcended the specific object of their individual research.

Was this sense of obligation shared among the larger pool of individual scholars interested in Cambodia and its region? If it was, what was the position taken by their departments and their university (or other institution) of affiliation? More specifically, were these scholars' professional academic environments preparing them to participate in activities of transnational engagement – that in practice somewhat exceeded the tasks they were usually required to perform? A corollary question, beyond these individual cases, is how the present academic environment as we know it in Western or Northern societies, particularly after being subject for over three decades to series of neoliberal reforms, is still capable of responding to social, societal and political situations outside the universities' walls and their functional role assigned by the 'Market'. In particular, since we focus on area or regional studies, can university leaders allow their faculty and staff to creatively reach out to those world regions as objects of their studies?

A number of intellectuals have addressed the fundamental question of the social responsibilities of academics and their university. The Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe unambiguously urged for the invention of a truly citizen university, "an institution whose primary responsibility is to minister to the universal"; [an institution that] will have to abandon

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its inward-bound posture, open up and become accountable to new publics."[1] Beyond the traditional realms of international collaboration, what Mbembe and other intellectuals have called into question is the role of universities as social institutions in which "practices of cultural pedagogy and research can be a matter of forging [...] the types of institutional spaces where important questions can be asked, where networks and communities can be created and where, ultimately, progress on a number of socially significant issues can be made".[2]

To quote again Morris and Hjort, another fundamental urging, this time aimed at academics, called for "concrete modalities within which [academic staff] exercise agency in the university and what imaginative choices and creative moves [they] might be able to make in [their] varying situations and within the constraints that [they] face" – it is very much about addressing the creative institutional space-building capacity of 'committed' scholars willing "to go beyond narcissistic careerism and narrow institutional reproduction", a model of academic activism in the face of the current landscape in which "accountability and relevance are all too often conflated with a grinding version of accountancy and a dispirited or cynical conformity to every management decree".[3] There are considerations some of us found ourselves confronted with while working at CKS, particularly as the Center was explicitly designed to serve as a link between 'first-world' universities (and their academic staff) and the post-war 'Southern' social, economic and political reality of Cambodia. By international scholars, I am especially referring to those most likely to work with the Center, those engaged in area or regional studies. These specialized academics stands at the heart of the CKS story.

In academic language, the interdisciplinary scholarship that focuses on geographical, national or cultural regions in the social sciences and the humanities is called 'area (or regional) studies'.[4] Postcolonial critiques since Edward Said have insisted on the European and then American expansionist designs at the origins of area studies.[5] The relationship between the U.S. Cold War project and area studies in American academia in particular drove the

1 Mbembe, Achille (2012). 'At the Centre of the Knot'. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 38 (1): 8–14, pp. 10–11.

2 Morris, Meaghan and Mette Hjort (2012). *Creativity and Academic Activism, Instituting Cultural Studies*. Durham and Hong Kong: Duke/Hong Kong University Press, p. 2.

3 Morris and Hjort (2012). *Creativity and Academic Activism*, p. 17.

4 Area studies as they are typically practiced in Western universities involve research and teaching in history, political science, sociology, cultural studies, language, geography, literature and other related disciplines.

5 Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.

origin of their institutionalization into university departments, centers, and multiple programs supported by the Federal Government and by private foundations. Since at least the period of the American war in Vietnam (1960–75), and the domestic movements opposed to it, the role of area studies has largely been recast within many U.S. universities to become, to quote the historian David Szanton, "a major social invention" [that] "has repeatedly challenged the institutional and intellectual hegemony of the U.S. and Euro-centric social science and humanities disciplines." Szanton later adds: "By creating new interdisciplinary academic programs and developing close collaborations with colleagues overseas rooted in different national and intellectual cultures, area studies scholars press the social science and humanities disciplines in the U.S. to look beyond, even sometimes recast unstated presumptions and easy interpretations."[6] It is this capacity of area studies and its representatives to "challenge" and "recast" that the CKS project tested.

1 Involving International Scholars

In the particular situation of post-war Cambodia, a question I was regularly faced with was whether 'area studies' academics from northern institutions as well as their students were likely to meet Szanton's expectations by contributing, thanks to the culturally and socially contextualized practice of their scholarship, to bridging some of the methodological gaps that existed between them and their Cambodian colleagues. I already mentioned, when discussing the JFTP program, the need acknowledged by many area studies academics to de-concentrate processes of knowledge production on the region. This was envisaged as an activity consisting not only on bringing intellectual debates over to the country-object of their studies (Cambodia), but also, by engaging with local counterparts to contribute to these discussions, *from their own perspectives and on their own terms*, so as to move away from the perpetuation of the phenomenon of scholarly 'metropolitanization' of Southeast Asian studies in Northern academic centers (including today, Northern Asia) as described by Anderson.[7]

6 Szanton, David (2004). 'The Origin, Nature, and Challenges of Area Studies in the United States'. In *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (*Global, Area and International Archives*), edited by David Szanton. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1–33, p. 3.

7 Anderson, Benedict (1998). *The Spectre of Comparisons, Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. New York, Verso, pp. 8–9.

A number of recent programs already sought to address this original imbalance. As I alluded earlier, a few major U.S. foundations had already, since the 1970s, transformed their cold war-era regional centers (Ford in Jakarta; Rockefeller in Bangkok), or even created new ones (Ford in Hanoi, in 1996 – closed in 2010) into resource structures supporting the promotion of new generations of local academics to become true counterparts to their American and international colleagues. We saw in Part 2, that CKS represented one of the latest models of intervention capable of moving the process of decentering – and decentralizing – knowledge production practices further.

As a post-war, post-colonial hybrid organization model embedded in the Cambodian social and academic landscapes, the Center acted as real node of local-global intellectual alliance(s). In many ways, its organizational configuration held the promise of epistemological transformation. Its model of inclusive interaction could help situate its contributors in relation to each other, beyond narrow disciplinary or geographical affiliations. This could facilitate the formulation of new scholarly paradigms against old postulations: the prism of the nation-state (e.g. under JFTP, work around inclusive thematic questions, always in comparison); the fragmentation of knowledge forms (e.g. the inclusion of artists in the discussions); or, more generally, the opposition between theoretical naturalization and local knowledge practices. The Center was not just engaged in exploring alternative narratives of the country and the region's history. As it began its work, along with other like-minded local and international programs and by virtue of its community-based involvements, CKS held the potential to shape a locally-globally connected network of individuals and institutions working simultaneously *on*, *in*, and *with* Cambodia and her society.

1.1 *Khmer Studies: a Fragmented Field*

The process of empowerment of a new community of local and international intellectuals bore special meaning in the case of post-war Cambodia. This effort needed to be framed against a highly divisive environment in which entrenched ideological and personal contentions among academics working on the country had existed for a long time, divisions that mirrored the general state of discord which lay at the origins of the 1970s conflict itself. On the occasion of a visit to Yale University to introduce the Center, I remember the great political scholar of Southeast Asia, James Scott, remarking from the back of the room: "there are two killing fields in Cambodia: the one perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, and the one raging between scholars working on this country".[8] The state of fragmentation of the field of Cambodian studies,

8 Visit to Yale University, New Haven, November 2004.

with its acute and long-lasting personal rifts, will hopefully be a thing of the past. Nonetheless, for CKS, the fractiousness of the academic community had to be taken into account and if possible mitigated by imagining new modes of interactions rooted in a sense of shared responsibility and transnational solidarity. This need of solidarity was made all the more pressing given the general trend in Cambodia, and in most Western countries, of rampant marketization of higher education effected through successive financial squeezes imposed on humanistic learnings, and what these trends do in terms of increased professional insecurity, heightened competition between individuals struggling to achieve work security, short-termism in action, reinforced hierarchies, and a general process of atomization of the scholarly area studies.

In Cambodia in particular, the rifts the civil war provoked among Western and Western-based scholars must be understood through the prism of changing political loyalties vis-à-vis the successive regimes, and beyond them, the ideological divisions of the Cold War that affected the whole region. In a rare analysis of the way Southeast Asian area studies scholars "work and deal with each other and about how these patterns influence the spread and acceptance of ideas in academic circles" (290), the Australian historian of Indonesia Robert Cribb compared the field of Cambodia studies to Australia's "history wars" over migration and the genocide of the Aborigines, a very fractious arena which he contrasted with those, more "appeased", of Indonesian and Malaysian studies, with Thai, Vietnamese and Burmese studies falling in the middle.[9]

It is true that for many specialized scholars, the political turmoil in Cambodia led to a long period of disenfranchisement from the country they studied resulting in their growing marginalization in their home university. Quite generally, from the early 1970s until the 1990s, the field of 'Khmer studies' somewhat froze, with professors and students almost totally cut off from Cambodia. Many individuals, Cambodians or international, considered 'old hands' in the 2000s, were once young promising academics whose scholarly visibility and sense of worthiness drastically shrunk for over two decades, even when they held positions. My experience of interacting with some of these major names in the field (Ang Choulean, Claude Jacques, Kamaleswar Bhattacharya,

9 See Cribb, Robert (2005). 'Circles of Esteem, Standard Works, and Euphoric Couplets'. *Critical Asian Studies* 37 (2): 289–304, pp. 290–300. The episodes of the 1965 anti-communist Indonesian repression and the American-led 'Vietnam War', with its Cambodian extension, dramatically contributed to define the political and scholarly involvement of many Western and local academics. See for instance Benedict Anderson's own itinerary (and his account of the "politicization and polarization" of 'Southeast Asianists' in The *Spectre of Comparison*, pp. 11–12). See also Winichakul, Thongchai (2014). 'Asian Studies across Academies'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (4): 879–897, p. 881.

Vann Molyvann, Jacques Népote, David Chandler, Michael Vickery, Khing Hoc Dy and many others) has led me to realize, in hindsight, the weight of what amounted to cases of personal existential misfortune. American, French and Australian scholars especially bore the brunt of this legacy, which may explain what I perceived as recurrent cases of extreme sensitivity or tendencies to read situations in highly suspicious fashion. Original rifts between individuals often crystallized into narrow closed circles, somewhat reproducing the traditional patron-client model found in Cambodia – an entrenched form of the "circles of esteem" depicted by Cribb.[10]

Cribb also attributes the degree of animosity among scholars of the same field to the level of concentration of the academic population in relation to the range of subjects and sources available. It is the competition over these scarce resources that would encourage tension and conflict between scholars. This argument partially holds for areas such as pre-modern Cambodian history, though this would underestimate the level of dividedness associated with the politicization of historical research since Cambodia's colonial past. It does not explain the level of acrimony that persisted until recently among scholars of modern and contemporary Cambodia. Here, the legacies of the past political conflict are still the determining factor. It has not spared the first generation of Cambodian scholars who populated the field through the 1960s. The emergence of a new wave of specialized researchers in the aftermath of UNTAC, today in their 50s and 60s, challenged this pattern.

With even younger scholars joining in the 2000s, less affected by past baggage, the community of Khmer studies was in fact fast normalizing, even if a certain intensity could still be observed on 'sensitive' subjects such as the episode of the Khmer Rouge or the legacy of UNTAC.[11] Another defining feature is the increasing number of international researchers of Cambodian background finding academic positions in European, Australian, and U.S. colleges, a phenomenon that is strongly influencing the way Khmer or Cambodian studies is shaping up today. With them, new areas of investigation, primarily focusing on the lived consequences of the war in refugee camps of Thailand and among the dispersed diaspora, are being privileged. The emergence of the first post-war generation of Cambodian scholars *from Cambodia* – some of them beneficiaries of the JFTP in the 2000s – now conducting doctoral and

10 Cribb, Robert (2005). 'Circles of Esteem'. p. 300.

11 For example, the heated debate that followed the completion of the thesis by French historian Sasha Sher (Sher, Sacha (2003). 'Le parcours politique des "Khmers rouges": formation, édification, projet et pratiques, 1945–1978'. Paris VII University, later turned into a book (2004). *Le Kampuchéa des "Khmers rouges", essai de compréhension d'une tentative de révolution*. Paris: l'Harmattan).

postdoctoral studies overseas, is perhaps the most significant phenomenon of the recent years.

In an article published in 2014, the Thai historian Thonchai Winichakul considered that 'Khmer Studies' as a field was finally showing trends comparable with those in Indonesian or Thai studies, thanks to a growing process of internationalization of the community of scholars involved and an increasing importance of national and Asian scholars within the field. The fact remains that Cambodia, together perhaps with Myanmar and Laos, is one of the countries of Southeast Asia in which there are still too few local scholars able to engage in in-depth research while working and teaching at universities in those countries.[12]

The engagement of international scholars in Cambodia was also necessary in order to help develop new spaces of public debate by providing new intellectual infrastructures and a better integration of local intellectuals in public debates. In the guise of a link between Cambodian and international academia, the participation of culturally, linguistically and historically informed area-specific 'experts' – including members of the country's diaspora – was of critical importance.[13] Their contribution could help render imported reference knowledge (i.e. new concepts, new theories) accessible and locally relevant, while a dynamics of close interactions with local partners should benefit these international experts by deepening their understanding of the context – sheltering them from the risks of working with gross misconceptions sometimes at the origins of the divisions affecting the field, and possibly worse.[14] This kind of interaction was all the more necessary if, as in the case

12 Winichakul, Thongchai (2014). 'Asian Studies across Academies', p. 881.

13 This trend should be contrasted with that of a growing number of social science researchers, not necessarily trained in any regional expertise or knowledgeable of Cambodia, its history or language, who chose the country as a neutral available ground for their 'investigations'. Their work is often based on superficial knowledge of the place and is highly dependent on quantitative data or shallow journalistic sources.

14 Since Edward Said, a number of scholars have pointed to the propensity of Western colonial scholarship to frame theories of universal pretense that were shaped without the incorporation of local experiences or proved to be totally disconnected from realities of the ground. A tragic example in the case of Cambodia is the introduction into Angkorian historiography by French scholars of the Wittfogelian theory on the 'Asiatic mode of production'. These now contested Euro-centric views may have influenced, at least indirectly, the senseless pursuit by the Khmer Rouge leaders of massive hydraulic public works responsible for the deaths of thousands of people. On the subject, see the series of archaeologists and geographers from W.J. van Liere, Philip Stott, to Robert Acker who, each in their turn, sought to debunk this grand narrative. (On this highly contentious discussion, following W.J. van Liere's (1980) groundbreaking article 'Traditional Water Management in the Lower Mekong Basin'. *World Archaeology* 11 (3), Water Management: 265–280, see

of CKS, the program's stated objective was about framing a *shared* basis of understanding, also available in the vernacular language – a basis for future intellectual exchanges between colleagues from Cambodia as well as outside.

1.2 *Working with International Academic Institutions*

Determining the degree to which individual scholars engaged with the hybrid structure of CKS can help consider the kind of relations it could entertain with the international – largely American – academic institutional world. During my ten-year tenure as director, I visited nearly sixty universities or specialized institutions, in fifteen countries. We sought to develop collaborations with these universities with the objective of reaching out to the few potentially interested scholars in their midst, but also to identify creative modes of institution-to-institution partnership. To that end, a generic 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MoU) was developed that included the recognition by these universities of CKS's unique capacity-building component and its commitment to help rebuild an intellectual community in Cambodia. I was generally received well by members of these universities who expressed their support for the objectives of the institute.

This, however, only rarely materialized into tangible collaborative policies, even when these institutions ran programs on Cambodia and her region. As I will explain, projects associating universities' libraries with that of the Center could be envisaged along with publication exchanges or even visits by technical staff. Other than that, the idea of linking educational or research-based activities with the Center's capacity-building programs, if not singled-handedly 'owned' by one faculty who would handle fundraising, administration and communication tasks, would not naturally emerge out of these establishments. CKS was not in a capacity nor could it enjoy the kind of financial resources that would allow to unilaterally carry out all the groundwork necessary to accomplish this kind of Center-University collaboration.

From my standpoint, moreover, I came to see many of these area studies academic programs as parts of a more general problem in Western universities that appeared ill-prepared to operate beyond their restricted functional tasks of teaching and supporting individual research undertakings, by aiming to interact in a meaningful and mutually beneficial fashion with different kinds of partner institutions, particularly those with an unprivileged or 'third-world' background. As mentioned above, there are structural reasons behind this

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Higham, Charles (2001). *The Civilization of Angkor*. London: Phoenix, p. 156, pp. 158–160). See also Sher, Sacha (2003). 'Le parallèle éminemment douteux entre l'*angkar* révolutionnaire et Angkor'. *Aséanie* 11: 21–37.

difficulty to engage in serious collaborative exchanges and capacity building, largely because Western academics are themselves afflicted by a sense of insecurity and a constant shortage of resources at their disposal. Their capacities to look outward and engage in activities aimed at deepening interactions in/on a place like Cambodia are limited. This is illustrative of the inadequate position universities find themselves in today, that are no longer able to offer the kind of community-orientated provisions usually referred to as 'public service' that previously fulfilled one of their three core missions.[15] There is now solid literature on the effects of the neoliberal ideology on the functioning of Western universities and on the ensuing restrictions of their roles in society.[16]

Universities' staff and faculty have in fact turned inward. They have become obsessed with status differentiation and national and international ranking. Financial sustainability, fundraising, and ways to attract paying students are all dependent on these rankings.[17] As Morginson noted, neoliberal higher education is now organized in the capitalist model, one based on status competition.[18] Consequently, a 'public service' organization like CKS, built on a non-competitive model, saw many university departments seeking to be associated with the Center for the status and visibility they could gain in terms of 'attractiveness' – for the purposes of public relations and pulling in paying students or even external funds. Not surprisingly also, a number of these institutions' faculty came to see the Center as a useful entry point

15 The idea that universities should provide 'public services' is distinctively American. It is rooted in the religious origin of many of U.S. higher education organizations. The concept is however open to interpretation, with its application varying between institutions and through time. Public service has always come after teaching and research as a university's core mission. See Crosson, Patricia (1985). 'Public Service in Higher Education: Practices and Priorities'. Association for the Studies of Higher Education, ERIC Digest 85, Washington DC.

16 Hyatt, Susan B., Shear, Boone W. and Susan Wright (Eds.) (2015). *Learning under Neoliberalism: Ethnographies of Governance in Higher Education*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books; Marginson, Simon (2004). 'Competition and Markets in Higher Education: A Glonacal Analysis'. *Policy Futures in Education* 2 (2): 175–244; Strathern, Marylin (Ed.) (2003). *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. Oxon: Routledge Abingdon.

17 On ranking as an all-pervasive feature of today's higher education landscapes, see Collins, Francis, Park, Gil-Sung (2015). 'Ranking and the multiplication of reputation'. *Higher Education*: 115–129 (DOI 10.1007/s10734-015-9941-3).

18 Marginson, Simon (2004). 'Competition and Markets in Higher Education: A Glonacal Analysis', p. 186. "Globalization and markets together are changing the competition for status goods (positional goods) in higher education. The competition is becoming more 'economized' because mediated by private capacity to pay and intensified because there is diminished attention to public good objectives such as equality of opportunity." (p. 175).

to access new spaces for their own status promotion such as for example development-earmarked funding from philanthropic institutions – something they, from institutions in rich countries, could not otherwise access.

1.3 *Universities' Librarians and Supporting Staff*

The objective of this account on international academic civic collaboration is not to draw a generalizing bleak portrait of all institutions and their members. Some of them could find ways to establish truly meaningful relations that supported CKS's humanistic mission while enriching their scholarly work. As I will explain, these were primarily found among universities' 'support staff' like librarians, publishers, or 'study abroad' directors, or else, among early career academics who retained a sense of social and institutional responsibility, and a propensity to resist the logics of outright competition. One privileged space of interaction between CKS and Western academic institutions was the latter's support for the library of the Center. It is as though libraries, spaces of public intellectualism *par excellence* – even when their access is restricted to paying registered students – had become host, or rather refuge, to the kind of social responsibility once bestowed to their mother institutions. Supporting the CKS library was in any case an easy way for scholars and administrators to help the Center. Because one of my tasks was to assist in building the center's collection, I made sure to include in my visits to universities meetings with representatives of their libraries.

Among the libraries I visited were those of Cornell, Michigan, University of California Los Angeles, Northern Illinois and Chicago universities, the London-based School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore, as well as the former East-German Central Library in Berlin, the New York Public Library or Ho Chi Minh City's General Scientific Library. I felt always emboldened by the level of enthusiastic support CKS received for the cause of its library at Wat Damnak. The powerful symbolic image of building a book collection in a country ravaged by totalitarianism and genocide must have contributed to this eagerness to assist the Center.

A plainer reason can be found in the sense of solidarity and a strong culture of public service in the academic division of labor that continues to animate university librarians. Many of them took upon themselves to directly support the Siem Reap collection by scanning materials (Chicago, Cornell); shipping books (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, UCLA, Michigan, Singapore and SOAS); offering subscriptions to their journals (Hawaii, Northern Illinois, *Institut de Recherche sur le Sud-Est Asiatique*, Marseilles, Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Siam Society in Bangkok); train our

Cambodian staff (ISEAS, Cornell); or, for a number of them, by spending their holidays in Siem Reap to work at the Center's library. The SOAS Southeast Asian librarian, Nicholas Martland spent days of his free time to train the CKS librarians, or by sending duplicate materials whenever they became available, while his ISEAS colleague, Ch'ng Kim See, hosted the CKS Head Librarian Oum Daraneth for two weeks in Singapore to study cataloguing and conservation techniques. David Magier, director of Columbia University's South-Asian collection, also spent weeks at the CKS library to change its catalog system while his colleague from Chicago University, Jim Nye, assigned students to copy materials of critical importance for the Center. Not to mention UCLA's librarian Hao Phan, who kept shipping precious reference titles to us, free of charge. In the United States, CKS received indefatigable support through the professional network of librarians specialized on Southeast Asian collections organized in the Committee on Research Materials on Southeast Asia (CORMOSEA) of the Association of Asian Studies. I always appreciated the high level of conviviality that existed among the members who immediately adopted CKS. CORMOSEA was one of the institutional platforms in which the Center's public mission was fully valued and appreciated.[19] This intense effort of collaboration and support to the Center's library has continued to this day.

2 Facilitating Special Educational Activities

Besides support for the CKS library, collaboration with universities could take the form of study-tours to Cambodia, another structural segment within the university system – though not free for the participating students – that permitted some creativity on the part of their organizers. On many occasions, CKS was solicited to help coordinate educational travel for students and faculty. It did so for a consortium of high schools in the American North-East, or, for instance, for Chulalongkorn University's Southeast Asian graduate program. Some tours were willing to enroll a few CKS/JFTP Cambodian members to take part in joint research events: a group of archaeologists at the University of Hawaii; the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the New School of Social Studies; the Faculty of Social Sciences at National University of Singapore followed this model. A number of institutions relied on CKS to recommend Cambodian scholars for their training programs. The institute also benefitted

19 CORMOSEA included the librarians from Harvard (Raymond Lum); Yale (Richard Richie); Michigan (Susan Go); UCLA (Hao Phan); UC Berkeley (Virginia Chi); Cornell (Greg Green); U. of Wisconsin-Madison (Larry Ashmun), among others. See www.cormosea.org.

from academic exchange networks like the Manila-based nonprofit organization Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP) supported by Japan. CKS also worked closely with two Thai institutions, Chulalongkorn and Chiang Mai universities, to enroll some of its Cambodian members in their MA programs.

Unsurprisingly, universities that could engage in atypical initiatives were often those enjoying high levels of administrative and academic support resources. These were 'rich' institutions like Chicago or Cornell universities. In the end, however, it was up to individual academic staff, and students, to engage and sometimes even raise funds for specific research and training-based support. A good example of a complementary collaboration between the imperatives of institution development of CKS and student education was the training course series developed by Arizona State University's Business School team under Clifford Shultz. Shultz not only brought students to CKS every year: he asked them, as exercise, to develop a communication strategy for the Center, which proved very helpful. Likewise, the School of architecture at National University of Singapore under Richard Ho sent his students to the Center for their architectural studio. Some of the ideas that emerged from these training exercises were later used by the Center. Another example of mutually benefiting collaboration was when Eric Heikkila from the University of Southern California, also secretary of the Pacific Rim Council on Urban Development, helped CKS put together the 2008 roundtable "Urban Development Under the Shadow of Angkor". For every one of these initiatives, there was always someone in these universities who dedicated his/her time and resources to help the Center's mission. No doubt these efforts had equally self-interested motives. It was nonetheless their organizers' contribution to the development of CKS that rendered them worthwhile, and at the end, socially responsible.

2.1 *Facilitating Research Projects*

Some research projects were conducted in partnership with CKS. Only a few of the scholars involved were able to contribute funding. This was the case of the New School (urban studies) or Chicago University (socio-economic research). Others relied on CKS to find funds: NUS, with the Sainsbury Trust-funded training course in Cultural Resource Management or Hawaii University with the first Rockefeller-supported project in pre-Angkorian archaeology. A number of research and teaching collaborative projects were developed thanks to the scholarly interests of individual faculty: Abdul-Malique Simone, specialist in urban theory at the New School, received funding from the Ford Foundation to develop a research and training project with CKS. The program, devoted to Phnom Penh's youth urban cultures, was established in conjunction with one

of the JFTP's sessions led by Penny Edward. It culminated in a major international conference on Southeast Asian Cities in Phnom Penh (2006). With Hawaii University, CKS drew from ties established with Cambodia in the field of archaeology before the creation of CKS. Under Bion Griffith and Miriam Stark's supervision, the capacity-building initiative consisted of research, excavation, analysis and leadership training under the first three-year program supported by the Rockefeller Foundation. The project also ended with an international conference in Siem Reap. With Chicago University, it was a three-year village-based socio-economic research project on the Mekong region led by Robert Townsend, while for Cambodia, Alan Kolata served as its international Principle Investigator. On all of those occasions, the question I needed to ask myself before committing to collaborate was whether these programs were going to support the Center's hybrid mission. It was necessary to ensure that CKS would not become a mere provider of local services to foreign scholars conducting 'extractive' research. The temptation always existed, particularly when we were asked to suggest local Cambodian 'research assistants', without clear indications that the people hired would benefit beyond being compensated for the punctual services they provided.[20]

3 Relations with Individual Scholars

When discussing 'international' scholars, I must stress that most originated from North America and Europe, and to a lesser extent Japan and Oceania. I am not referring here to academics of Cambodian background from these countries, a subject that will be addressed later. To draw generalizations is hazardous. My comments must be read as those from someone who was both a witness and an actor. In hindsight, I can say that their involvement with CKS and their appreciation for what the organization stood to achieve in the country was often ambiguous owing largely to their own insecurity due to the over-competitive nature of the sector in which they operated. In theory, an organization like CKS should have been valued for what it offered in terms of original opportunities for humanities and social sciences researchers, to enrich their specialized knowledge by engaging in participative local activities. This socially active form of academic involvement could provide them with an alternative option that directly contributed to the current theoretical discussion

20 On some occasions, the promise made by these institutions of providing 'training' to the hired Cambodian staff was not fulfilled. In such cases, it was very difficult for the Center to hold these 'partners' to account.

on the need to decenter 'area/regional studies' in Western universities.[21] Substantive intellectual pursuits such as these and strategies of career survival or advancement were two very distinct questions.

3.1 *Early Career Academics*

Early career academics, I discovered, showed a keen interest in CKS's institutional and programmatic model.[22] They were particularly receptive to the Center's capacity-building mission. Even when unsure of their own future career, many showed an alignment to the idea of promoting scholarship on Cambodia *with* Cambodians. This took the form of young graduates offering to volunteer at the institute or the library, or doctoral students assisting me and other CKS staff during visits to their university. One factor determining these contributions was, I thought, a craving of these young academics to overcome a sense of estrangement in their scholarship which they felt when researching Cambodia's society. For one thing, their support for CKS sought to mitigate the fundamental imbalance many of them experienced inherent to cold-war style academic area studies, with its tendency to appropriate local stories without 'giving back' – what historian Michael Laffan appropriately described as "the discrete object of scholarly colonization".[23] Their implicit support for CKS's 'postcolonial' engagement provided these young academics with a sense of social – and ethical – retribution justifying their field-research expatriation. Clifford Geertz already pointed to this imbalance of power between 'researcher' and 'researched' which he thought could never be solved satisfactorily: "Neither empathy, nor brokerage, nor openly admitting bias can get round the un-get-roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer's descriptions, not those of the described".[24]

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21 The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, the Netherlands, undertook a reflection on this subject, under its program "Rethinking Asian Studies in the Global Context" (www.rethinking.asia/).

22 The ideas drawn in this section result from multiple discussions I held with CKS doctoral and post-doctoral fellows. My proximity with a number of them derived probably from the fact that we were of the same age range and because of the very informal atmosphere that existed within the Center. A number of them were PhD candidates or young postgraduates, recipients of the CKS fellowships (ECA for Americans, Florence Gould for French).

23 Laffan, Michael (2014). Workshop *Transcending the Bay of Bengal* report. Princeton University. www.iias.nl.

24 Geertz, Clifford (1990). *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist As Author* (1988). Stanford University Press, pp. 144–5.

In fact, many of these early career scholars were seduced by the fact that through CKS they not only immersed themselves in Cambodian life but that they could directly impact social reality, allowing them to relate their scholarship to the institute's local capacity-building involvement. Participating in one of the Center's programs aimed at training Cambodian scholars helped some of them to frame their own theoretical learnings.[25] They recognized how a space of intellectual exchanges like the Center could not only enrich local debates but also reinforce their own social worthiness, in Cambodia or at home, and with it, the constitution of a new kind of transnational North-South network of committed academics. This was particularly true as far as inter-personal interactions were concerned, beyond disciplinary or national boundaries, for that amounted to a new form of non-competitive collegiality. It was always interesting to see how, after a few months spent at the Center, fellows were transformed, largely as a result of their confidence in interacting with local colleagues, with other researchers, and with the CKS staff. This phenomenon of socialization was always facilitated by charismatic figures among the fellows, or individuals who had already spent long stretches of time at the Center. For this socialization to happen, young international scholars had to provisionally break with the normative utilitarian function of professional academics which they held at home, and what this entailed in terms of competition and struggle. People who stayed for a certain amount of time, especially JFTP Visiting Professors, while enjoying their experience at CKS as some kind of escape from their university routine, often expressed their ambivalence towards their social worthiness as scholars and the fact that they were torn between their desire to contribute to the civic cause of the Center and the pressure they felt to conform to the restraining academic system in which they were imbedded.[26]

This ambivalence was especially perceptible among young academics whose professional future was still uncertain. Despite their personal affinities with CKS and its unconventional ways, they felt the pressure to play by the narrow rules of their institutions. From their university or department's point of view, they were in Cambodia for a limited amount of time during which they were meant to 'collect data' that would lead to quantifiable outcomes such as publications or the development of new syllabi, all 'counting' in their academic ranking, with the future of their position in the balance. If this malaise was tangible for young, untenured faculty, it was too, for a few mature academics I encountered whose position remained precarious, often because of the

25 Discussions with Peter Hammer, Visiting Professor of JFTP.

26 Not a small number of these ex-CKS fellows eventually chose to abandon academic pursuit at home. Some of them settled in Cambodia.

invisible – i.e. uncompetitive – nature of their area of specialization: philology or archaeology, for instance. Having internalized the hazardousness of their professional situation, they could not afford to distract their attentions from the restrictive fulfillment of their career plan.

A trying problem for many of these academics was the amount of financial debts they contracted during their undergraduate studies, forcing them from the outset to prioritize their actions often at the expense of out-of-the-box creative activities like those represented by CKS. There were of course differences between nationalities: French scholars in general were in dearer needs of financial support and academic coaching, the result of a structural lack of support from their universities. British academics who were attached to the Center seemed to enjoy more autonomy than their French colleagues, even though they struggled financially. For Americans, the clear difference was between those attached to financially endowed elite Ivy League universities and their area studies programs and those from less well-to-do institutions. And here lies one of the most worrisome tendencies embodied by these otherwise eager scholars: as area studies scholars who devoted considerable time to learning about a society, its language and history, they felt at the end of the day structurally limited to engage creatively with this same society, beyond their teaching assignments at their university, or their fieldwork needed for their next publication to count for their tenure track.

3.2 *Established Academics*

In contrast with the young colleagues I easily interacted with, my perception is that established scholars in their fifties and sixties holding stable positions in recognized institutions showed a lower propensity to identify with CKS and its mission. My sense is that they primarily regarded the Center as an opportunity to enhance their future career plans. This included academics whose progressive-leaning scholarship, and their purported concerns for the welfare of communities, did not lead me to expect such attitude, particularly towards a capacity-building program like CKS. As director, I was in the awkward situation of being sometimes wooed by few of these established academics for what the organization could hypothetically offer them in terms of opportunities, funds, or influence on the board, and through it, access to wealthy potential supporters.[27] This observation is corroborated by what I came to see as an overly hierarchical academic milieu in which those who had succeeded in ascending its internal ladder owed it not just to their scholarly achievements but also to their ability to carefully use their status in the university

27 I refrain from naming any individual(s).

institutional system to their advantage. No established area studies program however known for its Cambodian sympathies was spared from this almost structural predicament. The ability of some individual scholars to conform to the unwritten rules of the university – in Bourdieu's definition, a sociological 'field' with its own normative sets of values and hierarchies – is what gives them their social prominence.

A way to respond to these peoples' solicitations was to encourage them to search for external funding sources. I sought to channel their appetite in ways that it could contribute to the Center's development. The absence of alternatives imposed that a mutually beneficial *modus operandi* be found between them and CKS. This disposition to accommodate highly individualistic academic strategies is also symptomatic of the commercialization of universities, particularly in the U.S., where the system produces its own celebrities, a winner-takes-all culture that rewards a few supposedly highly achieving academics and leaves little room for the development of their junior colleagues. Academic 'stardom' did not fit the inclusive model embodied by CKS.[28] A concern we had at the time was that this symptom of – mainly Western – academic self-centeredness should not dilute CKS's Cambodian vision founded on a combination of scholarly pursuit and North-South academic solidarity; that it should not be appropriated by individuals or groups whose interests could easily lead to a more restrictive agenda of the Center. There was indeed always the temptation to reduce the scope of action of CKS and to restrict its role to that of a more traditional first-world "overseas research center" serving quasi exclusively international scholars going to do fieldwork in Cambodia. This point alone justifies why CKS, in its public descriptions and its publications, continuously needed to stress its character as a hybrid academic and capacity building, Cambodian *and* American (or international), structure.

In the end, it was of course up to individuals' personal judgment to decide how to deal with and treat the institute, to behave as a collegial partner or as someone primarily interested in his/her narrow, individual plans. As I went on with the job, I often felt a sense of estrangement from some of those established academics from well-funded institutions. I could not fail to see how their behavior, determined by the structural tendency of today's academia could jeopardize the fragile equilibrium that founded the Center. By turning into self-centered functional agents whose impact on the societies they study remain circumscribed by their personal strategy, these scholars fitted Gramsci's

28 On the origins of this process of academic 'celebritization' see, for example Moran, Joe (1998). 'Cultural Studies and Academic Stardom'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1 (1): 67–82.

definition of 'organic intellectuals' who had renounced their role as autonomous social consciences or educators, even when their study – anthropology or history – should have compelled them to take a self-reflexive distance from their research and its production context.[29]

3.3 *Scholars from the Diaspora*

The generalizations I just drew about first-world scholars cannot be fully transposed to international academic individuals of Cambodian descent, even when, given the massive exoduses of the war and the post-war periods, they became citizens of the same 'developed' countries and thereafter, as scholars in those same universities, they experienced similar limitations. For students and researchers with Cambodian heritage, the choice to undertake studies on Cambodia often lies in a highly emotional search for rootedness and a search "to address the past in order to go beyond it".[30] It must be linked to their search for a connection with the land of their parents, the place where they were born or from where they were uprooted as a result of the war. For these scholars of second-generation Cambodian descent, the combination of an affective dedication to the subject of their study – the "home" described by Thongchai Winichakul – and an ability to socially embed themselves thanks to their knowledge of the language, and/or their family connections in the country, clearly set them apart from other 'international' scholars. These special connections with the country that is today Cambodia must, however, be compounded with experiences of estrangement once those diasporic scholars chose to move and work in their ancestral homeland, often a realization of their 'foreign-ness'. Khatharya Um, herself a first-generation refugee in the United States, described these legacies of trauma as they registered in Cambodian diasporic families and communities.[31]

CKS proved to be a fecund meeting ground for young academics of Cambodian background particularly through their involvement in its junior and senior fellowship programs. On average, one in five American and

29 Gramsci, Antonio (1971). *Selections from the Prisons Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. I once visualized this condition of academic domestication in the context of the modern city of Singapore, where I attended a conference at which a number of academic panels included stringent criticisms against the policies of the host country. This academic event was held in a commercial hotel located above a major luxurious shopping mall crowded with indifferent consumers.

30 Um, Khatharya (2015). *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, p. 251.

31 See Um, Khatharya (2015). Ibid., especially Chapter 7 "Homeland, Exile, and Return", pp. 216–253. On the relations between diasporic scholarship and its object of study, see Winichakul, T. (2014). 'Asian Studies across Academies', p. 884.

French undergraduate students who participated in the Center's annual Summer Junior Fellowship initiative was of Cambodian origin. The experience, based on team-building activities for a group comprising students from Cambodia, the U.S. and France in the congenial environment of Siem Reap provided these young students with a first introduction to Cambodian life. Meaningful exchanges generally took place between overseas and local students. Interesting discoveries sometimes occurred as a result of these contacts. They often revolved around hitherto unknown connections or parallels between overseas Cambodians and Cambodians from Cambodia, but also between American and French students of Cambodian descent. I remember for instance, thanks to the CKS platform, how a project about a community museum developed by Cambodian-Americans in Chicago found a parallel initiative by some Cambodian-French in the suburbs of Paris. It was in fact through the mediation of local participants that the different ways of being 'Cambodian' (or of Cambodian background) in either the U.S. or Europe could be openly addressed, if not reconciled. This model of post-conflict educational exposure was certainly a meaningful way for young members of the Khmer diaspora to engage with their country of origin. It also contributed to develop a sense of international integration, and of cosmopolitan worthiness, among the young local Cambodians who built personal ties with their foreign counterparts. These were important factors, especially if they wished to pursue further studies or engage in other social activities in the country.

A similar point can be made about the young American and French scholars of Cambodian origin who carried out their MA or PhD research at the Center. Throughout my tenure at CKS, I witnessed a number of these scholars going about their research. The range of subjects they studied varied, although a strong interest in societal phenomena such as aspects of local social fabric, or of citizens and communities' grass-root agency tended to dominate their investigations: local medical practices and responses in the wake of the introduction of Western medication (Sokhieng Au, Chean Men, Pollie Bith Melander); conditions of forcibly deported refugees in their ancestral country (Navin Moul); or more generally, the multifaceted aspects in the interaction between Cambodia and the diasporic Cambodians (Stephanie Nann, Khatarya Um), and post-genocide survival strategies (Kosal Path, Leakhena Nou, Linda Saphan). Other research focused on the post-UNTAC political situation, international aid and the constitution of a neo-authoritarian system (Kheang Un, Sophal Ear). If many scholars from the diaspora focused on ways Cambodian society coped in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, few chose to engage in systematic historical research, particularly on the circumstances leading up to the recent Cambodian tragedy, a subject which, to this day, remains largely

a preserve of Western (white) scholars.[32] For these young heritage researchers, the model of CKS as a bridge between their countries of 'adoption' and 'origin' proved critically helpful. Many of them generously contributed to its projects.[33]

Older scholars of first-generation Cambodian descent whom I interacted with had a more complex rapport with CKS. Few chose to return to Cambodia. If they did, it was often after their professional retirement, sometimes to work for national institutions which they tried to help to bring to 'international standards'. Their situation of seniority contributed to heighten their social status largely grounded on the knowledge and experience they acquired in the pre-war period. These made them highly concerned and also very critical of any organized efforts to rebuild a Cambodian post-conflict intellectual public sphere. In their interactions with younger scholars, they often acted as repository of customary knowledge, capable of relating current ways and practices to those from pre-war Cambodia. Their role as embodiments of an otherwise lost continuity in intellectual life made them essential for the reconstitution of the cultural and intellectual life in the country.[34]

My professional interaction with these older Cambodian returnee intellectuals was a contested one. I impute this difficulty to the strained situation Cambodian returnee scholars experienced in a country that was both theirs and yet no more the one they remembered as children or young adults. As a young white foreigner in charge of a program that was deeply charged with cultural and symbolic meanings, my position vis-à-vis these scholars would sometimes be very uncomfortable, something I recognize and understand better now.

Most Cambodian-origin international scholars of fifty years and over I dealt with were educated in France. This was probably one of the sources of the problem. Embedded in an acute postcolonial situation, in the society of their country's former *métropole*, some of these French Cambodian

32 There are exceptions of course: Sokhieng Au worked on health care in the colonial period while Suppya Nut's research on the royal ballet, starting in the French protectorate, extended to the post-independence period beyond UNTAC. Many of the young diasporic history researchers, if they speak Khmer, are not always conversant in reading the language. Historians of the modern period must, moreover, master French because a considerable amount of primary source material is in this language.

33 To describe the difficulties 'heritage scholars' encountered when interacting with local Cambodians would require a much longer study. This has generally to do with the complex interactions between members of the diaspora and their country of origin.

34 I am thinking especially of a number of Cambodian returnees who taught at the Royal University of Fine Arts Faculty of Archaeology in the 2000s. For this section, I will refrain from providing names.

exiled intellectuals showed signs of what could be described as injured dignity, a feeling often reinforced by recurring experiences of patronizing behavior on the part of some French and Western scholars and their institutions. Being French myself (though with no history of past relations with Cambodia), I realize now how my interactions with them certainly suffered from this post-colonial baggage. I did not encounter the same sense of conflicting identities when I dealt with diasporic Cambodians from other countries. These French-Cambodian scholars escaped the conflict and completed their academic training in exile. A few of them were even involved in the CEDORECK project in the 1970–80s. Some whom I would categorize as proponents of a restricted appreciation of *Khméritude*, perhaps in reaction to the overwhelming and often negative French or Western legacy on their country, cultivated a reification of Cambodia and its culture that often verged on a hard form of nationalism – thereby reversing the kind of essentialist description found in colonial literatures. Winichakul qualifies this attitude as "nationalistic" or imbued with "nativist intellectual tendencies". It can be compared with the movement for "Filipino psychology" in the 1980s–90s in the Philippines, a postcolonial reaction to the intellectual hegemonic influences of U.S. academia similar to that of France in Cambodia.[35]

Needless to say that such an attitude alleviates the possibility of intercultural comprehensions and interactions with 'outsiders', being non-Cambodians or 'new Cambodians', unless they too convert to the timeless notion of an enshrined 'Khmer-ness' and conform to dubious conceptions of (Khmer) 'authenticity'.[36] For these proponents of 'ultra-khmerism', emphasis in their scholarship was primarily placed on rural popular culture as well as on linguistic knowledge, particularly rooted in the post-Angkor-pre-colonial 'middle' period. These emphases supported the existence of a vernacular oral Cambodian culture against elitist orientalist conceptions. This intellectual stand, first found in the works of Saveros Pou and Ken Vansak, later followed by those of Ang Choulean, as we saw in Part 1, contributed to the birth of 'Khmer studies' as an autonomous field of academic inquiry. In some cases, however, a narrow interpretation of these approaches led to a rather exclusive national(ist) narrative – in content and in its political applications – not so different from those used by past regimes imbued with nativist notions. This intellectual

35 See Winichakul, T. (2014). 'Asian Studies across Academies', p. 890.

36 In discussions in French, I often came across the adjectives of *authentique* [authentic] or *pur* [pure] preceding the noun *Khmer*. The latter word, when used in Molière's language, more perhaps than in English, tends to reinforce a racialist/culturalist exclusive definition.

stand, however critical it had been in the construction of the field, carried with it a kind of exclusionism in its scholarly practice that somehow contradicted that promoted by CKS.

As I now see it, suffering from the legacy of colonial and neo-colonial alienation, and witnesses of the disintegration of their country in the 1970s, some of these French-Cambodian scholars felt tempted to reject the idea of any inter-cultural dialogues in the name of a preliminary assertion of a reified Khmer Culture, a *Khméritude* which, they believed, ought to remain clear from exogenous corruption. In practice, those holding this view displayed an obvious lack of goodwill to interact with the Center. This same attitude also came to the fore towards Cambodians brought up in the country, for what the former saw as the limited capacities and the lack of proper education of the latter – shameful reminders, in their eyes, of the devastating condition of the country and its culture.

This stand by a few scholars and their followers, foreign and local, is by definition suspicious of any perceived form of hybridization of Cambodian culture. By clinging to a reified definition of Cambodian 'purity' – *le Cambodge des origines* – they displayed a desperate expression of the "identity of vulnerability" phenomenon described by Springer.[37] This stand needs to be compensated by more inclusive, open activities, with special efforts put on exposing members of the new generation of Cambodians to the multiplicities of conditions, their situational character, and the need to always seek for comparisons and interactions. Not only would this emphasize how the colonial-era orientalist discourse on Cambodia could lead to distortion, it would make clear how such ideologically tainted line of scholarship, however valuable in its contributions, runs the risk of leaving a number of individuals in an unhealthy state of marginality and parochialism, the ingredients for future politics of exclusion and hatred.

These few scholar individuals must be contrasted with the larger contingent of scholars whose conception of Cambodian culture were not defensively defined. This larger category of overseas Cambodian intellectuals might be characterized as advocates of a open *khméritude*. Their position is rooted in a more cosmopolitan and secular intellectual tradition from which they see the process of national cultural revitalization, if it needs to be reclaimed after decades of destructions or relegations, ought also to be grounded in a broader platform of exchanges and comparisons in which contributors from different backgrounds, as long as they intend on engaging critically with Cambodia,

37 Springer, Simon, (2015). *Cambodia's Neoliberal Order: Violence, Authoritarianism and the Contestation of Public Space*. London: Routledge, pp. 55–56.

have their place. Scholars like King Hoc Dy, Son Soubert, Suppya Nut or Michel Rethy Antelme, to list just a few whom I am familiar with held a more open appreciation of Cambodia and her culture.

As we worked on developing CKS as a legitimate national-international intellectual center, we learned to identify which of the diasporic Cambodian scholars we could work with. It was clear with the first group that the model of the Center as an inclusive platform was not what they hoped to see developing even when we tried to engage them through projects or activities.[38] In hindsight, I am no longer sure that this open-arms stand was an appropriate one to follow. At any rate, we never fully succeeded in these efforts. As outsiders, whatever contribution we were to make, our presence stood in their way. Their exclusiveness kept them at bay from the Center and from its avowed double objective of widening the field and the community of local participants. As for the other diasporic Cambodian academics we worked with, they fully embraced the dual vision of the Center which they contributed to shape through their research and training initiatives. With them, a relationship that went beyond mere intellectual or scholarly pursuits could be cultivated: their perseverance in the capacity of the country's new generations to overcome its past traumas, and to engage, as its adopted citizens in an interconnected world, inspired much of the Center's institutional and programmatic model.[39]

3.4 *Socializing Scholars in the Neoliberal Age*

In discussing my experience with these first-world individual scholars, it is the civic implications at the level of institutions like universities that primarily interests me. More than anything, I believe it is the general climate of competition between individual scholars and the structurally unstable environment in which they evolved in their establishments that contributed to a fundamental estrangement between some academics with their prescribed role and CKS with its local-civic obligations. What I also discovered is the degree of isolation from other strands of society in which scholars from 'developed

38 With its title, however, the Center for *Khmer* Studies certainly called for confusion. It could give the impression that it was excluding other ethnic and religious groups from the Cambodian 'geo-body'. As mentioned in Part 2, Chapter 4, the adjective 'Khmer' in the title finds its origins in a suggestion made by Vann Molyvann and Ang Choulean at the 1999 founding workshop. This must have pleased the proponents of an ethnicized definition of *Khméritude*.

39 The appointment as CKS's third Director of Krisna Uk (2012), a second-generation diasporic Cambodian-British woman, constituted a powerful message. It consecrated both the Center's Cambodian commitment, and its openness to the different strands of academics working with and through it.

countries' often find themselves. An academic by training, my perception as director toward fellow researchers gravitating around the Center gradually changed as I became aware of the distance that existed between their priorities and mine. In their eyes, I was an 'administrator': someone with some form of executive authority no longer deemed to be considered a fellow academic in what Michael Herzfeld has called the unwritten "hierarchy of values".[40] It is, however, through this change in statutory position – again hierarchy – that I gained a better appreciation for those, academics or not, who undertook institutional and program-building responsibilities.[41] I earlier mentioned the group of librarians and their constant support for CKS and its library. Their understanding of the inner functioning of their universities differed from that held by academics who usually oversaw their work. Yet, this work, like that of the Center, was about building intellectual infrastructure – the very condition of future research and teaching scholarship. An analogy between the creation of an institution of higher learning like CKS and the establishment of a full-scale university was given to me during discussions with university administrators and academic support staff. I learned that the creation of a library (building and collection) and a few journals often constituted the intellectual groundbreaking prerequisites before the establishment of a full-fledged university. This was for instance the case with Chicago University, founded in 1890 by John D. Rockefeller.[42]

CKS was born out of the social consciousness of a small circle of intrepid young academics. We were joined along the way by a number of international scholars, like the Visiting Professors of the JFTP. They may not have encountered the level of exhilaration (and exhaustion) the first group experienced in the early heroic years, but they too, through their work and time, contributed to building the unique space that was the Center. With JFTP, they helped their Cambodian colleagues to develop their own research, teaching and public

40 Herzfeld, Michael (2004). *The Body Impolitic: Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

41 The scholar and administrator Ralph Nicholas, former President of the Board of the American Institute of Indian Studies and emeritus professor of anthropology at Chicago University immediately comes to mind. In any discussions I had with him, Nicholas always understood the governance issues which I was describing. His ability to operate as both a responsible institutional person and at the same time an intellectual highly sensitive to the sociological and cultural contexts in which decisions needed to be taken always impressed me. His (and his wife's) academic-organizational common drive is fueled by a strong ethical commitment, at home and abroad.

42 On the process of establishment of these 'new world' universities, in the United States see: Thelin, John R. (2004). *A History of American Higher Education*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

skills. The limited pecuniary compensation offered to them meant that participation came from truly committed individuals. As the educational programs gradually took shape, the Center's view on the contributions of these scholars were disseminated across the local public. In the end, this model of knowledge exchange and transfer benefitted both Cambodian and foreign scholars.

A platform of local-civic engagement for international academics, CKS stood therefore as a socializing laboratory for a kind of civic inter-cultural (rather than just area studies) scholarship. The individuals who chose to work at the Center did so because they adhered to its stated mission, or sometimes because they sought to contribute to an experiment of a new kind. For these reasons, they were willing to devote their time and knowledge outside traditional academic channels. Needless to say, this model of individual involvement which CKS provided went counter to the movement of reduction in the range of social agency individual scholars are allowed in the present university system. Yet, it was certainly not for the Center to force 'embedded' academics away from their narrowly prescribed list of activities.

What this structural disconnection reveals is a contradiction that becomes particularly acute with regard to the scholarly practice of area studies which faces the risk, once again, of falling into the neo-colonial ditch pointed at by Geertz and Laffan: where the 'field' is reduced to a utilitarian restricted place or group of people from which one 'collects' useful 'data' necessary to develop one's own individual portfolio to be dryly quantified through a number of highly-rated publications that will lead one to achieve tenure, that is, an end of job and financial insecurity after years of training and specialization. The result of this trend on the field is a new hierarchical relation of subject-object and an increased commodification of the societies studied. The embedded area studies scholar stands at risk of returning to his early powerlessness, removed from the capacity of questioning state of things, and of engaging in inclusive participatory scholarship.

The counter example to this risk is the enthusiastic support toward CKS showed by university librarians mentioned earlier. They, like the area studies professional academics they serve, are very much versed into Southeast Asia and Cambodia. The degree of their interaction with CKS, however, shows how their subaltern position within the university's hierarchy somewhat and paradoxically shielded them from some of the structural limitations imposed on scholars. Would the latter be not so strenuously constrained by the neoliberal functioning of universities, they would probably show a similar inclination or disposition to embrace the hybrid public service mission of the Center.

Another argument that may reinforce this point is the contrast I observed between embedded academics and the other group of people CKS engaged

with: artists. In the interactions we had with them, we did not encounter the same kind of disconnection and powerlessness found among professional academics. For one thing, they were less institution-dependent than their academic counterparts even though they too had to struggle to secure a stable position. Their independent attitude made them probably more receptive to new social trends or needs as to those pursued by CKS, thereafter enhancing their level of responsiveness to community-based actions. Unless this openness may result from an early internalization of the peculiar construction of art in Western societies as a sphere apart, a world that resists immediate sociological, political or economic explanations, as described by Bourdieu.[43]

43 Bourdieu, Pierre [1992]. *The Rules of Arts*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

CHAPTER 8

Funders as 'Stakeholders'?

In the previous chapter, I refrained from explicitly naming academics and their universities as 'stakeholders', even if their rights to shape the programs of an educational and cultural organization like CKS needed to be judged on their involvement on the ground. The term 'stakeholder' does little justice to their special role as creators, producers and transmitters of knowledge. Their contribution cannot be evaluated in the same way as other social actors whose interventions are primarily determined by collateral interests, be they economic, political or moral. Scholars, artists and other creative social leaders, local or international, are the institute's *raison d'être*.

Yet, in the process of building a post-conflict independent cultural organization like the Center, issues of governance, fundraising, networking and interactions with state and non-state agencies must be considered for the critical role these processes play in determining the existence of the project and the direction it takes. Moreover, in the current ideological neo-liberal environment, with the state apparatus as its main enforcer, bureaucratic (quantitative) mechanisms of evaluation, recognition and legitimation take the form of a 'registered' legal status and of funding support schemes.

In this chapter, and the following one, I will discuss CKS's interactions with two of its main institutional stakeholders: private funders and public organizations (national and international). The account will include a personal ethnographic perspective, hoping this lived experience at CKS can point to the difficulties non-state independent initiatives are likely to face when they engage with these established social actors. The present chapter will discuss the role of international private donors, from individual philanthropists to private foundations. Chapter nine will narrate CKS's interactions with international (state) structures such as the World Bank, UNESCO, as well as foreign diplomacies and their cultural agendas.

One point that will run through the two chapters is the extent to which the space – and pace – of intervention of a localized cultural and societal initiative like CKS did not always fit well with that of these funding and aid mechanisms situated at the top of the global politico-economic ladder. This is problematic when, as in Cambodia, no unified grassroot voice exists or is reflected on the political landscape. One of the most serious challenges for the Center – probably the hardest – was not about preserving its intellectual and creative

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integrity. It was about sustaining the course of its actions against the changing ethos of these institutional stakeholders on which it largely depended.

The organizational model upon which CKS and the other contemporary organizations operating in Cambodia was built was that of a 'social economy enterprise' as described by Olin Wright. A non-profit-seeking mechanism – yet not a state-run 'socialist' institution nor a mutualist money-free cooperative – the Center evolved in a market-driven system. Like any other socio-economic agent, it had to compensate for services and goods from for-profit suppliers. It also had to pay salaries aligned to those of the market. This also means that, as an NGO, CKS depended on an array of funders that, for most of them, originated in the private sector, in particular individual and institutional philanthropy, in the rich countries of the 'North'. With differences corresponding to the diversity of fiscal systems, the private funding model prevailing in most 'developed' countries tends to imitate the American system in which a large share of cultural, educational and other social activities, when they are not profit-making enterprises, fall in the purview of the private non-for-profit philanthropic sector. In its heydays, CKS's dependency on this sector amounted to two-third of its revenues, which was considerable.

For any organized independent public organization, reliance on outside funding implies a relation of dependency and ownership. Any NGO, like other productive economic units, is in theory oriented around goals determined by the funders who effectively possess the means of its actions. In practice, however, at least in Western societies, a normative culture of democratic governance is inscribed in the modus operandi of these non-governmental organizations. This is reflected in these organizations' by-laws and their official registration under State Law as non-governmental, non-profit structures. Internal provisions exist that must reflect the clear delineation of roles between an overseeing board of directors, made up of democratically-appointed members, for limited terms. The public mission of the organization, the groups in society it targets, the institutional partners it involves – including funders – are of the responsibility of the board which appoints, to implement them, a director, upon whose leadership it exerts regular oversight. At least theoretically, the executive staff operating 'on the ground' should therefore enjoy a high level of autonomy in determining the organization's agenda.

In order to preserve its independence, CKS sought the support of more than one sources of funding. It set out to attract a combination of private and public sponsors. Thanks to its American Overseas Research Center (AORC) status gained in 2004, the Center was able to access funds from state agencies. The U.S. Department of State funded its fellowship program for American scholars (after a first program, supported by the Luce Foundation), and, in 2007, the

U.S. Department of Education came in with its "Title VI grant". After CKS received this four-year grant, revenue originating from state institutions amounted to one-third of the Center's total income. This was the highest extent of public support the organization got. These government-funded grants allowed for generous parts of the money to cover a substantial portion of CKS's operational costs: twenty-five per cent for the ECA grants; the 'Title VI' grants of the U.S. Department of Education supported activities corresponding to some of the Center's core operations (staff salaries, library, conferences, etc.).[1]

For a U.S.-registered organization like the Center, the natural way to finance its operations, including programs, was therefore by soliciting private funding, either from grant-making foundations or individual benefactors. Corporate business sponsorship would have been another possible source but in a post-war country like Cambodia the opportunities of promotion of a company's name increasing its visibility to prospective customers was limited. Corporate enterprises, moreover, are rarely interested in organizations committed to rebuilding societies through education. This was, in principle, different with private individual 'philanthropists' and foundations.[2]

1 Individual Philanthropists

From the beginning, CKS relied almost entirely on private funding with a large portion of its operations supported by individual donors. The Center was actually kickstarted thanks to the help of private donations together with 'seed money' provided by a couple of New York foundations.[3] This early dependency on individual donors remained throughout my ten-year tenure. As mentioned above, part of the tasks of the director was to diversify these sources by seeking parallel support from foundations and other public sources. A small institution, with a relatively narrow area of action (Cambodia), it was not realistic for CKS to raise money across a wide pool of middle-income potential donors. 'Crowdfunding' through Internet platforms was not yet a common practice. The bulk of the Center's individual supporters consequently belonged to a narrow circle of wealthy 'philanthropists' in the U.S. and Western Europe.[4]

1 In 2016, CKS was for a second time awarded a Title VI grant.

2 Additional attempts to generate revenues from conferences' fees and publication sales only led to negligible earnings.

3 The Luce and Starr foundations. See Part 2.

4 If one takes the etymology of the stem *phil*(*os*) ("love" in ancient Greek), this would tend to mean that only people with wealth are "mankind loving" people (*Anthropos*) capable of generous acts. 'Humanitarian' might perhaps be a better definition, for it implies some elements

A handful of committed individuals whom I met through the social networks of the World Monuments Fund initially agreed to support CKS in anticipation of future institutional funding (which came eventually). They were immediately convinced of the importance of the project for Cambodia and the lack of involvement by institutional backers in the activities on which it focused. Some of these early donors continued to support the institute long after it reached maturity. A major advantage of these donations lay in their versatility and flexibility, a critical factor when we needed to jumpstart the program. It is indeed with these early contributions that CKS's first infrastructure was built. These donations for 'bricks and mortar' works proved critical to enable the Center to attract funding from foundations. These latter establishments, like state agencies, do not usually fund these kind of infrastructures – an indication of the division of responsibilities that exists between these two categories of funding sources (and the tacit ideological recognition of the primary role devolved to private philanthropy as initial provider of 'seed money').

The base of most CKS individual donors was New York.[5] There, I encountered people who showed a sense of social empathy and a desire to help. Quite early in its existence, CKS was able to rely on a small number of committed donors who recognized its potential importance in Cambodia. Their desire to help was largely determined by their awareness of the extent to which the plight of this country was linked to past American involvements including the policy by the Nixon-Kissinger administration of mass bombing and destruction pursued in the first half of the 1970s. Another motive for these early donors that made them receptive to the Center and its mission was their sense of social responsibility in their own country, the United States, which they viewed as plagued by injustices at home and erratic policies abroad. A number of the people who initially chose to support CKS clearly did so as a social and political protest against U.S. government policies, particularly after the beginning of George W. Bush's war in Iraq. As one of the organization's board members used to say to convince new donors: "America's relations in the world must not be limited to throwing bombs". CKS, together with a few like-minded New York-initiated organizations – for example, the Angkor Children Hospital, initiated by the Japanese-American photographer Kenro

of social engagement albeit without seeking to change the root causes of suffering. My use of the term 'philanthropy/ist' in the following pages is a default one.

5 I can only write about the New York 'high society', which is mainly located in the Upper East-Side section of Manhattan. My rare experiences among networks of rich people in the West Coast of the United States made me realize how, though social dynamics were similar, modes of interaction between their members were very different. After New York, I felt like a total stranger!

Izu – was soon regarded as a worthy project capable of demonstrating that point. As the pool of private donors expanded, the diversity of views widened. Yet, even when the Center began to include among its supporters a few Bush voters, the discourse I encountered remained, as far as Cambodia was concerned, progressive.[6] This is a point I wish to make before I take a more critical look at my relations with private donors. With some, I developed a relationship of trust and respect that went beyond any patterns of fundraising interaction.

If succeeding in attracting support from those private donors was one of the reasons behind CKS's early successes, this reliance eventually amounted to one of its structural weaknesses. As I later realized, the downside of private 'social' philanthropy is that it entails compliance to the norms and etiquettes of a social elite group, and with it, corollaries of dependency and patronage. Although the initial supporters of CKS took a strong moral and social stand, increasingly, as the program became successful in defining its own model and narrative, its symbolic importance grew within the New York upper-class society. It then became gauged through that society's internal sociological codes: questions over who was sitting on its Board, whose friends had donated, which name was it worth associating oneself with, became commonplace. With these, the beginning of a hierarchy involving the main sponsors on the one hand, and their followers on the other, took hold. These matters morphed into lucid criteria influencing people's social strategies including their involvement and support for CKS. As I myself became drawn into 'selling' the project of CKS within these wealthy circles, I came to play – at first without fully grasping what was increasingly at stake – the role of a social courtier or else, of a provider of good conscience to members of a group whose exclusive social status needed to be collectively justified and legitimized. This situation reminded me of what I had studied about eighteenth century European court culture, sometimes feeling I was turning into a performer for aristocratic patrons and a collaborator in their quest for social validation.[7]

Because CKS depended to such a large extent on individual donors, I had as director to devote a substantial part of my worktime trying to understand

6 Except for a few isolated cases I talked to, this kind of social empathy displayed by some of the private supporters of the CKS did not go as far as questioning the structural reasons for the inequalities they were upset about.

7 I refer here to Norbert Elias's classic historical sociology on *The Court Society*. A book that struck a sensitive chord when I read it while working at CKS was Elias's sociological description surrounding the Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Despite the obvious differences of context, the book depicts the struggles the composer at the Salzburg and Viennese courts led to break free from princely patronage. See Elias, Norbert (1993). *Mozart. Portrait of a Genius*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

the New York upper class's inner workings. The experience, though sometimes disconcerting and unsettling, was at the same time often agreeable and always instructive. By hobnobbing with members of the New York social aristocracy, usually through introduction from 'protectors', I learned a good deal about the way social elite legitimation functions in the 'land of opportunities'. I also learned the tough rule of the game and the subtle – sometimes not so – socially and gender determined inner strategies at play, and with them, the elusive hierarchies in the making.

New York City's aristocracy reflects the larger power and representation interactions at play between sociologically diverse profiles and the incorporation and re-foundation of the United States' upper-class circles through restricted mechanisms of mobility at the top of the social ladder. Neither particularly wealthy nor having been brought up in these milieus, I learned about my own social markings, my limitations as well as the difficulties any outsider to this world might experience when interacting with people whose concerns and standards are of a totally different kind than one's own.

The question of why people make gifts has long been a concern for social scientists who have theorized on the act of giving and the donors' motivations. Marcel Mauss, in his classic work *The Gift* argued that gifts are never truly free.[8] Discussing modern elite charity, the anthropologist John Hanson pointed to the class-centered and exclusionary character of the act: "[donors] employ charitable exchange ritual, like the primitive potlatch, for structured loss and exchange, both affirming and concealing status and power, obfuscating yet illuminating privilege."[9] The sociologist Emily Barman describes how her discipline has helped to identify the social contexts and relationships that drive the exercise of philanthropy. Gifts are dependent on multiple levels of societal factors. For instance, "the construction of the broad-scale institutional and legal arrangements that permit, legitimate, and incentivize the wide-scale exercise of philanthropy" – the role of charity in the U.S. is largely conditioned by the country's tax code – has been pointed out as a critical factor. Barman also refers to how donors' selection of beneficiaries is largely shaped by their own social location and the dynamics within their networks, something I also experienced among the New York elite. Broader societal dynamics, for instance the fact that donations can been made as direct forms of political statement – for

8 Mauss, Marcel (2002). *The Gift, The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New translation). London: Routledge Press.

9 Hanson, John H. (2015). 'The Anthropology of Giving: Toward a Cultural Logic of Charity'. *Journal of Cultural Economy* 8 (4): 501–520, p. 501.

example, against President Bush's foreign policy – is another phenomenon I experienced.[10]

Throughout what I often considered as temporary extravagant immersions (in contrast to my simpler life in Cambodia), I sometimes bumped into oases of humanity and great wit. Oftentimes, I equally encountered cases of utter arrogance. I discovered the extent to which the social – and political – influence of these well-to-do individuals in the United States is considerable, particularly in the areas of culture and education. This influence has in the past three decades grown significantly given the drastic withdrawal of state interventions that began in the 1980s. It is interesting to note that this trend in the reduction of the role of the state, combined with the rise of a finance-based economy and a widening of socio-economic disparities in the country, was often at the origin of the financial commitment of CKS donors. My personal left-leaning inclination, as I discovered, was more than once shared by some of my wealthy interlocutors.

Nonprofits like the Center are embedded in these complex dynamics as the social elite gift economy expresses itself through modern charitable giving. On the receiving end, private donors may be inclined to exert an overbearing influence over the development and operations of the project they support. Detecting what Hanson describes as "patterns behind elite charitable giving that make seeming relinquishment of wealth a declaration of power",[11] I discovered how they often feel entitled to revise missions, goals, implementations, and to micro-manage. The goal of this involvement sometimes becomes a battle between their image versus the original mission of the project itself. Of course, this phenomenon has many manifestations and scales. And it is not limited to private individual donors. I realized, too late perhaps, the full impact this situation of dependency had on CKS and its governance. For the organization, the risk of falling hostage to donors' circles internal strategies could jeopardize the contribution of other key partners including members of the academic and artistic community, local and international civil society actors, or funding institutions not represented on the organization's board for fear of conflicts of interest. The absence of a neutral institution-building support framework, except for the indirect assistance provided by some officials of the Rockefeller Foundation, in fact allowed the organization to remain at the mercy of power struggles involving first partner institutions like the World

10 Barman, Emily (2017). 'The Social Bases of Philanthropy'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 43: 271–290, p. 285.

11 Hanson, John H. (2015). 'The Anthropology of Giving: Toward a Cultural Logic of Charity', p. 501.

Monuments Fund, or within the board, wealthy patrons, even if a majority of them were devoid of personal agenda. This ultimately allowed for an unhealthy dominance of members with financial means capable of buying their prominence over the organization. Reining in those private centrifugal interests fell increasingly on the executive staff, on a few sympathetic foundation officers and on a minority of more socially responsible individual donors.

The risk of donors' intrusion, as I found out, is commensurate to the level of attractiveness of the project among these members of the upper social strata for its capacity to endow social legitimacy upon those associated with it. Too often, a good project, viewed from the New York aristocracy is one that attracts renowned society names on its board or list of major donors. Reciprocally, *en vue* individual supporters will determine the symbolic social value of the project and provide it with the level of acceptability it needs to attract more donations and support. A unique weakness for CKS was its academic identity, and with it, the powerful attraction this institutional symbolic attribute still exerts on members of the elite. By developing meaningful educational and academic programs in Cambodia like the JFTP, supported by established foundations, CKS did not just appeal to academics. The degree to which the organization represented a concentration of symbolic social capital must be underlined. Some types of scholarly activities, moreover, could be particularly enticing to donors in search of special interests: archaeological research and conservation in Angkor, for instance. Long-term scholarly research requiring months of archival or field study were less attractive. In turn, it was equally normal that a few socially-ambitious academics saw in CKS a chance to advance their plans.[12]

It was especially naive to think that affluent individuals could productively coexist with money-hungry academics at the same level of membership of the CKS board, without risking plunging the institution into centrifugal strategies of influences or other forms of private patronage. To provision the institute's governance with some internal regulatory protections, though probably not sufficient, is something that should have at least been explored. One solution may have been to resort to the 'dual board' governance model. The model is that of a corporate structure system originating from northern Europe that

12 One phenomenon that began to affect CKS and other similar programs in Cambodia, is the emergence, amidst the context of privatization of the university described earlier, of self-made academics who also act as donors. For them, the Center offered a kind of institutional legitimacy and academic patina that was non-negligible for their own academic self-aggrandizement strategy. Such convergence of interests in achieving social capital carried a new danger with the risk of intrusion of 'phony scholarship' in the academic realm.

consists of two separate boards of directors that govern the organization. The roles and relationships between the two entities vary. The structure is usually composed of a 'Management Board', and a 'Supervisory Board', each with different roles.[13] In the case of CKS, a board made up of scholars, social activists and artists could be qualified to decide on programs and activities while the private supporters, organized into a second committee or board, would be responsible for raising and providing funds.[14] Other mechanisms, including the strict application of the standard non-profit by-laws, a regular rotation of members, etc., could help to mitigate risks of governance imbalance.

Individual donors, however well-meaning they may be, when their actions are not closely regulated, should not in any case be able to exert direct or overall control on the destiny of a public good educational and cultural institution, particularly if its activities bear important consequences on a fragile social and cultural milieu like that of war-torn Cambodia. There is something fundamentally disturbing about the destiny of a major social and cultural local public program falling into the hands of a few people whose remoteness from the scene of action renders them irresponsible vis-à-vis the community the organization is serving, particularly when the lives and the very welfare of people and institutions in that country are at stake. Too often, the Center found itself hostage to private donors' politics at the board level, a trend that unraveled the fragile institutional and programmatic compromise that had defined the organization as a hybrid organization, an international academic and a domestic capacity-building institution – an independent public space for intellectual, cultural and social engagement. Surely, better legal governance prescriptions should have been put in place though those that existed were not followed.

Ultimately, the disconnect that we found between the public mission of CKS and the logic of neoliberal academia was repeated in the degree of dependency of the organization, a public good project caught in the hands of private actors made to believe, evidence to the contrary, in their own 'social responsibility'. Public good community programs like the Center should not be made

13 'What is a dual board system', *The Law Dictionary* (Black's Law Dictionary Free Online Legal Dictionary), 2nd Edition. (https://thelawdictionary.org/dual-board-system/). Using a two-tier system might result in 'more monitoring' and 'less aggressive performance targets'. Although efficiency may be impeded by the risk of reduced communication and the higher costs of running a dual board, on the other hand, the system may constitute a healthy guarantee for a multi-purpose /multi-stakeholder organization like CKS against the possibility that one sector or group takes the upper hand at the expense of others. A dual board can thus better guarantee the social responsibility of the institution.

14 There is the precedent of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, for which the management is structured into two main branches: Administration and Academic Services.

to rely exclusively on individual private funders. If they must depend on this source of support, they should do so concurrently with public and half-public funded agencies like established foundations.

2 Foundations

As an organization registered in the U.S., the Center sought to fund at least part of its educational and scholarly programs by soliciting grants from established funding organizations such as foundations. I became acquainted with the economy of institutional philanthropy in the context of New York where many of the best-known foundations are established. Both a grant applicant and a grantee, CKS was well positioned to experience the impact of transformations in the sector as they occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. As I will explain, the period in which the Center was developing corresponds to one where major change in program-supporting directions were introduced by some foundations. The trend followed the ascent of a new powerful corporate environment in the wake of the expansion of the high-tech and financial economic sectors, and with it, a renewed ideological hold on the world of philanthropy.

The U.S. has the largest number of grant-making private foundations in the world. The American foundation model emerged at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries following the constitution of large corporate empires like those of Rockefeller, Carnegie, or Mellon. Originating from the corporate world, the social and political position occupied by these foundations lay uncomfortably between the worlds of civil-society – associated ambiguously with the 'private sector' – and state – 'public sector' – organizations. The advantageous legal and fiscal provisions underpinning their position in society has positioned them as public social actors. They somehow embody the association between the large corporate and government leadership universes.[15] The ideology defining these foundations is drily summarized by Nicolas Guilhot, as a "private alternative to socialism" and can be described as "a bureaucracy of civic virtues managed in the image of private corporations, with a board and a president at its helms."[16]

This unique American institutional model sets the tone for today's global philanthropy. The power and vigor of some of the large foundations has long

15 Parmar, Inderjit (2012). *Foundations of the American Century, the Ford, Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power*. New York: Columbia University.

16 Guilhot, Nicolas (2006). *Financiers, philanthropes, Sociologie de Wall Street*. Paris: Raisons d'Agir, p. 9, p. 10.

been recognized including in the 'developing world' – even though the amount of money they actually dispense is smaller than that provided by private individual funding and volunteering. Of the $39 billion qualified as private U.S. philanthropy in 'developing countries', only 4.6 per cent come from registered foundations. Fourteen originate from "private and volunteering organizations", a figure that should include individual philanthropists (figures for 2010).[17]

Establishments like Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford foundations became internationally recognized to the point that their activities have exerted considerable influence the world over, while their overseas activism significantly impacted the way U.S. foreign policy was conducted. Their mission evolved from that of combating isolationism at home in the pre-war period to supporting the constitution of alternative networks to those influenced by Communism and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Even before the end of the 'East-West' confrontation, these foundations built highly-valued competences in the way they supported dynamic social agents in many regions of the world, distinguishing them from that run by governments or international development organizations.[18]

From the point of view of a seeking 'grantee', we at CKS had to learn to distinguish between different types of foundations. First, there are private family foundations, in the hands of their founding family, usually undistinguishable from private individual donors. Then there are the large grant-making structures like the New York-based Rockefeller, Carnegie [Corporation], Mellon, and Ford foundations, with no or minimal connections to their original founders, whose operations render them quasi-public institutions. A new category emerged out of the financial and digital revolutions of the 1990s and 2000s. Some are located in the West Coast of the country, like the Gates and Hewlett-Packard foundations. Others appeared in the East Coast, mostly from new financial empires. The most prominent among them is the Soros 'Open Society' Foundation. In most cases, these new establishments continue to be managed, at least partially, by their tycoon founders. They have been described as 'philanthrocapitalist' or 'venture philanthropy' for they are characterized by their corporate management methods and their utilitarian 'quick-fix' philosophy.[19] Their considerable accumulated wealth, with the Bill and Melinda Gates

17 See *Index of Global Philanthropy and Remittance, 2012*, by the Washington DC-based Hudson Institute, Center of Global Prosperity (http://www.hudson.org/).

18 On the history of these three iconic philanthropic institutions, see Parmar, Inderjit (2012). *Foundations of the American Century*.

19 Stewart, Michael (2008). *Just Another Emperor? The Myth and Realities of Philanthrocapitalism*. London: Young Foundation Publications. Massing, Michael (2015). 'How the Gates Foundation Reflects the Good and the Bad of "Hacker Philanthropy"'. *The Intercept*, Nov. 25

Foundation as the largest of all, has somewhat overshadowed the status and position of the older foundations.[20] The business model of these 'new foundations', and the entrepreneurial ideology they embody have since influenced the agenda of the 'old foundations'.

2.1 *CKS and Foundations*

A number of the foundations CKS dealt with were family-run ones, usually endowed with a single major source of funding from one family or corporation. These establishments, including the larger ones, have as their primary activity the making of grants to other charitable non-profit organizations and to individuals. When a person or a corporation sets up a foundation, family members or agents of the corporation frequently become members of the governing board – although this is not always true, as in the case of the Rockefeller Foundation. Foundations deploy complex modes of operations, with strict rules as far as governance and financial accountability are concerned, all framed by the U.S. State through their accreditation as "501©3 Internal Revenue-registered, tax deductible" establishments. Grants are typically made to other U.S.-registered non-profit projects like CKS. This system of tax deductibility, in effect, makes these donations indirect government subsidies. Private philanthropy is therefore built *into* public policy.[21]

A program officer who worked at many funding institutions operating in Southeast Asia, and a major supporter of CKS, Alan Feinstein, gave an insightful account of the properties of 'old international philanthropy' and the way some foundations were transformed in the wake of the 'philantrocapitalist' movement.[22] Years of involvement overseas, and mistakes throughout most

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(https://theintercept.com/2015/11/25/how-the-gates-foundation-reflects-the-good-and-the-bad-of-hacker-philanthropy, last accessed on 12 July 2016).

20 In 2014, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's assets reached the staggering figure of $41 billion. This is more than double of the combined wealth of the old "Big Three" foundations: Ford ($12 billion), Rockefeller ($4 billion), and Carnegie ($3 billion). Massing, Michael (2015). Op. Cit.

21 The U.S. Tax Reform Act of 1969 defines the fundamental social contract offered to private foundations. In exchange for exemptions from paying most taxes and for limited tax benefits being offered to donors, a private foundation must (a) pay out at least five per cent of the value of its endowment each year, none of which may be to the private benefit of any individual; (b) not own or operate significant for-profit businesses; (c) file detailed public annual reports. See Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service. *Publication 557: "Tax-Exempt Status For Your Organization"* (*Rev. Jan. 2018*), Chapter 3, Other Section 501©(3), Organizations, p. 27.

22 Feinstein, Alan (2012). 'International Philanthropy in Southeast Asia: Case Studies from Indonesia and the Philippines' in Asian Public Intellectuals: *Understanding Confluences and Contestations, Continuities and Changes: Towards Transforming Society and*

of the twentieth century, had led old foundations like Ford or Rockefeller to shape a rather sophisticated model of international philanthropy that nonetheless remains true to their original objective of promotion of U.S. 'democratic' values and global interests. They learned from the failures of a technocratic interventionist style employed in the 1950s and 1960s, practices that went hand-and-hand with the heavy-handed cold-war policies of the U.S. Government described by Parmar.[23] These excesses had led to criticisms at home, especially by area studies academics, in the context of heightened politicization in the U.S., with the Civil Rights and Feminist movements and of mass demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and Cambodia in the 1960s and 70s.

The image of elitism and conservatism that was associated with these foundations convinced some of them like Ford or Rockefeller to embrace a more progressive strategy independent of that followed by the U.S. Government. They would be more respectful of the local contexts and communities. They would focus on building long-term capacities and institutions based on networks capable of effecting social change and public advocacy.[24] This emphasis on 'contextualization' and 'capacity building' naturally supported works in the fields of humanities and culture. Geographical and historical contexts became important. It was accepted that to work globally, respecting differences or nuances of place, language, history, politics, or governance was critical. Support for scholarships and individual fellowships aimed at local researchers and educators became a hallmark of a foundation like Ford.[25]

Long-term institution-building grants to local institutions, NGOs or intermediaries – for example CKS – were equally at the core of this strategy. They became "the 'bread-and-butter' of the 'old foundations' like Ford, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mellon, and MacArthur."[26] This also meant the building

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Empowering People – The Work of the 2009/2010 API Fellows'. Bangkok: Nippon Foundation's API Regional Coordinating Institution, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, pp. 88–96, p. 88.

23 Parmar, Inderjit (2012). *Foundations of the American Century*, pp. 221–225.

24 Feinstein, Alan (2012). 'International Philanthropy in Southeast Asia', p. 90.

25 The Ford Foundation recruited in 1971 the renowned anthropologist on Indonesia (and Morocco) Clifford Geertz to work as technical assistant. Geertz explained: "The Ford Foundation, which had a field office in Jakarta, wished to raise the level of Indonesian social science research (that is by Indonesians, in Indonesia, on Indonesian problems, as opposed to bringing people to U.S. to study, which had turned out to be both very expensive and a mixed success), and I was dispatched to travel about the country to see what might be done." In Geertz, Clifford (1995). *After the Fact, Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 79.

26 Feinstein (2012). 'International Philanthropy in Southeast Asia', p. 90.

up of internationally-connected academic departments, the support for interdisciplinary regional scholarly fields in collaboration with U.S. universities, operational support for local institutions and even endowment funds.[27] The benefits of this long-term strategy were a deeper knowledge of socio-cultural structures taking into account local histories and ways of understanding, and the development of a powerful web of individuals and institutional networks. To achieve these goals, the foundations relied on highly-educated program officers, many of whom graduated in social sciences and humanities. A famous example of these liberal-minded officers is Anne Dunham, the mother of former President Barak Obama.[28] This model of 'humanistic' international philanthropy continued past the end of the Cold War decade until the mid-2000s, at which time the effects of the 'philanthrocapitalist' revolution began to be felt.

Born in conjunction with the rise to power of the neoliberal conservative agenda of the late 1980s–early 1990s, endowed with unprecedented financial capital, the new foundations grew quickly in prominence, setting a more conservative 'entrepreneurial' alternative agenda to that of the older establishments. The philosophy of these new foundations is based on the premise that their corporate style is best fit to tackle problems of a global nature. Local cultural and historical contexts are deemed of less importance than the general impact these global phenomena may have on society in general. More than their colleagues at older foundations, the officers of these new institutions share a stern belief in the quasi-messianic power of private business management and technology. They usually chose to focus on a few specific 'global ills' which they sought to resolve once and for all. The Gates Foundation for instance, set out to eradicate malaria in Africa. This single narrow focus has prominence over any other issues. In Cambodia, one of these foundations single-handedly decided that by giving impoverished children free access to computers and Internet, they would be encouraged to become entrepreneurs

27 Feinstein lists a few important initiatives in the humanities and social sciences in Southeast Asia: the Toyota Foundation's support for translation and publishing in the 'Know Our Neighbors' program; the Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program supported by Japan and Toyota foundations; The Nippon Foundation's Asian Public Intellectuals Fellowships program; the Ford and Rockefeller foundations' support for media and journalism. He could have added the 'Learning Across Boundaries' initiative of the Rockefeller-supported Greater Mekong Sub-Region capacity building program, of which CKS was a part. Feinstein (2012). Ibid., p. 92.

28 A Hawaii University PhD graduate in Anthropology, Dunham specialized in economic and rural development. She worked for numerous philanthropic and development agencies including the Ford Foundation at its regional office in Jakarta. (Wikipedia, Anne Dunham).

capable of alleviating themselves out of local poverty. This capitalist-optimist trend brought with it the current fashion for micro-credit and other 'self-help' programs, all aimed at providing socio-economic changes in societies anyway deemed to be affected by global capitalism.[29]

New philanthropy often misses the deep causes of the origins of the state of poverty, pandemics or conflicts that plague the regions where they operate. In their philanthropic activities, they, like the neo-conservative governments that have followed in their steps, tend to dismiss the importance of cultural rooting and the intricacy of social, historical phenomena as these require long-term efforts of comprehension, interactions with local actors, and ultimately, institutional cultivation. The new breed of philanthropists prefers instead to single out narrowly-defined 'global problems' identified by appointed 'experts'. Even an activist foundation like OSI, when it combats corruption or human rights abuses in countries like Cambodia or Myanmar, usually does so by parachuting Western-trained lawyers while neglecting the complex local interweaving of historical, cultural and socio-economic factors and the larger context within which these abuses were or are taking place, and what would be the lasting consequences of their actions. A number of OSI programs consequently fail to build the conditions for a sustainable democratic culture to flourish. The disposition of new foundations in favor of highly-segmented strategies, moreover, finds its origins in the ideological transfer into philanthropy of a business model in which economic fortunes are made out of market niches that must be created and conquered. For Feinstein, such attitude "flies in the face of sixty-plus years of hard-learned lessons by development practitioners which

29 Feinstein identifies a number of changes brought in the philanthropy world, directly inspired from the neoliberal ideology: (a) Grants are seen as 'investments' expected to yield measurable social 'profits', often within a fairly short time frame. (b) To quantitively evaluate 'measurable impacts' (metrics) of their 'investments', foundations rely on a new set of in-house (or externally contracted) bureaucracy. (c) Increase of foundations' reliance on members of the corporate sector, especially business consulting, management, and new communications media, at the expense of program staff who are disciplinary or regional experts or experienced in 'development' fields. (d) Foundations must look for 'solutions' that can show measurable results within short span periods (three to five years). (e) The foundations' obsession for simple 'focuses' or 'targets', determined from above, renders them dependent on usually northern-hemisphere-based intermediaries at the expenses of local actors; possibilities of funding unsolicited requests from the grass-root are drastically reduced. (f) Trend toward concentration of decision-making processes at headquarters. (g) Preference for 'technical' subjects such as agriculture, health or social welfare schemes to the detriment of 'soft', non-quantifiable 'fields' such as humanities, culture, and the arts. (h) Abandonment of individual fellowships and scholarships, building up of academic departments and capacity-building grants. (Feinstein (2012). 'International Philanthropy in Southeast Asia', pp. 90–93).

show that context, culture, and locally 'owned' solutions do [...] matter, and that without taking them into account, the best-intentioned technical innovations or trendiest new ideas can be doomed in practice in the field."[30]

Contemporary to this trend that has gripped the world of institutional philanthropy, the experience CKS and other Cambodian organizations had with foundations is symptomatic of these major shifts. In many ways, the Center was the product of the conceptions of social development promoted by 'old philanthropy'. Not only did it benefit from collaborations with foundations like Rockefeller, Henry Luce and Toyota, its multi-leveled hybrid quality was in fact shaped out of its collaboration with these organizations to become a by-product of their humanistic philanthropy. The Center's long-term capacity building and scholarly mission could not fit in the strategy supported by the new philanthropic model. Especially in a case of a war-affected society like Cambodia, the need to grasp local social and cultural intricacies, historical genealogies and their connections to larger global trends, constituted a major prerequisite to any initiatives aimed at reinforcing the social fabric. Sadly, however, CKS's experience of dealing with foundations coincided with the time when the philanthrocapitalist methods began to pervade into the agendas of even some of the organizations that had helped its model to grow. I would like here to reflect on my experience as grantee of one of them, the most important funding organization largely at the origin of the Center, the Rockefeller Foundation.

2.2 *Relation with the Rockefeller Foundation*

Rockefeller Foundation's presence in Southeast Asia is longstanding. Just two years after its creation, in 1913, it initiated one of its first overseas 'missions' in Cambodia's neighbor, Thailand, the only country in the region that was not a colony. This involvement was recently documented in a commemorative collection marking the hundred years of the Foundation, of which one full volume is devoted to the Southeast Asian country.[31] Before the Second World War, the Foundation's activities in Thailand primarily focused on public health and medical education which it developed in close intelligence with the monarchical

30 Feinstein (2012). 'International Philanthropy in Southeast Asia'. 92.

31 Becker, William H. (2013). *Innovative Partners: The Rockefeller Foundation and Thailand*. The Rockefeller Foundation Centennial Series. New York: Rockefeller Publications. This volume was critically reviewed by Thai specialist Michael Montesano (I am grateful to him for introducing me to this text): Montesano, Michael (2015). Review of *Innovative Partners: The Rockefeller Foundation and Thailand*, by William H. Becker. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 2013. *Sojourn, Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* (1): 290–299.

regime.[32] They were later expanded to support a 'Green Revolution' policy.[33] Between the early 1960s and the late 1970s, a volatile Thai political context witnessed the rise of Communism among segments of society including students, against the background of the war in Vietnam and Cambodia. In this scenario, Rockefeller's assistance turned to Thai universities, including the one at the heart of the students' movement, Thammasat University. Under the initiative, University Development Program (UDP), the Foundation invested for the first time in long-term capacity building support in the social sciences, particularly the fields of political sciences, liberal arts, and economics.[34]

The end of Communism and the opening up of the neighboring countries of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and later Myanmar, had the Foundation extend its Thai experience to embrace a regional approach within a new geographical framework: the 'Greater Mekong Sub-Region' (GMSR).[35] Conceived to respond to the "unforeseen results of regionalization in the Mekong River ecosystem", and the potentially dangerous consequences of an unbridled economic integration "at the expense of ecosystem protection, cultural resilience and national sovereignty", the Foundation engaged in a far-sighted regional strategy. Four inter-disciplinary and trans-sector initiatives were conceived under the GMSR framework: 'Learning Across Boundaries' (LAB), 'Bridging Diversity' (BD), 'Upland Communities in Transition' (UCT) and 'Cross Border Health' (CBH).[36] I am not privy to the internal operations of the Rockefeller Foundation, but I suspect that the partnership developed with CKS must have along the way corresponded to this progressive regional strategy.

As I explained in Part 2, for nearly a decade CKS and Rockefeller Foundation enjoyed a meaningful collaboration. Soon after I started working with CKS,

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32 Becker (2013). *Innovative Partners*, pp. 42–87.

33 Becker (2013). Ibid., pp. 88–111. For instance, Rockefeller played a major role in establishing the International Rice Research Institute, or IRRI (1959), *Innovative Partners*, p. 95.

34 Becker (2013). Ibid., pp. 132–138. Rockefeller's support of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Thammasat began in 1964, taking the form of graduate scholarships overseas. Twenty scholarships were distributed. By 1978, 10 had led to PhDs (p. 135).

35 Becker (2013). Ibid., pp. 162–165. The notion of GMSR, developed in collaboration with other institutions like the Asia Development Bank, included Thailand, the Yunnan Province in China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, with the first two considered as the most 'advanced'.

36 LAB "concentrated on promoting an understanding of the need for increasing integration across the GMSR ecosystem"; BD "emphasized improving appreciation of religious and ethnic differences and reducing discrimination"; UCT "focused on improving food security and the incomes of those in upland population centers in the GMSR"; CBH, "intended to widen governmental and public awareness of the health impact of greater cross-border movements of the people in the region." (Becker (2013). Ibid., p. 164).

I went to meet people at the Foundation. In them, we found people who understood our institution and program-building concerns. They shared the same vision of long-term social rehabilitation through culture and education. In their larger scale goal of facilitating the development of new communities of humanistic educators in the still fractured 'Greater Mekong Sub-Region', they saw in the hybrid model of organization that was CKS a valuable mechanism capable of carrying out their vision in Cambodia, at least during a transitional period of a decade or more, until national academic and cultural institutions would be in a position to play their role.

As I have described earlier, the officers I met were well versed in the art of identifying and nurturing out of different environments the kind of adaptive initiatives that could effectively deliver social transformations. They had worked with communities in the United States or in some regions of the world including Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia. They recognized the importance of working in tandem with local partners and that the work could only yield results if it was built on a long-term strategy. Working with them from our first grant on (2001), I learned to value their commitment. Their vision reinforced our assurance in what we were doing. To engage in genuine network-building efforts, critical for forging the kind of academic and intellectual communities CKS aimed to sustain, the Foundation officers naturally saw foundational and creative – humanistic – education as an essential part of the Center's agenda. They recognized the potential represented in the conciliation of academic knowledge with community building activism and saw no contradiction in connecting international regional studies scholarship and Cambodian social development. Projects were framed with the view of not only advancing the Center's Cambodian agenda but also supporting its original organizational model, as a non-state, non-profit, national-international, academic-public service, hybrid structure.

The series of grants made by the Rockefeller Foundation to CKS attests to the closeness of the collaboration. This was especially true for the second and third grants developed with Joan Shigekawa and Lynn Szwaja in the New York office, and, for the last phase of Junior Faculty Training Program (JFTP), with Alan Feinstein from the Bangkok office. These three officers saw their involvement as framed in the *longue durée*. Collaboration worked incrementally, drawing from experiences and mistakes on the ground, in conjunction with the universities and the NGOs with which the Center was involved. As seen in Part 2, the CKS' programmatic platform – made up of several scholarly, intellectual infrastructure and training projects – eventually gained in coherence that led to JFTP initiative. Our counterparts at the Foundation understood the need for this empirical mode of program development as well

as the informality that was often needed when working in Cambodia. They hoped CKS would succeed in building networks of trained individuals in the country and regionally, whose work in their institutions would set the catalyzing mode for changes in their fields.

Sadly, five years after the beginning of its operational existence, CKS was caught in the middle of a drastic change in the Foundation's policy that led to the reversal of its regional commitment, the dismantling of the GMSR strategy, and with it, the efforts to cultivate in a holistic fashion, in the local context, communities of social educators and institutions. Under its new president, Judith Rodin, the foundation instead engaged in a "systems approach" aimed at "global impact" which, for the region, had the effect of re-casting its Bangkok office as the post responsible for the entire region of Asia.[37]

The close collaboration CKS used to entertain with Rockefeller altered. Starting in around 2006–7, I noticed sparks of an internal revolution that was taking place within the establishment. For some time already, in my discussions with officers, the distinction between corporate versus humanistic-style philanthropy had become blurred. Tenets of business practices crept into conversations, permeating modes and operation of even oftentimes the views of my counterparts. I remember meeting a new officer sent from the New York office – whose name I fail to remember – replacing Lynn Szwaja, Director of the now dismantled "Creativity and Culture Division". It must have been in 2007. He seemed not to understand or be interested in what was going on in Cambodia. It was only after long and laborious discussions that he expressed satisfaction that what we were doing with the JFTP was effectively 'institution building', a term that may have ticked in him the right box. He had come all the way to Cambodia to learn such an obvious truth about our collaboration. His visit may have been less motivated by the need to evaluate grantees than to appraise or monitor the work accomplished by the officers we had been working with. The process of phasing out the support of the Foundation for creative humanities in Cambodia had begun.

For us, the announcements of the changes to come did not, however, begin with the Rockefeller Foundation, but with another grant-making partner, the Tokyo-based Toyota Foundation. Founded in 1974, Toyota Foundation had, since the 1980s, pioneered many pan-Southeast Asian academic networks in the humanities and social sciences. I referred earlier to Toyota Foundation's support for translation and publishing with the "Know Our Neighbors" Program; the support for regional academic institutions such as Southeast Asian Studies Regional Exchange Program (SEASREP); or the series of international grants it

37 Becker (2013). Ibid., pp. 165–168.

awarded for projects aimed at preserving and encouraging indigenous cultures in Southeast Asia. Many of these initiatives began in the 1990s.

Toyota worked with a number of private and public organizations in Cambodia, including a major capacity-building program at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), in collaboration with UNESCO. As discussed in Part 2, Toyota collaborated with the Center through the Publishing In Cambodia (PIC) initiative together with the Reyum Institute. It later supported a research methodology training program aimed at final-year Bachelor degree students at the Center's Phnom Penh branch. The appointment of a new president, directly coming from the Toyota Motor Company in 2004, preceded the departure of some of the Foundation's highly experienced officers with whom we worked. Among them were the ethno-musicologist Alan Feinstein, already cited (2005), and a year later, the anthropologist Rie Nakamura (2006). Prior to their departure, and like with Rockefeller two years later, a new bureaucratic language emphasizing the need to produce quantifiable 'deliverables' under narrowly framed evaluation procedures was employed by the Foundation in its correspondence with the Center. We were requested to fill in questionnaires and other quantitative surveys. It was soon followed by drastic staff changes. Eventually, a new grant system was put in place that no longer recognized the need to promote situated Southeast Asia-based projects. Applicants ought to compete against institutions from other parts of Asia, Japan included, which eventually eliminated most of the Cambodian – if not Southeast Asian – applications. CKS continued to maintain contact with the Foundation, especially with the officer Yumiko Himemoto-Hiraishi whose commitment, despite the reshuffles in the organization, was heroic. A few years after the changes, I was contacted again by new officers from the Foundation who sought to re-connect with former grantees. Perhaps they recognized that the brutal agenda change that occurred constituted a massive waste of experiences, contacts, and overall goodwill.

The changes at Rockefeller Foundation proved far more hurtful for CKS. Upon her appointment, Rodin, set the organization off on a new course, an altogether new work culture and agenda which led to the replacement of many of its former programs including the "Creativity and Culture Division" initially responsible for interacting with CKS, and other organizations in Cambodia.[38]

38 Rockefeller Foundation (2013). 'Evaluation of the Rockefeller Foundation Program NYC Cultural Innovation Fund, New York'. Report commissioned by the Foundation to the consultancy firm Helicon Collaborative. Slover Linett Audience Research, Yancey Consulting and Nick Rabkin, p. 2.

https://assets.rockefellerfoundation.org/app/uploads/20150911122754/NYC-Cultural-Innovation-Fund-Evaluation-Report-2013.pdf, last accessed January 2018.

Within two years, all the officers I worked with left or were made redundant. Our partnership with a core group of officers dedicated to Cambodia's long-term transformation which took years to build was discontinued at a whim, at the end of the second three-year grant. The efforts of CKS and the remaining sympathetic staff at the Foundation who by then were working in extreme uncertainty for their own job, made it nonetheless possible to have the JFTP extended for two more years through a "departure grant".[39] Yet, even before the program ended, CKS had no more interlocutors in the Foundation.[40] A question one should ask is whether there might have been any failings on the part of the Center in its operations or outputs in the Foundation-supported program that led to the decision to terminate the collaboration. If there were, no one communicated it to us.

The question regarding the term of the collaboration was regularly brought up in discussions between the Center and the Foundation's officers who did not hide that they were hoping, in the future, to support more directly Cambodian public institutions. It was the structural weaknesses of these institutions, the lack of transparency in their internal operations that dissuaded the Foundation. Another evidence that CKS was not 'at fault' is the fact that other projects in humanistic capacity building – the publishing and reading sector with the Cambodia's Book Federation, or support for cultural and artistic interventions with Reyum Institute – were equally denied grants. Soon after, the regional program Learning Across Boundaries (LAB) in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region under which many of these activities including CKS fell, was altogether discontinued. If the new management of the Foundation felt the work they had been supporting was wrong or going nowhere, it would have been helpful for all the people and communities affected to be made privy to this view.[41]

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39 On the occasion of CKS's high-profile annual fundraising cocktail party at the home of Anne Bass, one of the high society trustees in New York, Mrs. Bass and I publicly and emphatically complimented the Rockefeller Foundation for its long-term support, hoping that the words would reach the ears of its president and her entourage.

40 When I reconnected with the Foundation from my new position at the International Institute for Asian Studies after 2010, I was shocked to encounter a totally different type of interlocutors. The people I met were short-term hires, with no real in-house philanthropy culture. Most were transfers from technical international aid organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP or USAID. (Judith Rodin's successor, Rajiv Shah, is a former administrator of USAID).

41 See the account on the fate of the regional program by the former director of the regional office in Bangkok: Sciortino, Rosalia (2016). '"Learning Across Boundaries": Grant-making Activism in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region'. In *Scholarship and Engagement in Mainland Southeast Asia*, edited by Oscar Salemink. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Press, pp. 141–166.

The Center and its sister organizations were not meant to be considered as interlocutors with whom the rationale behind Rodin's changes should be discussed. What we all got was the moral support of the remaining Foundation's staff who themselves were unsure about their own fate. What is most shocking with these radical changes in priorities of an institution with a public standing like Rockefeller is the brutality with which they were carried out, and with it, the seeming absence of any sense of accountability on the part of the Foundation's leadership. This way of operating, at least vis-à-vis Southern grantees, can legitimately be considered as an act of neocolonialism, in contradiction with the claims of support for local empowerment advocated by the Foundation. In post-war Cambodia in particular, the U.S.-based institution, for its stated commitment to rebuild the social fabric of the country, held a special responsibility that could not just be unilaterally erased. For the Foundation, the relatively low cost of supporting humanistic education and culture in Cambodia – perhaps 300,000 dollars per year? – was, for the country, of considerable importance. Their abrupt phasing out was bound to have catastrophic effects. I remember that, alarmed by the prospect of the Foundation's planned withdrawal from Cambodia, I directly discussed the matter with the then minister of Education, Kol Peng, founder of Pannasastra University, and a supporter of the JFTP initiative. He decided to write directly to the President of the Rockefeller Foundation. He did so by expressing the gratitude of Cambodia and her government to the Rockefeller Foundation. He hoped he would at least engage in some form of dialogue. according to Kol Peng himself, the ministry never received an answer or even a statement acknowledging his letter. Such behavior, if confirmed, is devastating for the image of a philanthropic establishment that pretends to "generate sustainable impact on individuals, institutions, and communities".[42] It was also a slap in the face of those who worked in and outside the Foundation, to make it the partner of communities in need or so it claimed.

This move on the part of one of the most prestigious foundations reveals a clear ideological realignment of established philanthropy in favor of the neoliberal policies outlined earlier.[43] Now that Rodin is no longer at the helm of the Rockefeller Foundation, more information has emerged about the context in which she overhauled the organization's agenda and what were her

42 See the Foundation's website: http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/.

43 The massive changes that occurred at Rockefeller under Rodin's tenure took place well before the severe financial recession of 2008–2010 which engulfed many established foundations whose endowments were drastically depleted. Ford Foundation for instance, lost one third of its assets and had to close its Moscow and Hanoi regional offices.

motives. Ideologically, she was a strong advocate of the "inclusive capitalism" theory once championed by the World Bank and neo-Keneysian economists, described as a way of maximizing the extent to which capitalism can 'heal its own ills'.[44] To serve this objective, Rodin, the first woman at the Foundation's helm, and before that the first woman to lead an Ivy League university – University of Pennsylvania – adopted an operating model characterized by its overt partnerships with big corporate business and government. The two causes she championed, "climate resilience" and "impact investing", held the potential, as she herself wrote, "to change how both the public and private sectors act on behalf of [their] beneficiaries."[45]

As explained on its website: "to achieve our goal of the well-being of humanity through smart globalization, the Rockefeller Foundation funds a portfolio of initiatives that link and interlink to achieve meaningful and measurable impact." Beyond the rhetoric, the "vision" encourages adaptation – not alleviation – through "smart globalization" to the socio-economic and political forces that are at the origins of inequalities and a destabilized environment.[46]

In line with her philanthropic tenets, Rodin identified a handful of questions supposedly of universal concern for its future interventions: global warming, urbanization, pandemics, social and economic security. The Foundation claimed that clearly delineated projects under these big global themes could yield "concrete solutions" to build resilience to the otherwise unquestioned changes brought about by global capitalism ("smart globalization" is one of the Foundation's new mottos).[47] There were no longer grantees but 'clients', 'subsidiaries' or 'contractors', profit-making as well as non-profit, to whom the Rockefeller Foundation chose to 'outsource' projects. This new mode of collaboration, and this new corporate vocabulary, significantly altered the way the organization would interact with its grantees. Applying to the foundation's new grant making schemes online – without preliminary interactions with program officers – gives the applicant the impression he/she must endorse the plans already concocted by the organization, and that his/her initiative must

44 One of Rodin's allies was the "neo-Keynesian" economist Laurence Summers, former Secretary to the Treasury under President Clinton and former Harvard University President. Summers is widely cited as one of the key architects of the banking deregulation that led to the 2008 financial crash.

45 'Judith Rodin to Step Down as Rockefeller President'. *Philanthropy News Digest*, 17 June 2016.

46 The expression "well-being" is vague enough to forgo any kind of responsibility by the Foundation. See the Foundation's website: http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/, accessed in July 2015.

47 Parmar, Inderjit (2012). *Foundations of the American Century*, p. 254.

fit in its narrow working framework. There is no room for the kind of creative interactive collaboration where foundation officers and grantees worked together to incrementally *shape* a project, *in context*.

On the news of her planned retirement in 2016, a *Wall Street Journal* article, described how Rodin, named by the journalist as "a trail blazer", turned the Rockefeller Foundation into a multinational.[48] Needless to say, CKS's wide capacity-building spectrum based on foundational humanistic education and an appreciation of the local context, could not meet the Foundation's pre-defined objectives. Aimed at nurturing a community of social educators capable of developing *their own* solutions through multifaceted actions, CKS's JFPT did not suit Rodin's agenda. Neither could the program be easily 'evaluated', its impact 'quantified', and its operations 'packaged' as communicable items to be posted in mass media. There were no 'cases of best practice', no 'private-public partnerships' or ways of encapsulating the program in one catchy formula.

Against this overt example of social irresponsibility on the part of one of the most well-known foundations, some institutions have continued to operate on the old philanthropy model. They pay close attention to the projects and the grantees they support on the ground, as well as the way in which institutional sustainability is built into their grants. Organizations like the Asia Cultural Council, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation or the Rockefeller Brothers Fund share a similar vision framed in the long-term and the assumption that quantitative criteria of evaluation cannot truly assess

48 "Like a corporate CEO, [Rodin] has emphasized brand-building and hitting shorter-term performance goals, making her a rarity in the nonprofit world. She unabashedly admits to spending more time with the Foundation's corporate partners than with its grantees. That, plus the rigorous screening process she has put in place for grant funding, have led the Center for Effective Philanthropy to give the Foundation low ratings for its relationship with grant recipients. Other critics say she focuses too much on seeking publicity. […]" The article added: "Hobnobbing with the corporate elite has been a hallmark of Ms. Rodin's tenure. This year, she held a summit at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, with fifteen world and business leaders, hailing from companies including Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Coca-Cola Co. and Nigeria-based Dangote Group to discuss tackling food waste. At the forum, the Foundation handed out snacks from discarded food scraps. Among them were 'upcycled' mango tarts and pickled vegetable salad, which Ms. Rodin made sure former White House assistant chef Sam Kass came by to sample." Even conservative philanthropy experts, the article later mentioned, objected to Rodin's constant publicity-seeking. See Ramachandran, Shalini (2016). 'Judith Rodin Steps Down as Head of Rockefeller Foundation'. *Wall Street Journal*, 15 June. Today, Rodin seats on the board of major multinational corporations including Aetna (health insurance), Electronic Data Systems, BlackRock (asset management and shadow banking).

human developments. Their embrace of situated social progress as something that can be perfected through sustained cultural and educational activities is best illustrated by the dedication of their program officers who, for the most part, come from an academic, artistic or civil society background. Their work is not limited by ideology but rooted in their experience of transformative human experience. This is where I see, beside and in addition to the philanthropy of private individuals, a continuing critical role for socially responsible organizations like foundations. In my view, capacity-building initiatives in the South ought to be committed to a period of at least ten years, even if grant timeframes may not exceed three or four years. Both the grantee institution and the foundation ought to be bound by some sort of moral contract that should help them achieve their common objectives. This kind of contractual collaboration seldom exists in the world of foundations today to the exception, in the arts and humanities, as far as I know, of the institutions mentioned above.[49]

One way to improve grantee-foundation collaboration may lie within the processes of representation and governance. Many foundations do not allow their staff to join grantee institutions' boards because of the risk of conflict of interest. Although this clause guarantees the integrity of both the foundation and the institution, it can prove problematic when either of the two can itself become the site of radical unexpected changes in orientation. CKS encountered this problem when foundations were not in a position to temper decisions taken by individual donors at its helm or, as we have seen, when its main institutional funder decided to discontinue a long-term collaboration. To avoid these shortcomings, it could be advisable for the management of the grantee institution to hold a dual board as mentioned earlier. There could be a board or committee consisting of academics and professionals, and a separate one whose main task would be to determine the financial strategy of the institution and to raise funds. Alternatively, the board should select one of its members to directly interact with foundations. That person should preferably have a background in the philanthropic world. He/she should work with the director of the organization. In any case, some sort of moral agreement between the foundation and the institution should be forged at the outset and acknowledged by both parties beyond sudden changes of staff or policy orientation.

49 For instance, the Mellon Foundation operates on 10–12-year cycles with the objective that its intervention will bear lasting transformative impacts on the ground.

CHAPTER 9

Working with International Organizations and Cultural Diplomacies

Of all CKS's institutional 'stakeholders' or possible ones, that which existed with the public – state – sector was the most tenuous. This was certainly the result of the near-total absence of the post-UNTAC Cambodian state in the areas of creative education and culture. Beyond the Cambodian state, the Center, as both a local and an international structure, had to define its role and relations with non-Cambodian public-sector institutions that were involved in its area of competency. These included international public agencies devoted to development and culture. Organizations like UNESCO or the World Bank are structures that act as both inter- and supra-national, but which at the end are emanations of national sovereign state policies to which they are ultimately accountable. In this public sector should also be included diplomatic missions as extensions of these national states, as far as they are involved in the Cambodian domestic, social and cultural theater. Because of its hybrid and holistic character, CKS cannot be reduced to the private sector in its philanthropic or charity incarnations. As a multi-faceted civil society *civic* entity, it aspired to be at the same time an educational, a cultural and a social actor, and as such, a part of the Cambodian public sphere. This leaves the organization in the often-unrecognized environment of 'social economy' defined by a number of social scientists.

We saw how the Center stood sometimes awkwardly vis-à-vis the academic sector, of which it ought to be part, with relations restricted by a narrowing role of universities under the neoliberal spell. We have seen how constrained it was by its financial dependency on foundations or private philanthropists when its role far exceeded that of charity – a role anchored in an integrated vision which, from the mid-2000s on, fewer foundations also aspired to play. To be recognized as an alternative public good 'third way' to the public and private sectors as they are usually defined and opposed to each other, has been CKS's ambition and that of many of its sister organizations since CEDORECK.

This sector is that of social and solidarity economy, what Neamtan describes as "a pragmatic response to the economic and social challenges of globalization [...] contributing to the renewal of positive and active citizenship locally, nationally and internationally, and to the process of redefining relations

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between the state, the market and civil society."[1] The then and now seemingly in-between position that characterized the Center may explain why, in its relations with public sector programs like international organizations and cultural diplomacy, CKS and other organizations, despite their important role in the revitalization of the country's civil society, were not always taken seriously. The Center and its sister institutions was instead often viewed as problematic.

This last chapter will not describe the same kind of organic relations (and sometimes dependency) CKS experienced with scholars, donors and foundations. Apart from the grants it received from the U.S. Government through its CAORC membership, as mainly an American academic entity, the relations the Center entertained with the international public-state sector remained limited. For this reason, the sections below are sketchier and more impressionistic. I think it is however important to include them in this broader narrative for they illuminate the situation of in-between-ness that characterized the hybrid enterprise of CKS and its aspiration to be part of a new form of social economy, beyond the private-public binary.

The political character of international development agencies and cultural diplomacy is obvious, particularly for a program created to operate outside state politics like CKS. In building the Center, we had to negotiate with these established structures, seeking either their infrastructural support, sometimes funding opportunities, but more importantly, institutional and moral recognition – as states retain the insigne power of providing social legitimacy and norms. The question was about leveraging these objectives while keeping their source at a distance so as to preserve the intellectual and operational freedom of the organization. In some ways, this strategy consisted in reaching interstices of power structures between the forces they represented.[2]

My assessment of these public-sector stakeholders is based on the limited range of relations CKS entertained with a few of them: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Bank (WB) and a few state cultural diplomacies. Opportunities to work with major public agencies of the likes of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Union (EU) as well as major national aid agencies like the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID), Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Department for International Development (DFID), or *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), were in my time limited

1 Neamtan, Nancy (2005). 'The Social Economy', p. 71.

2 Cooper, Frederick and Ann Laura Stoler (Eds.) (1997). *Tensions of Empire, Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, p. 18.

because of the difficulties these agencies had to accommodate CKS and what it represented; also because we were not mentally ready to fully embrace state-centric institutional authority.

In line with recent scholarship on the post-UNTAC period in Cambodia, I share the belief that few or none of these institutions had in their agenda a comprehensive civil society building strategy that included a strong foundational education and cultural dimension.[3] Notwithstanding arguments to the contrary, it is clear that these cooperation programs privileged the support of national state institutions in the host country at the expense of grass-root civil society mechanisms. Another point I should stress from the outset is that these public sector organisms were not immune to the swiping influence of the neoliberal ideology that characterized the 1990s and the 2000s. The effects of this influence among decision makers advocating pro-business 'small government' and an increase in control and bureaucracy could be felt at the receiving end of these organizations' policies. On occasion, when I had a chance to interact with some of their members, aware of Cambodia's deep-seated difficulties, they acknowledged how critical the role of organizations like the Center was to support a culture of social empowerment and civic accountability.[4] Here, I reflect on my experience in working with some of them.

1 The World Bank

The World Bank (WB) has been active in Cambodia since the reopening of the country, originally through an "Emergency Rehabilitation Project" that began in 1993. Since that date, WB has focused on a variety of projects in economic rehabilitation, agriculture, disease control, health, child welfare and the modernization of the country's educational system. With regard to higher education, the WB tried on a number of occasions, beginning in 1995, to launch a comprehensive loan-based program that would have introduced quality control provisions in teaching and research capacities.

CKS collaborated with the Bank under this initiative, with the preparation of a major national higher education public event scheduled to take place in the summer of 2002 in Phnom Penh. I already referred to this event in Part 2 to

3 If not directly dealing with educational and cultural infrastructures, the general conclusion of Ojendal & Lilja and Springer is that long-term civil society development in Cambodia was never an assigned mission of UNTAC and the major international aid agencies.

4 Close to the end of my tenure, I developed a special relation with the representative of the European Commission office who expressed interest in developing a partnership with CKS on a training program at provincial teacher's colleges.

describe the Center's development steps. The program involved the Ministry of Education's State Secretariat for Higher Education. Its objective was to pass a national law on tertiary education that would include the establishment of an independent mechanism of accreditation for universities and curricula as well as a foundational-knowledge first year common to all academic specializations. These reforms, if passed by the Cambodian parliament, would have triggered the granting of a thirty-million-dollars loan by the WB (to be of course repaid by the Cambodian state).[5] In essence, the suggested program attempted at regulating the anarchic process of privatization of the higher education sector, a phenomenon that was already underway. As explained in Part 1, the country was experiencing a wave of creation of dubious universities owned by oligarchs close to power. These new establishments responded to the massive demand in education (and diplomas) by an exploding number of college-age students with virtually no oversight of their education quality or admission standards.[6] Even within the public system, there was little coordination of students' courses of study.

One of the architects of the WB plan for Cambodia was the former Australian minister for Employment, Education and Training John Dawkins (1987–1992). As minister, Dawkins is recognized for introducing 'corporate managerialism' in Australian higher education, a policy referred to as the 'Dawkins revolution'. Among the 'Dawkins reforms' was the encouragement of the use of quantitative criteria to assess and rate research output. These measures have since been subjected to intense criticism for their inappropriateness in evaluating pedagogical and research activities and the general commodification of Australia's higher education.[7] His views broadly matching those of the WB at that time, and having retired from Australian politics, Dawkins moved into the lucrative job of consultant to the Bank. He was hired to 'advise' on higher education reforms in a number of countries, including Cambodia, where he worked with the same team led by the other architect of the proposed Cambodian reform, the economist and education specialist Peter Moock.

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5 Sine, Richard (2002). 'Lack of Standards Threatens Education Loan'. *Cambodia Daily*, 17 October; Falby, Patrick (2012). 'Higher-ed code remains stalled'. *Phnom Penh Post.* 6 December.

6 Caldwell, Mary Louise (2013). 'Neoliberalism and Structural Violence in Developing Countries: The Case of the Cambodian Education Market', Conference paper, University of Sydney.

7 Numerous papers have been published over the last two decades, highlighting Dawkins' legacy and with it, the surrender of Australian universities to the implacable logic of the market. See for instance Gwilym Croucher, Simon Marginson, Andrew Norton and Julie Wells (2014). *The Dawkins Revolution: 25 Years On*, Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.

To address some of the fundamental weaknesses of Cambodian higher education, the methodology of the suggested reform put forward by Dawkins and Moock supported a qualitative improvement of the sector through the introduction of transparent evaluation practices that were not, and this is important, limited to the mere use of metrics – though one of the main problems with such assessment is the lack of independent designers to determine how to measure impact versus implementation both qualitatively and quantitatively. The envisaged accreditation board or commission, free of political influences, would have "set uniform standards for teacher credentials, admissions, curriculum, and school administrative and financial management."[8]

For this latter reason and given the obvious incapacity of the Cambodian public sector to effectively manage the huge domestic demand for education, CKS backed the plan. I thought, perhaps naively, that through its involvement, the Center could help influence the public debate by promoting an appreciation for the need to support pedagogical infrastructures (language modernization, textbooks, reference materials, libraries) for a more humanistic and creative public education sector, especially with regard to the envisioned first "foundational year". In anticipation of the organization of the national conference, CKS assisted the Ministry of Education and the WB representatives by ensuring that no major national and international institutional players in the sector were overlooked. Before their collaboration with the Center, Dawkins and his WB colleagues had made little efforts to study the national and international institutional landscape. They relied almost entirely on a narrow core consisting of the then (Cambodian-American) Secretary of State for Higher Education and his Australian-educated technical assistant – unfortunately for the Bank's strategy, both from the Royalist Party, the minority member of the government. The core also consisted of a member of the Catholic Maryknol order and the U.S. Embassy.

This strategy of near concealment certainly contributed to the WB's failure in its previous attempt to push through its reform two years earlier. Despite declarations to the contrary by the Deputy Prime Minister Sok An, Cambodian law makers – a number of them involved in private university businesses – appeared reluctant to agree on a system that was to exert control over their hitherto unfettered commercial educational ventures. Moreover, the authority recently given to the Royal Academy of Cambodia to issue Master and PhD degrees without going through the planned accreditation process, was seen as an attempt by the Hun Sen leadership to create its own dependable network of Cambodian scholars. Caught between its predilection for concealed lobbying

8 Sine, Richard (2002). 'Lack of Standards'.

tactics and its desire to place its reform in exchange of a loan, the small WB group was rather desperate to find a way through.

We at CKS suggested to widen the support base of the reform plan with, in agreement with the WB, the opportunity of bringing up the higher education reform question to the public stage. To that end, and in anticipation of the national conference, the Center organized a number of meetings for the WB group: with UNESCO, ministries of Culture and of Religion – respectively in charge of the Royal University of Fine Arts and the Royal Buddhist University – Royal Academy of Cambodia and even the Buddhist Institute. We also made sure that major international cooperation programs in education like those led by Japan, Australia and France were also included in the conference, in addition to those of the U.S., the ones best known by the Bank. I also introduced the Bank to Alan Feinstein, then program officer of the Toyota Foundation with whom CKS worked on academic publications support.

The Center took care of the organization of the large conference held in the Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh, on 'Quality Education' in which hundreds of contributors, domestic and international experts, participated. A number of ministers and cultural attachés were also present. We made sure that a large domestic press contingent would cover the event. This second aspect of CKS's assistance proved challenging for a still nascent organization. For the occasion, we mobilized the three young researchers working on Youth Culture under the first Rockefeller-funded capacity-building program. We thought they could benefit from their involvement in the preparation of the event. Numerous public presentations and exchanges took place. Some contributions, like for instance the one by the French Cultural Attaché, not known for his interest in educational matters, chose to support CKS's stand in favor of humanistic training. Similarly, Feinstein, the representative of the Toyota Foundation, insisted on the importance of developing learning materials such as textbooks and university libraries.

It is difficult to assess the full impact of this event. However, for three consecutive days, with the local medias reporting, it brought light to the imperious question of the need for Cambodia to invest in the quality of its academy, which should include a minimum standard in the humanities and should not be restricted to imparting technical knowledge (as was advocated by a Malaysian professor who insisted that Cambodia needed doctors, engineers and lawyers but certainly no historians or writers, the seeds for future political disruptions!). Eventually, the delays in passing the law designed to regulate Cambodia's universities led to the derailment of the higher education reform as it was envisioned by the WB. A law was nevertheless passed in 2003, which created an Accreditation Committee of Cambodia. The new body was

put "under the supervision of the Council of Ministers chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Sok An", thereby frustrating the original objectives of the WB plan.[9]

Besides the obvious interest for CKS to position itself in the national debate on higher education, what I learned from this experience was how an international body like the WB could operate in such a disconnected way from the local social and political environment within which it aimed to operate. The Washington-based institution was ill-informed in its planning to introduce a program of such magnitude. Its staff's priority seemed more about 'selling' a ready-made plan and a loan attached to it, than seeking to fully understand issues of local power relations and internal political sensitivities. Their strategy was also constrained in that they primarily sought to influence members of the local political elite rather than cultivate local partners that could somehow impact the wider national public opinion (medias, professional unions, etc.). Along with Dawkins, other consultants, mostly from Washington DC, were 'parachuted' to talk about Quality Education at the conference. Dawkins and the Bank staff were simultaneously working in Vietnam, Mongolia and Jamaica to introduce their reform model. More anecdotally, I discovered how stingy the WB is when it comes to subcontracting major tasks like those imparted to CKS. On the other hand, I appreciated its capacity to entrust a small organization like the Center. The time I spent working with Dawkins and Moock was collegial and meaningful.

At any rate, the experience was instructive for CKS. We realized how a small southern country like Cambodia is easily exposed to macro-economic and political strategies concocted in the northern centers of power. Effectively aimed at supporting national institutions while promoting a certain vision of development, the Higher Education initiative of the WB had us experience first-hand how its policies, and those of its institutional supporters – i.e. the U.S. government, operated through narrow informal networks of associated individuals, Cambodian or foreign. It got us to realize the extent to which a pro-market orientation prevailed even among Cambodian interlocutors at the ministry and at ancillary institutions. We could see how difficult it is for a local state to resist outside pressures when the country does not have the institutional and social infrastructures and capacities. What we also saw, as

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accreditation_Committee_of_Cambodia, last accessed in August 2016.
Despite its lack of independence, the Commission succeeded in creating a positive trend toward professionalization among at least some of the universities. A Foundational first year was established by the ACC. (Interview with Ky Ravikun, member of the Commission, former JFTP participant, Spring 2008).

a small civil society organization, was how even on the margins, it could contribute its humanistic vision, by virtue of its local anchorage and its capacity to mediate between the macro and the micro policy dimensions. This was a humbling moment for us but also an encouraging one. If CKS played a part in this process, it was to keep itself from becoming a mere mechanism serving the policies of its institutional public partners. Bearing in mind its third year of existence, I think it succeeded in this endeavor.[10]

2 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

In contrast with the World Bank which is a financial institution, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) operates as a specialized agency of the inter-governmental organization of the United Nations. Its mode of operation, probably the most bureaucratic of all the United Nations agencies, is largely determined by the level of internal influence exerted by member countries notably over cultural heritage issues such as for instance the decision to list 'World Heritage Sites'.[11]

The root of the misunderstanding or miscommunication between UNESCO and CKS lies on this fundamental difference: between an international organization whose legitimacy is founded on states and local elites, and on the other, a project born out of the aspirations for social engagement free from state interference in post-UNTAC Cambodia. In the extreme case of post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, one could have hoped that UNESCO and its officers in Paris or Phnom Penh could have done more to uphold the generous universal principles at the origins of the organization.

UNESCO's position and role in Cambodia reveals a special situation. As explained in Part 1, this has to do with the country's post-conflict and

10 A loan similar to the one supported by Moock and Dawkins was eventually made to Cambodia in 2010. Entitled "Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project", the $23-million seven-year loan (5 August 2010–30 September 2017) aimed "to improve the quality of teaching, management, research and providing scholarship to poor students for their higher education." See WB Portfolio in Cambodia, as of April 2017. It is not clear whether the loan was made conditional on the acceptance by the Government of securing independence of the National accreditation Commission. http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/124381493960035853/Portfolio-Factsheet-Cambodia-April2017.pdf, last accessed in August 2017.

11 Meskell, Lynn (2013). 'UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40: Challenging the Economic and Political Order of International Heritage Conservation'. *Current Anthropology* 54 (4): 483–494.

post-colonial background. Even before UNTAC, the international cultural organization was in the forefront during the peace negotiations thanks to the efforts deployed by Norodom Sihanouk and the French and Japanese governments who sought to ensure that the temple complex of Angkor was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1992. At that time, the recognition of Angkor by UNESCO's community of member states symbolized the return of Cambodia on the international arena. The plans for the management of the site were included in the country's overall reconstruction program agreed upon in Paris. A number of international stakeholders, primarily representatives of UNESCO member states, were involved in the World Heritage listing process.[12]

Cambodia was at first badly equipped to resist international interferences or influences over cultural matters. This situation was made more serious because of the increasingly high visibility and economic importance of the World Heritage Site of Angkor as a newly found global tourism magnet.[13] The consequences of the Khmer Rouges' decimation of at least two generations of educated leaders concurred to leave the country subject to aggressive international cultural diplomacies. In the 1990s and 2000s, these countries included Cambodia's former colonizer, France, its former war-time occupier, Japan, but also Australia, India, China and the United States, each animated by geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the region. A sign of Cambodia's strategic importance for UNESCO and the countries that counted within its midst is the fact that the organization's country office became directly dependent on the Paris headquarters, with no ties to the regional Asia-Pacific office located in Bangkok. The situation began to change in the middle of the 2000s with the return to prominence of the Cambodian state on the Angkor scene which rose to the level of a venal guarantor of a politico-diplomatic status quo that continued to profit UNESCO.

Because of CKS's educational and cultural activities, we were at first hoping to collaborate with the international organization. It was, however, only on some occasions, and very intermittently, that we could do so. As I mentioned earlier, the fact for UNESCO that CKS was headquartered in Siem Reap-Angkor, while its activities were national, characterized from the outset a relationship that was marred with misinterpretation and competing legitimacy. At the January 1999 founding workshop of CKS (organized by the World Monuments

12 Peycam, Philippe (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee for Angkor: A World Heritage Site as an Arena of Competition, Connivance and State(s) Legitimation'. *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31 (3): 743–785, pp. 743–744.

13 Winter, Tim (2007). *Post-conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism, Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor*. London: Routledge.

Fund), an uncomfortable relationship began when the UNESCO representative, Sébastien Cavalier, a French diplomat, told participants on the final day of the discussions that the envisioned institution was not regarded as necessary by the organization because the international agency "was already doing what the new Center was set to achieve". The diplomat (and his colleagues) conspicuously missed all the sessions until the final day of presentations where he made his disparaging comments against the proposed plans to create an open academic library in Siem Reap. Probably following the precedent of his French and Japanese mentors, he was mostly concerned with the risk for UNESCO and its supporters that the future CKS library would overshadow their planned 'Documentation Center'. When it finally opened, this 'Center' consisted of one room filled with technical conservation reports provided by the teams working at Angkor, with no provisions to make it a facility open to the public. It did not occur to the UNESCO office, which mainly saw Cambodia through the prism of Angkor, that a scholarly library, even in Siem Reap, could be a positive addition in a country in crying need of such a resource. At that time, many of us among the workshop's participants were not familiar with the level of politics going on in Angkor. This attitude, and UNESCO's refusal to take part in the exchanges that took place throughout the weeklong meeting shocked us.

As discussed in Part 2, it was under the aegis of UNESCO that after 1993, a number of national cultural diplomacies began to operate in Angkor and its surroundings. The ubiquitous international presence had its own institutional platform in the International Coordinating Committee (ICC), an ad-hoc structure co-chaired by the two largest donor countries, Japan and France, with UNESCO operating as its 'Secretariat'.[14] The problem CKS encountered with UNESCO was shared by numerous non-state institutions, especially those not French or Japanese, that tried to exist in an environment dominated by the logic of state politics legitimized by the international organization.[15] What made the situation more difficult was that the Center operated within the geographical limits of the World Heritage site of Angkor, an arena of competition between the numerous national teams working on the site. Thus, CKS was not only troubling for UNESCO because of its multifaceted mandate and its national and international identity. The physical location of its headquarters, within the precincts of a Buddhist monastery, in the heart of 'living' Siem

14 Peycam (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee in Angkor'.

15 There were many organizations that either were not represented at ICC (for instance the environmental group Osmose), or if they were, as in the case of CKS, their position as non-governmental entities confined them to a secondary role.

Reap, showed a level of local anchorage which UNESCO and its supporting national teams could never achieve.

Another anomaly the Center represented in the eyes of UNESCO is that it did not emanate from any nation-state agencies. Internationally headquartered in New York, with significant U.S.-originated funding, CKS needed to stand, in the eyes of the UNESCO officers or 'experts' as strictly an American national institution, with American designs over Angkor and Cambodia. That the Center was also officially recognized by the Cambodian ministries of Education and Culture and was registered as an *Association* in French did not really matter. In CKS they saw concealed hidden U.S. intensions, whether governmental or private. The confusion was wrought by the fact that for many years, UNESCO operated without a U.S. membership (and money), due to the country's withdrawal during the Reagan administration (1984), with countries like Japan and France playing a prominent role in the organization. Though the United States rejoined UNESCO in 2003 after the Iraq War public relations fiasco, the influence of this country on the Angkor scene remained limited. It mainly consisted of supporting, indirectly, the conservation work carried out by the non-profit World Monuments Fund.[16] WMF's activities in Angkor were also perceived negatively by UNESCO and its French and Japanese backers. The Center, which ironically received little or no support from the U.S. Embassy, was seen in similar light.

The UN body's puzzlement with CKS lasted for a while although on occasion, it allowed for some constructive interaction. In the beginning, the senior officer of the ICC Secretariat, Azedine Beschaouch, a trained epigraphist (and later a Tunisian minister of culture), showed signs of comprehension and interest in our project. In earlier meetings (probably in 2001), he encouraged me to operate on the base of a wide transnational academic network on and around Cambodia. A fall-out occurred on the occasion of the tenth-year anniversary of the ICC 'collaborative' model in Angkor at a major conference organized in Paris, in 2003, when Beschaouch, who had invited us, denied Lois de Menil, the CKS President, the right to talk.[17] Later, the Center enjoyed another phase of appeasement with UNESCO thanks to one of its officials in Phnom Penh, Tamara Teneischvili, a trained archaeologist from Georgia who sympathized

16 WMF received U.S. Government subsidies to carry out projects in Angkor, for instance, on the Phnom Bakheng temple.

17 Beschaouch, a Tunisian, has served well the French and the Cambodian governments. Beside a considerable list of honorific titles in these countries, and despite his age (b. 1938), he continues to act as Permanent Secretary of ICC.

with the works carried out by the Center and that of other cultural NGOs. Teneischvili knew personally the members of organizations such as Reyum, Amrita, Bophana, SIPAR, etc., whom she encouraged by attending their events or visiting their spaces. It is probably thanks to her help that CKS was formerly acknowledged in 2006, through a 'Special Resolution' issued by the UNESCO's World Heritage International Committee congratulating it (together with the Japanese and French Governments), for its capacity-building endeavors in Cambodian higher education. These efforts on both sides to keep a civil relationship were nevertheless tarnished because of repeated petty incidents – when CKS and its affiliate scholars were not permitted to present their work at ICC meetings, for instance.

This deep-seated mistrust results I believe, from the difference of allegiance that marked the two organizations. Many scholars have pointed to UNESCO's flawed position because of its dependency on the patronage of national states as its main contributors and legitimizers. A new research subject, "UNESCO Studies" is indeed fast developing as a subfield of 'Heritage Studies'. It aims at critically assessing, through sociological, ethnographic, historical and political inquiries, the exact role and impact of the organization's policies in sites where it is actively engaged, particularly in World Heritage Sites such as Angkor.[18] By definition, UNESCO's country missions must embrace the agenda of their host country, as well as the big funding states and their diplomatic missions. This political dependency somewhat reinforces a culture of social irresponsibility that primarily benefits the local ruling elites, a few well-paid international staff and some outside 'experts'.[19] This model hinders the organization's actions while it maintains in its midst an opaque and often dysfunctional mode of operation with no clear decision-making processes and a near impossibility for civil society actors to weigh in.[20]

Apart from individuals like Teneischvili, the Center's actions in favor of the promotion of Cambodia's cultural revival and education were generally

18 See the pioneering works by Lynn Meskell, already cited. See for instance a public roundtable on 'The Effect of UNESCO on Local Notions of Heritage', held at the International Convention of Asian Scholars 8, Macau, June 2013.

19 Meskell, Lynn (2013). 'UNESCO's World Heritage Convention at 40', pp. 484–94.

20 Some UN agencies like UNHCR have for a long time developed more transparent mechanisms. Forms of civil society representation have also been institutionalized (e.g. churches, associations, NGOs, community groups, etc.). See Martens, Kerstin (2011). "Civil Society, accountability and the UN System". In *Building Global Democracy? Civil Society and Accountable Global Governance*, edited by Jan Aart Scholte. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also from the same author: *NGOs and the United Nations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

ignored by UNESCO officials. What made CKS somehow ungraspable for them, was the kind of community-focused activities supported by it and other similar cultural organizations. The range of these programs in Cambodia somewhat highlighted the extent to which the international organization was conspicuously weak when it came to addressing the capacity-building aspect of its mandate. This was problematic for the staff at the UNESCO office in Phnom Penh, particularly given the organization's post-UNTAC discourse in favor of cultural and educational reconstruction in the aftermath of the war.

Three examples demonstrated UNESCO's lack of interest in the educational and community-based activities developed by CKS: I already referred to the conference on the reform of the higher education sector which CKS facilitated on behalf of the World Bank and the Ministry of Education in 2002. As the conference's coordinating party, the Center organized a meeting between visiting representatives of the World Bank and the country head of UNESCO, Étienne Clément, to inform him about the object of the upcoming event and to ensure that the international organization would be represented. Despite the positive intentions expressed by our host, no one from UNESCO attended or participated in the three-day conference. The organization was then coordinating a major program on higher education at the Royal University of Fine Arts. Supported by the Japanese Government's Trust-in-fund made to the international organization, the program funded activities (and many foreign experts) in the faculties of Archaeology and Architecture to train future Cambodian workers on the archaeological site. However valuable this program was, UNESCO, whose mandate includes education in general, chose to leave it insulated from the larger discussions over the modernization of Cambodia's higher education.

A similar case of light headedness was shown the following year when CKS, Reyum and the Toyota Foundation organized a national conference on academic publishing. The UNESCO office was informed long in advance about the event. When meeting the officers in the Phnom Penh office, the staff expressed interest in the initiative. But again, none of them came to take part in the public forum organized in Phnom Penh in the presence of numerous journalists and local intellectuals. Had a representative of the French or Japanese embassy been present, or the event organized by either of them, probably Clément would have sent someone. The last example I can mention is the 2008 roundtable on Siem Reap's urban-scape "in the shadow of Angkor", co-organized by CKS with the Siem Reap Province, APSARA Authority, the Pacific Rim Council on Urban Development, Getty Conservation Institute, and the Superior School of Architecture of Paris-Belleville, an event I discussed earlier, at which not only UNESCO failed to send a representative but whose official conclusions

to be presented at the following ICC meeting were discarded by the UNESCO Secretariat and its two 'co-Presidents' (of the French and Japanese embassies).[21]

It is not difficult to assess the reason for such a disconnect between CKS and UNESCO. Beyond the irritating circumstances that existed around the Center's presence in Siem Reap, in the shadow of the sacrosanct Angkor, what separated the two institutions was a difference in political vision, and with it, of social involvement. In spite of the support of officers like Teneishvili, the general mode of interaction between UNESCO and NGOs like the Center remained minimal or superficial. From the perspective of CKS, we sadly came to regard UNESCO as an insignificant player and an often impediment to the consolidation of a more open and democratic Cambodian society.

3 Working with Diplomats

Among the international public stakeholders of CKS is the category of embassy and foreign affairs personnel in charge of educational and cultural cooperation, bilateral and multi-lateral, or 'cultural diplomats' whose work corresponds to the characterization of states' 'soft power'. For Joseph Nye, the promoter of the concept, "Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies".[22] In diplomatic terms, soft power reflects the capacity of a state-constructed 'national culture' to project an influence on the public opinion of other countries with the objective of conditioning the actions of their governments as well as other domestic power players. A definition of cultural diplomacy was given by former American diplomat Richard Arndt: "Cultural diplomacy can only be said to take place when formal diplomats serving national governments try to shape and channel [the] natural flow [of cultural relations existing between societies without government intervention] to advance national interests."[23] A number of the foreign diplomatic missions

21 The representatives of the Paris-Belleville Architectural School, present at the IIC meeting, were denied by the Secretariat the possibility to present the roundtable and its outcome. As explained earlier, its recommendations included a demand for future ICC meetings to be opened to representatives of the local communities.

22 Nye, Joseph S. (2004). 'Soft Power and American Foreign Policy Source'. *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (2): 55–270, p. 256.

23 Arndt is cited in: Lenczowski, John (2009). 'Cultural Diplomacy, Political Influence, and Integrated Strategy'. In *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare*, edited by Michael J. Waller. Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 74–99, pp. 75–76.

that were present in Cambodia ran cultural and educational initiatives. Some of them operated through international organizations like UNESCO or WB.

Though officially an American Overseas Research Center since 2004, CKS, thanks to its second 'hat' as a registered Cambodian capacity-building organization, sought to collaborate with different national and bilateral state programs, in the U.S. and beyond. How did the Center negotiate with diplomatic missions without compromising its multi-level commitments? Were there any trends affecting these relations during my tenure? The following section will attempt to answer these questions by focusing on three of the most significant state diplomacies in 2000s Cambodia, those of the United States, Japan and France. I will discuss each of them separately on the basis of their interaction with CKS.

For each of the three diplomacies, history of past Cambodian involvements played an important role in contemporary choices and strategies. In the case of French cultural cooperation, managing a problematic colonial heritage – and responsibility – vis-à-vis its former Indochinese possession loomed larger than the modern strategic imperatives of a faraway European country like France – even if aspirations for a continuing influential presence were palpable. For the Japanese cooperation, it was less about the constraints of having once militarily occupied Southeast Asia during WWII, than a regional strategy through which Japan sought to position herself as a benign post-war partner, particularly against an anticipated rising Chinese influence and also as a counterpoint to the U.S. and European cultural presences in Southeast Asia. In the case of American cultural cooperation, the legacy of a recent past of warfare and military intervention in mainland Southeast Asia competed with the new priorities of a post-Cold War order which the U.S. dominated under the ideological seal of 'electoral market democracy', and a range of new challenges and contestations against this domination – including, looming in sight, China's growing assertiveness in the region.

3.1 *United States' Cultural Diplomacy*

Engaging with U.S. diplomacy in Cambodia in the first decade of the new millennium had CKS engaged with a 'mission' that was stripping itself of its 'cultural' and 'soft' components to replace them with harder traits. Indeed, the beginning of the Center corresponds to the period when the Cold War-era cultural arm of the country's foreign policy, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was shut down, at the end of 1999. This change was just another episode in the tumultuous relations between the two countries since Cambodia's independence. Diplomatic relations were broken (by Cambodia) in May 1965 in protest of U.S. military incursions from Vietnam. They were

reestablished in July 1969 until, on 12 April 1975, the mission was evacuated on the eve of the fall of the capital to the Khmer Rouge. A 'U.S. Mission' re-opened on 11 November 1991 in anticipation of the Paris peace conference. Full diplomatic relations were re-established after the September 1993 elections. This tumultuous history is reflected in the five moves of the U.S. Embassy that occurred in Phnom Penh since 1953.

In the 2000s, the American representation was arguably, possibly along that of China, the most influential of all the foreign missions in Cambodia, capable of exerting direct and indirect pressures on her domestic policy. Its power leverage was based on the considerable influence the United States had in regional and international structures such as the UN, IMF, WB and ADB, while, since 1995, the opening of its market to Cambodian garment exports provided additional room for the exertion of economic pressures. Meanwhile, U.S.-originated aid to the country's civil society far surpassed that from any other country. By the end of the decade, however, this influence was being challenged by that of China which became Cambodia's largest bilateral donor – before Japan and the European Union – and by a more assertive Hun Sen regime.[24]

The general reframing of state intervention in fashion in Washington since the 1990s inspired the drastic transformations of the U.S. diplomatic model that led to the closure of the United States Information Agency (USIA) the very year of CKS's birth. The ideologically motivated move constitutes, in hindsight, one of the worst self-inflicted damaging policies ever carried out by the U.S.[25] It was only a few months earlier, that the last USIA Cultural Attaché, Mary Schaeffer, one of the key participants of the January 1999 workshop that helped shape the Center, had fully endorsed the plan to combine support for American and international academics in Cambodia with building local individual and institutional capacities to support Cambodians through – primarily U.S.-originated – funded programs, with the discreet backing of the diplomatic mission.

The end of the position of Cultural Attaché, renamed 'Public Affairs Officer' (PAO), with more limited discretionary powers, opened a period where cultural and educational programs like the Center, once regarded as attributes of America's soft power, received scant attention from diplomats. The 11 September 2001 attacks in New York accelerated the trend. Almost nothing

24 During my time in Cambodia, China's influence in the areas of culture and education was minimal.

25 See Cull, Nicholas (2012). *The Decline and Fall of the United States Information Agency: American Public Diplomacy, 1989–2001*. Palgrave MacMillan.

of the Embassy's cultural diplomacy remained. Resources were redirected towards new preoccupations in terms of geopolitical security. A fortress mentality had crept in among many of the embassy's personnel.

The mid-2000s marked a renewal of the American presence in the country, one that I would characterize as based on a more utilitarian conception of collaboration. New programs ranged from primary education support, assistance in upholding and maintenance of 'human rights' and the 'rule of law', military collaboration, technical training – through for instance the introduction of the U.S. Peace Corps in 2006. Apart for an 'Ambassador's Cultural Fund' grant application program – later turned into a larger 'U.S. Ambassadors fund for Cultural Preservations', aimed primarily at supporting "the preservation of cultural sites, cultural objects, and forms of traditional cultural expression" – and the Fullbright Hayes educational exchange program, U.S. diplomacy no longer directly engaged with culture, an area it rather left to the private non-profit sector.[26]

In this strategically located small country that is Cambodia, in the southern periphery of China, a region that still bore the scars of a war resulting largely from past U.S. policies, the new American diplomacy pursued a 'present-day' (one might say a-historical) opportunistic strategy. This meant that the patient policy of cultivation of educated segments of the host society out of which could emerge future leaders and partners, through the development of a coherent set of educational and cultural activities were no longer in fashion. This contrasted with the Cold War-era tradition when high-cultured American diplomats saw the importance of investing in policies that in places like Thailand or South Korea proved successful in building ties and containing Communism. These latter countries saw a plethora of public intellectuals, scholars, artists and other social leaders trained in the United States who today serve as the society's backbone.[27]

It was on rare occasions that CKS was to directly benefit from the Embassy's support. These were limited in time and scale and remained marginal to the Center's agenda: in 2004, the Embassy once contributed to the cost of completing the translation of David Chandler's *History of Cambodia*; two years later, it supported a conference jointly organized by the World Monuments Fund

26 See the Embassy's site: https://kh.usembassy.gov/education-culture/grant-programs/ambassadors-fund-for-cultural-preservation/, last accessed in September 2017. Not restricted to the humanities, the Fulbright Hayes Fellowship program aims at Cambodians and Americans for research and education abroad. The program is individual-based and does not support institutions.

27 An example of this pro-culture U.S. diplomatic policy I experienced in 1987 was the excellent American Cultural Center in Dakar, Senegal.

and the Center aimed at developing an integrated approach to the restoration of the Angkor site of Phnom Bakheng.[28] These actions were punctual. They could not replace a real strategy of support for what CKS was doing.

Things were different at the personal level. Despite the structural limitations in policy mentioned above, however, the first half of the decade was a period of relative grace for the Center's relations with the Embassy. It was certainly so under the short tenure of Ambassador Charles Ray (2003–2005), a military veteran of the Vietnam war who displayed a strong interest in the Center and other organizations of its kind. Ray was supported by two successive Deputy Chiefs of Mission (DCM), Alexander Arvizu and Mark Storella, two professional diplomats who displayed a remarkable activism and a strong interest in Cambodia and her culture. Both spoke Khmer. They were naturally well disposed towards CKS and its objectives. Thanks to their support, the Embassy provided it with logistical support such as free shipping of books to its library. CKS gained another solid support in the Embassy's local Cambodian staff. Their role was not subaltern. Better than career diplomats on short deployments in the country, Cambodian embassy personnel understood the role CKS played in society.

With the departure of Ambassador Ray, and that of Storella one year later, CKS's relations became somewhat tenuous. Like with other institutional partners, changes of personnel can bring adverse impacts on an organization, however independent it may be. From the CKS's perspective, the appointment of a new ambassador, Joseph Musomelli (2005–2008) marked an inflection towards a more conservative 'hard power' focus of the Embassy and for CKS, a less receptive period. The change is possibly one of perception only. Yet, in spite of the courteous words pronounced by Musomelli on occasions of the CKS board's visits, it was as if the areas of activities covered by the Center were no longer valued by the ambassador and his team.

What I perceived was an interest in Cambodia that was more framed in the ahistorical categories infused in diplomatic and international relations studies today. In their eyes, Cambodia's history was to be mainly appraised through a moralistic angle: that of the genocidal legacy of the Khmer Rouge and its ties with present-day leaders, the debate over the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, or the current policies of Hun Sen. In my conversation with Musomelli and his entourage,

28 The event, entitled 'Phnom Bakheng Workshop on Public Interpretation', was held from 4–6 December 2005. Coordinated by the late conservationist Jane Chermayeff, this high-profile event included the active participation of local villagers and Buddhist monks. It helped to draw a strategy that combined physical conservation of archaeological remains with that of their vegetal environment and a policy to restrict the flow of tourists.

I sensed a certain anti-intellectualism coupled with a refusal to appreciate the wider historical and cultural background in which they operated. This refusal to go deeper than the surface became clear when I realized the narrow focus through which the Embassy seemed to support one single 'cultural' program: that carried out by the Documentation Center on Cambodia, better known as 'DC-Cam'. DC-Cam is an organization born out of a State Department and Congress-funded program aimed at documenting Khmer Rouge atrocities. Initially attached to Yale University, it has been led since its creation in 1997 as a Cambodia-based NGO by the genocide survivor and former Texas police officer Youkh Chhang. DC-Cam collects evidence of the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge for use in court against living perpetrators. This is coupled with efforts to disseminate information on the crimes of the Khmer Rouge and in the training of high-level Cambodian researchers.[29] Under the George W. Bush Administration (2000–2008), for obvious political reasons aimed at the Hun Sen regime, DC-Cam became one of the privileged recipients of Republican-led U.S. Government funding.[30] However important and necessary the work of DC-Cam was, I found it rather problematic that American diplomacy chose to limit its appreciation of Cambodian history to the Khmer Rouge episode.

A revealing incident occurred when CKS facilitated the visit of representatives of PEN International New York into Cambodia. The Center arranged for the members of three major publishing houses to come to Cambodia. A visit to the Embassy was organized and the PEN representatives and myself met Ambassador Musomelli. When asked by his visitors what kind of concrete initiatives the Embassy was taking to support literary education in Cambodia, he answered: "We are supporting DC-Cam!" This answer stunned the guests. It was not just his narrow cultural knowledge; it was the fact that, even in my presence, he had not thought of CKS as an organization deemed worth a contribution in this realm.

In contrast to these challenging relations with the Embassy, exchanges with the State Department in Washington DC acquired an enhanced quality. There, I met receptive people who were convinced of the importance of developing meaningful cultural collaborations and making use of the little resources they had at their disposal as a way of circumventing the constraints imposed on their services by the policies of the day. Initiatives such as the "Ambassador's Cultural Fund" or support for looted archaeological property were among the

29 On Youkh Chang, see the biographical information compiled by John Ciorciari, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, available in: http://d.dccam.org/Brief_Biography_of_Youk_Chhang.pdf.

30 As discussed in Part 2, CKS's relations with DC-Cam were almost non-existent.

instruments they mobilized with a view to building local capacities. The projects supported carefully denoted considerations. The Center was often asked to provide advice on their nominations. These small amounts were aimed at Cambodian institutions or NGOs more in need of resources than the Center – for instance, the refurbishment of the National Museum's library.

A disjunction seemed to exist between Washington and the Embassy. It was clear when embassy staff regularly expressed surprise towards the fact that CKS received Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) funding for its fellowship program. Some initiatives from this Department were even duplicated with little possibilities of connections between them. This was the case, as explained in Part 2, with the Fulbright Hayes fellowship program aimed at Cambodian and American researchers at the same time that CKS was handling ECA fellowships. An exchange of information over the two programs, and with it a better appreciation of CKS's role, could have helped optimize their impacts in both countries.

In contrast with the French and Japanese diplomats I worked with, I must mention that relations with the U.S. diplomats were non-hierarchical and collegial. They also exhibited a relative ease in dealing with a non-state structure like us. The U.S. state, through its tax-deductible policy, in effect enables a wide range of civil society-to-civil society initiatives, notably through NGOs, foundations and church-originated projects (of which the Cambodian-American community initiates some). Amounting to the largest bulk of financial contributions made to Cambodia, these American-originated private initiatives could, if judged useful by diplomats, be facilitated and supported. One caveat to this relative openness, was the physical remoteness of the embassy's staff from the life and reality of the country in which they were posted, particularly after 11 September 2001 and the excessive emphasis placed on the personnel's security.

These notes are of course impressionistic. They only relate to the period of my Cambodian tenure. To be fair, CKS's mission and goals were rather abstract and far-fetched in time. We were located in Siem Reap, which may have contributed to a certain distance in perception with the Embassy. Me being a non-U.S. citizen, the difficulty of building trusting relationships with regularly changing diplomatic staff surely had an impact in the way CKS was perceived at the Embassy. We were also one small NGO among hundreds in Cambodia that received funding from the U.S.[31]

31 The decision taken after my departure to turn the organization into a more exclusively U.S. 'overseas center' probably made the relations with the Embassy easier. It remains to be seen, however, whether the abandonment of CKS's original hybrid identity was

3.2 *French Cultural Diplomacy*

Not surprisingly, French cooperation in the cultural and educational realms in Cambodia since the Paris Peace Treaty has remained intricately linked to the continuing legacies of her colonial presence. This legacy was reinforced by the influence exerted by a number of exiled former elite Cambodians, who, upon their return to their country of origin from France, felt a longing for taking the country back to the *Sangkum* era which they considered as a 'golden age', a period where France's influence was considerable. These numerically limited but politically influential circles, along with those from the United States, usually joined the opposition to CPP. For most of the 1990s and at least the first half of the 2000s, this group set the tone for a 'society' culture in Phnom Penh that ran parallel to that of the ruling economic and political elite. In the political arena, the fact that the two emblematic opposition leaders, Sam Rainsy and Norodom Ranariddth, held French passports, contributed to the political embeddedness that characterized French diplomacy in Cambodia since 1991.

This elite Ancien Régime Cambodian presence, also embodied by France's close connection with the Cambodian monarchy, continued to blur the country's post-colonial cooperation. French diplomacy in Cambodia in the 1990s and 2000s did not feature the kind of renewed vision found for example in Vietnam after the European country was forced to reinvent its relations with her former colony after her clear-cut defeat there. America's calamitous record in the 1970s, the civil war and the Khmer Rouge genocide, the Vietnamese occupation followed by the restoration of the monarchy and the ubiquitous French-Cambodian presence in post-UNTAC Phnom Penh and Hun Sen's brutal political style, all contributed to cast a nostalgic eye on the pre-war years. This somehow made France's state diplomacy towards Cambodia oblivious to her own past responsibilities. In fact, French diplomats sought to prolong a policy inaugurated after 1953, in agreement with Sihanouk, as somewhat of a benevolent guardian of Cambodia's historical and cultural 'continuity'. This policy helped to normalize France's colonial past in a way not possible in other former colonies. This, I believe, continues to distort perspectives while it affects many French diplomats who simply ignore the traumatic cultural and human postcolonial experience affecting Cambodia today, whose roots can be traced to the decades of France's rule over the Southeast Asian country. The narrative imaginary of a benign, protective ex-metropole, 'mentor' of its weak former colony, can be found elsewhere. The relation entertained by all successive French governments towards Lebanon is one example. Historical reasons

in the long run a positive development, including with regard to its capacity to project American soft power in Cambodia.

and contexts may differ, the quality of the ties may be different, however, in the minds of many French, Lebanese, and I believe some Cambodians, the power of such imaginary remained an enduring one.

I observed this tendency during my first meeting with the then French ambassador, André-Jean Libourel, in November 1999, when I sought institutional support for the nascent CKS. I was given a condescending lecture by the diplomat. I, a trained historian on colonial 'Indochina', was shocked by the patronizing tone of the lecture and his self-contentment with regard to France's 'achievements' in Cambodia since the Protectorate in 1863, with little critical distancing for what after all had been a historical fiasco: a crude policy of subjugation sanctioned by a violent war of liberation in the country next-door, as well as in Cambodia, itself at the root of the chaos and destruction that engulfed the country. Less surprising for who is interested in French colonial history, was the fact that Libourel was close to the officially left-leaning French Socialist Party.[32]

In 1990s and 2000s Southeast Asia, the position and influence of France was that of a middle-range faraway player. This objective situation was reflected in Cambodia. In the domains of cultural and economic 'soft' influence, France had to contend with countries like Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, Germany, and above all Japan, whose financial might assured her a new prominent role. France's political influence on its former colony was dwarfed by that of the United States, especially once this country engaged in a more aggressive approach following the 9/11 attack. Above all, French diplomats along with their colleagues of the mentioned countries were witnessing the seemingly irresistible integration of Cambodia into China's new sphere of regional influence. Among French diplomats, the patronizing sentiment of their country's benevolence described earlier coexisted with a knowledge that their room of maneuver was limited, a situation made worse as a result of reductions in their financial capacities. This contradictory reality between discourse and means is known to every French diplomat. It determines the way they envision cooperation in and with Cambodia. Because of the historical legacy and the ubiquitous presence of French Cambodians in Phnom Penh, France's cultural cooperation in Cambodia can hardly follow a simple track.

32 On the French non-Communist Left's colonial expansionism, see Girardet, Raoul (1972). *L'Idée Coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962*. Paris: Fayard. At that same meeting, Libourel scorned me for the fact that, as a 'compatriot', I chose to work for an American NGO, suggesting that I was a kind of 'traitor' – a word I later heard among members of the French circles in UNESCO.

For a non-Gallic, independent cultural and educational organization like CKS, a certain degree of intimacy mixed with emotional reaction from the French diplomats had to be expected, all the more so since I was French myself and that CKS, in its board and team always included French citizens. Such post-colonial 'insensitivity' was primarily found in the area of cultural exchanges, including over the question of language. In the middle of the 1990s, French diplomats clumsily but also arrogantly, tried to ascertain French language by making its use a pre-condition to educational support at a time when the country's institutions were on their knees. The mass demonstrations by hostile Cambodian youth in the streets of Phnom Penh that ensued – the students being well aware that English and other languages like Japanese or Chinese would be more helpful for their professional careers – traumatized the French diplomats who painfully realized the fragility of France's self-claimed special connection with Cambodia.[33]

The language issue had largely receded when I arrived, but the role that France's diplomacy played in the cultural and educational sectors in Cambodia remained ambiguous. In Cambodia, the two sectors of activity have become an essential leitmotif of France's official presence in the country since the 1960s. The relations between CKS and French diplomats were characterized by a mixture of suspicion, sometimes acrimony, and yet, outright interest. Surprisingly, they resulted in few meaningful collaborations, especially at the level of professionals on the ground, below the circle of professional diplomats. For the French ambassadors or cultural attachés, the hybrid nature of CKS – a Cambodian NGO, an American academic institution, but also a French-registered *Association* – caused problems. Like their UNESCO counterparts, they struggled to envisage that an organization like the Center could act independently from orientations dictated by a government. In fact, CKS was in the paradoxical situation of not being really taken seriously by American diplomats while it was taken perhaps too seriously by their French colleagues who, for some of them at least, suspected it of some kind of U.S. machination to acquire influence in what they saw as a French preserve.

This perception was made more acute because of CKS's location near Angkor. As explained earlier, CKS was seen as seeking to undermine the praised example of international cooperation that reigned over the club of UNESCO-coordinated International Coordinating Committee (ICC) member

33 On the language question at university, see Clayton, Thomas (2002). 'Language Choice in A Nation Under Transition: The Struggle Between English and French in Cambodia'. *Language Policy* 1 (1): 3–25. See also, Clayton, Thomas (2006). *Language Choice in a Nation Under Transition, English Language Spread in Cambodia*. New York: Springer.

states, with France and Japan at its helm. No doubt, UNESCO's own suspicions may have fueled French concerns, and vice-versa. One key difficulty CKS faced was the lukewarm reception it got from the orientalist institution *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO). As we saw in Part 1, the *École*, notably with its work on Angkor and the modernization of Cambodian Buddhism as well as art and crafts, played a crucial role during the colonial and pre-war periods in shaping the ideological canons of Cambodian cultural nationalism (defined around Angkor, Buddhism and the monarchy). In the 1990s, EFEO reestablished its quarters in the country. Soon again, Angkor became the public relations spearhead of the institution, and of France in the region. The official academic arm of France in the World Heritage Site, EFEO played a crucial role in the UNESCO-facilitated 'international cooperation' over Angkor. Not only was it assigned to undertake major archaeological and restoration projects, but it sought to maintain a certain monopoly on intellectual knowledge production over Cambodia's ancient past. Not surprisingly, EFEO members looked suspiciously at CKS and its establishment near the temple complex. Reminiscent to the old quarrel that once opposed the colonial scholars of EFEO and their 'amateur' rivals, the very presence of CKS and its multifaceted capacity-building activities was seen as a threat to the French diplomats and their EFEO colleagues.

As much a diplomatic as a scientific effort, EFEO's work in Angkor was only loosely conjoined with other French government-funded programs aimed at supporting Cambodia's higher education sector, the country's public cultural sector, and overall, the rehabilitation of state administrations. This cooperation was conceived as a coherent ensemble, built on the long-term. It somewhat followed the state-building strategy followed by Sihanouk after independence. Shaped from above, these large-scale schemes genuinely aimed at restoring the sector. The technocratic character of this cooperation in Cambodia was nonetheless praiseworthy for its comprehensive multi-year vision. It seemed, however, to have often consisted of an attempt at importing into the Cambodian reality the French state institution model, for instance the replication of the French *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* into an *Ecole Royale d'Administration* to prepare the kingdom's top civil servants.

In general terms, France's statist, fundamentally elitist, cultural and education programs contradicted the bottom-up approach taken by grassroot projects like CKS. In practice, however, apart from the opposition of a few Angkor-obsessed diplomats, we encountered positive reactions from members of the Higher Education French support program as well as those involved in publishing and the arts. With the French cultural centers in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap for instance, CKS collaborated in the form of joint events, book

launches, training programs and inter-library collaborations. In publishing, we cooperated with the program VALEASE (*Valorisation de l'Écrit en Asie du Sud-Est* – Valorization of Written Culture in Southeast Asia) by digitizing rare Khmer-language materials held at the National Library of Cambodia, and by supporting public libraries. The same program funded the publication in Khmer, English and French of the 'Publishing In Cambodia (PIC)' report which CKS developed with Reyum Institute and the Toyota Foundation – a rare example of international and inter-institutional collaboration.

Equally important was the collaboration between the Center and the French-supported department of Languages and Linguistics at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. CKS-supported young Cambodian scholars under JFTP (Rockefeller-supported) took training in translation and academic editorship, a program led by linguists Chan San Noble, Sylvain Vogel and Jean-Michel Filippi. Some of Vogel's students in Sanskrit were later supported by CKS. This French Embassy-RUPP-CKS-Rockefeller collaboration enabled the Center to be associated in the strategic discussions on higher education cooperation led by the then Academic Cooperation Attaché of the Embassy, Louis Arsac. The level of intimacy of such collaboration enabled CKS to play its role as an independent platform that could bring together projects involving publishing organizations like SIPAR, Reyum (Phnom Penh), Mekong Press (Chiang Mai), PEN International (New York), or foundations like Rockefeller-Bangkok. Because all shared the same objective of rebuilding Cambodia's humanistic academia, the non-state non-profit structure of CKS and the cultural diplomacy outlet of the French Embassy complemented each other well.

Starting in the second half of the 2000s, I noticed an inflection of the French cultural and educational cooperation toward a more accountant-driven mode of operation. The trend resulted in the closing of programs and a new focus that favored publicity over substance. France had just inaugurated the Sarkozy reign (2007–2012). The same neoliberal inflection that had already crippled the American cooperation was now seriously eroding the foundations that took so long for the French cooperation to achieve in terms of institution building. An example of the slash-and-burn policy that characterized the period was the termination of the Language and Linguistic program by the cultural services of the Embassy. Vogel and Filippi, the principle architects of the program, were one after the other dismissed after years of teaching at the public university. Arsac himself, who tried to save the program, was not replaced. In this regressive phase of France's cultural diplomatic cooperation, little thought was unfortunately given to a transition plan in favor of Cambodian ownership, or at least the possibility of facilitating non-state structures, like CKS, to negotiate this phase of retreat. Some very valuable initiatives were simply closed.

Beyond Cambodia, my sense is that French diplomats, like their American colleagues, did not recognize the long-term soft power potential a structure like CKS, as an innovative model of cooperation could hold. If I limit myself here to France's 'interests', her influence in Cambodia could only have benefitted from the Center's inclusive initiatives. In addition to supporting local scholars, the Center encouraged interactions between French, Cambodian and American scholars through its multi-year fellowship program that enabled French undergraduates to spend two months in the summer with counterparts from Cambodia and the U.S., and through its doctoral fellowships for French researchers. A number of these researchers, some of them of Cambodian background, would have had otherwise scant chances of obtaining funding at home. Thanks to these initiatives, both supported by the New York-based Florence Gould Foundation, a substantial number of these young academics gained international visibility. The fact that members of the CKS staff and board were French, that the CKS team recognized the critical importance of French language and French scholarship in Khmer studies, contradicted the specious suspicions and often outright hostility that pervaded in the Angkor (French) circles.

3.3 *Japanese Cultural Diplomacy*

From 1992 until at least 2015, Japan was Cambodia's biggest donor, providing more than $2 billion in official development assistance. Given the importance of this cooperation in the areas of education and culture in Cambodia in the 1990s and 2000s, I think it is necessary to assess its role and its possible influence on the work of organizations like CKS.[34]

Like in the case of the diplomacies of the two Western countries discussed above, Japanese public cooperation in Cambodia must be historically and regionally contextualized. As most of Southeast Asia, the southern country was once occupied by the Japanese imperial forces, although the impact of this short period – four years, in conjunction with the pro-Vichy French colonial administration, five months of direct rule, with the proclaimed 'independence of the kingdom', from March 9 till Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945 – was mainly felt by the acceleration of the decline of Western colonialism in the region and characterized by years of economic hardship.

34 See Kung, Phoak [2015]. 'Cambodia-Japan Relations: Beyond the East China Sea'. *The Diplomat*.
My views on Japanese cooperation in these fields are sketchier that those of France and the United States.

Japan's policy towards Southeast Asia in the first two decades after the war was mainly focused on economic development, often in the guise of war reparations, that primarily aimed at supporting access to raw materials and new markets for Japanese firms. Under the American alliance against Communism, Japan's engagement in the region was initially devoid of outright political and cultural concerns due to fears that these might resurrect old war-time grievances. With the 'Fukuda Doctrine' – based on a speech made by the then Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda in Manila, Philippines, in 1977 – which has remained the basis of post-war Japan's foreign policy for Southeast Asia, the Eastern Asian country positioned itself as a non-military power primarily concerned with economic cooperation. However, against the concern over persistent anti-Japanese feelings in the region, state policymakers embarked on a soft power strategy aimed at deepening relations with its peoples. The period was propitious: Japan had become the second largest economy in the world and a model for many Asian countries; the inability of other Asian states, especially China, to rival Japan's soft-power in the same manner festered. The new approach focused on various sectors including economic development (ODA), with a newly revamped JICA, and in socio-cultural activities through the promotion of culture, education, exchanges, and heritage.[35]

The 1990s became the real decade of Japan's cultural diplomatic offensive in Cambodia and in Southeast Asia. Even before the end of the Cold War, the country, constrained under the American umbrella, devised a strategy characterized by its use of multilateral institutional frameworks like ASEAN, and on the world scene, the UN, including UNESCO, to channel its aid. Already, a 'ASEAN Cultural Fund' had been established in 1977 to promote intra-regional cultural exchanges as well as between ASEAN countries and Japan.[36] The period also saw Japan investing in support of UNESCO, one of the first international organizations to accept Japan after the war (1951).[37]

35 ASEAN Studies Centre, Institute of Southeast Asian, Forum, 'ASEAN-Japan Cultural Relations', Summary of Proceedings of a public forum held on 24 July 2009, Singapore, ISEAS Publications, 2011, Singapore.

36 In 1979, a 'Southeast Asia Youth Invitation Program' was set to encourage mutual understanding through the invitation of outstanding young Southeast Asian leaders to Japan. A 'Japan Scholarship Fund for ASEAN Youth' was also established. Other initiatives included the 'Japan-ASEAN Research Cooperation Fund' (1982) promoting intra-ASEAN area studies and Japan-ASEAN academic exchange; the 'ASEAN Japan Friendship Program' for the 21st Century (1983) promoting student trips and exchanges.

37 Japan's first involvement in supporting the organization's cultural heritage preservation policy began in the late 1960s over the site of Abu Sibel in Egypt. See Akagawa, Natsuko (2014). *Heritage Conservation and Japan's Cultural Diplomacy: Heritage, National Identity*

With the withdrawal of the U.S. and the United Kingdom from the organization's membership in 1984, Japan became its largest provider of funds. Through a number of 'Fund-in-Trusts' (1989, 1993, 2000), and other organizational and funding mechanisms, the country in effect bailed out UNESCO.[38] By the early 1990s, the international organization had become one of Japan's favorite conduits of cultural cooperation in Southeast Asia, a region its government sought to reshape through its 'soft' influence. One aspect of this engagement was Japan's promotion of new policies in favor of 'intangible cultural heritage'. Another was the management of all World Heritage Sites in the region. As early as 1989, the Japanese government chose to take the lead by providing the biggest Fund-in-Trusts ever committed to UNESCO of which Angkor became from 1993 onward, the main recipient when measured by capital, number of projects and consultants.[39] The appointment of the professional diplomat Koichiro Matsuura as the organization's General Director in 1999, crowned this policy. Japan thus positioned itself as the champion of Asian and especially Southeast Asian cultural heritage preservation, with sites like Borobodur, Angkor and Huê as its new flagships.[40]

Japan was active in the resolution of Cambodia's peace process and in the multilateral UN-led effort represented by the UNTAC mission, also led by a Japanese diplomat, Akashi Yasushi. The country's cultural support in Cambodia has continued to work hand-in-hand with her economic interests represented by infrastructure development firms functioning as a strategy in the service of Japan's economic and political interests in Southeast Asia. Japanese cultural diplomacy in Cambodia is part of a major institutional international assistance framework that involves nineteen ministries and governmental agencies in total.[41] The other nexus of Japanese cooperation has

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and National Interest. London: Routledge. Especially Chapter 4: 'Japan in the Global Heritage Context', 79–114, p. 103.

38 Akagawa (2014). *Heritage Conservation and Japan's Cultural Diplomacy*, p. 109.

39 Peycam (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee for Angkor', p. 751. For a comprehensive list and description of the numerous Japanese projects under the UNESCO/Japan trust fund projects on "tangible heritage" in Angkor and in other countries, see MoFA (2003). Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan (MoFA). 'Preservation of Tangible Cultural Heritage through the UNESCO / Japanese Funds-in-Trust', 2003; http://www.unesco.emb-japan.go.jp/pdf/brochure-t-tangible2003.pdf, last accessed on 16 July 2016.

40 Akagawa, Natsuko (2014). *Heritage Conservation and Japan's Cultural Diplomacy*, pp. 102–113. See also Wong, Anny and Kuang-sheng Liao (1991). *Japan's Cultural Diplomacy and Cultivation of ASEAN Elites*. Occasional Paper. Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies: The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

41 Blaise, Séverine (2006). 'De l'aide à la coopération économique : pour un réexamen de la politique japonaise'. *Revue Tiers Monde* 186 (2): 307–328.

been an intentional communication blitzkrieg aimed at regional and international (including Japanese) visitors flocking to Cambodia, highlighting the 'benevolence' of Japan's intentions in Southeast Asia. The special interest in Angkor for Japan, an echo of that displayed by France, must therefore be put in this larger perspective of the Japanese government's efforts to recast the country's international image after the end of the Cold War, and in response to the predicted rise of China in the region.[42]

CKS did not entertain any direct, formal relations with the official Japanese cooperation. I was, however, aware of the importance of the country's cultural collaboration, so we ensured that their representatives in Cambodia were kept informed of our activities. Interesting is the fact that CKS received more personal visits of Japanese ambassadors and diplomats to its Wat Damnak compound that any other diplomatic visitors. Each time, the diplomats took the time to visit the facilities, talk to the staff, and carefully assess our work. From the mere standpoint of an NGO director, I found it gratifying that an ambassador would take the time to enquire about our project, something we rarely experienced with his American or French counterparts, let alone Cambodian government officials. Besides formal invitations, interesting conversations and the acknowledgement of the Embassy's staff of the fact that CKS received funds from Toyota and Japan foundations, there was little that the Japanese cooperation would have done to help CKS. Like their French counterparts, Japanese diplomats had difficulties in locating the organization in their geopolitical institutional map. Was CKS Cambodian, American, or French? How was it that a project that was capable of rooting itself into the Cambodian cultural and social landscape, was led and partially overseen by non-Cambodians – non-Asians – with the active involvement of a number of overseas (mostly American and French) Cambodians? Why was it that such a small organization, on top of that private, featured an ambitious integrated vision for the country?

These questions reflect the level of the commitment of Japanese cultural cooperation in Southeast Asia which somewhat contrasted with that of its Western counterparts. They also indicate a rather exclusive regionalist attitude, which, in subtle touches, stressed a special – pan-Asian or Buddhist – 'affinity' between Japan and Cambodia. Such subliminal discourse was sometimes used by the Japanese cooperation when for instance in Angkor it set out to promote the concept of 'living temple', with the implications that some special spiritual connections existed with the place, that for instance justified Japan's choice

42 Peycam (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee for Angkor', p. 750.

of restoring the Bayon temple at Angkor (arguably the second most famous temple after Angkor Wat).[43]

An independent project like CKS, with its diversified sources of support and loyalties, made it both an intriguing model in the eyes of the Japanese diplomats, but also, the kind of endeavor they would rather not support. Had we been Japanese, or had CKS been exclusively Cambodian, even with similar activities on the ground, it probably could have benefited from Japanese largesse. The Center was not alone in this situation: Japanese state cooperation in the 1990s–2000s had in general difficulties in recognizing the important social role played by the numerous civil society cultural projects that mushroomed after UNTAC. Projects like Reyum and Bophana Cambodian Living Arts, like CKS, were kept out of the massive government-to-government (or UNESCO-mediated) Japanese grant schemes, like for instance, the initiative to re-build academic capacities at RUFA (see below).

In terms of cultural and educational cooperation, Japanese aid toward Cambodia was substantial. Since the 1990s, the Japanese government has massively invested in the rebuilding of the primary education sector, channeling both public and private funds to build schools that can be seen all over the country. I never fully grasped the coherence which I found in French programs or the alignment to a clear political orientation in the case of American cooperation. This difference may have to do with the 'pragmatic' approach taken by Japanese diplomats to support projects first suggested by Cambodian government officials, with no attempt at imposing a set model onto the country.[44]

A number of these initiatives were obviously selected for their visibility – especially when it came to showcase Japan's role in Angkor. For instance, the major Japan-funded and UNESCO-managed eight-year program supporting the faculties of Archaeology and Architecture at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA), directly connected to the objectives of 'Cambodian-ization' of the management of Angkor, relied almost exclusively on international teaching staff, with high expatriate salaries, while local university staff, as well as the three remaining faculties of the establishment were left to operate with no means. The project was managed bureaucratically from the UNESCO office by a Japanese trained accountant – who later became the head of the UNESCO office, Teruo Jinnai. The situation created a sentiment of imbalance between the programs supported and those left out leading to the demoralization of the

43 Peycam (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee for Angkor', p. 751.
44 Akagawa (2014). *Heritage Conservation and Japan's Cultural Diplomacy*, p. 85.

university's staff and students, and, at the end, to the distortion of the institution itself.[45]

The other characteristic of the Japanese cooperation in Cambodia, as I saw it, was its extremely procedural and hierarchical mode of operation. Much like their French colleagues, Japanese diplomats dealing with cultural and educational matters whom I met seemed engulfed in a rather reified conception of 'the State'. It was in Cambodia that I realized the extent to which Japanese and French 'civil servants' share a similar kind of deferral attitude vis-à-vis national state interests and that, as individuals, they can withdraw behind *raison d'État*. This, in large part, explains why diplomats from these two countries are generally distrustful of anything or anyone not directly associated with the state or state agencies. I described UNESCO's difficulties to deal with NGOs like CKS. It is no coincidence that the French and the Japanese were the most convinced supporters of the international agency. Likewise, I encountered in Cambodia a few civil society-originated initiatives led by Japanese individuals that had fallen out of the Japanese official cooperation's radar. I am thinking for instance of the late Kikuo Morimoto and his Institute of Khmer Traditional Textile. As I found out, many creative Japanese nationals working in Cambodia were somewhat shunned by the representatives of their country.

An exception to this generalizing description was Katsuhiro Shinohara. An experienced diplomat who came first to Cambodia in the late 1960s as a Buddhist monk in a local monastery. Shinohara learned the Khmer language. His knowledge and enthusiasm for everything Cambodian made him support, morally at least, the CKS initiative when it began. I was lucky to be invited by Shinohara, then number two of the Embassy, to Japanese lunches in a Phnom Penh restaurant where we talked for hours – in French – about Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan and many other subjects. Shinohara later became ambassador (2008). By that time, he was no longer so easily accessible to a small NGO person like me.

Towards the end of my tenure in Cambodia, with the growing influence of China becoming palpable, while Japanese aid was suffering budget cuts, I witnessed a substantial hardening of the Japanese diplomats' attitude towards CKS. The newly-appointed diplomats I met were less open. They seemed more

45 Another example was the construction of a brand-new cultural center in Phnom Penh, at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), with nearly no cultural programs attached to it, except for occasional unilateral displays of Japanese culture. Like their French counterparts, but in an even more unsensitive fashion, these cultural or educational sponsored events amounted to a systematic import of teams, concepts and resources from Japan, with little efforts to build local capacities, encourage local initiatives or rely on local projects (including when those were initiated by Japanese citizens).

imbued with performing their duties than interacting with local actors (except for government officials). Although they continued to speak good French (as Cambodia falls in the Francophone realm designated by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs), they contrasted with their more cultured and jovial predecessors. Shinohara's successors were more conservative when, for instance, they enforced policies of exclusion of non-UNESCO-appointed local community members to the ICC-UNESCO meetings in Angkor.

To conclude, if there is a common thread in many of these Japanese cultural diplomatic activities, beyond those of promoting Japan and anything Japanese, it was that they were geared primarily toward the long-term reinforcement of the Cambodian state and its state-elites, whatever their party or persuasion. Most Japanese projects in culture and education are state-to-state gestures. In spite of its rigidity and statism, Japanese cooperation is multiform and geared toward different branches of the Cambodian state. It was by far the most generous and enduring one's I came across, particularly when it came to supporting the training of Cambodians. To limit myself to the social sciences and the humanities, hundreds were sent to Japan on full fellowships. CKS benefited from this ever-expanding pool of trained Cambodian young academic and cultural leaders who contributed to the success of its programs.[46]

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This section on the relations a non-state hybrid academic capacity-building project like CKS entertained with state cultural diplomacies shows the multi-layered character of such relations. If there were structural differences of objectives and operations, there were also stories of people-to-people collaboration and support. A general regret I have is that cultural diplomats, whether American, French or Japanese and beyond, never fully recognized the potential a structure like CKS, as an original model of North-South-North cooperation could hold, even beyond Cambodia. But could they think and act differently? Their role is to serve their state.

On occasion, some chancelleries saw the important role CKS could play. For instance when we collaborated with the Indian Embassy, at a time when the country was embroiled in a row with the UNESCO 'experts' over the handling of its supported conservation team from the Archaeological Survey of India at the temple of Ta Phrom, a row that overshadowed much tougher negotiations with

46 For instance, one of the JFTP instructors, Ly Vanna, archaeologist, received his PhD from Japan. A number of the JFTP participants obtained MAS from Japan, or were later sent there to take their PhD.

the Cambodian authorities over the granting of oil concessions off the coast of Cambodia.[47] CKS and the Embassy, under the leadership of Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Kapur, negotiated the co-sponsorship of a major international conference on Epigraphy in Angkor at CKS (2004), and the joint funding of two MA fellowships for Cambodian researchers to study Sanskrit in India.

Another point that transpired from CKS's interactions with the embassies was the growing impact of 'realistic' diplomacy, one tainted by elitism, statism, for the Japanese and the French, the other by neoliberal technocratization, even anti-intellectualism, in the case of U.S. diplomats. The trend towards a hardening of these realistic, nationalistic stances, sometimes verging on cynicism, augured badly, especially in a country like Cambodia, particularly with the looming rise of perhaps the staunchest state power-mongering diplomacy today, that of the People's Republic of China.[48] Although NGOs belong to another category of international collaboration, at least when dealing with long-term local capacity building, in the educational and cultural sectors, relations of trust and indirect support must prevail. I often reminisce about Ambassador Charles Ray who at the ICC, expressed his government's support, and respect, for the independent work carried out by CKS and WMF.

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47 As Lynn Meskell explained on the question of the Preah Vihear frontier temple between Thailand and Cambodia with U.S. diplomacy, or as I wrote in another article on French and Japanese supports for the ICC-Angkor, the work of cultural diplomats can often hide hard elements of economic interests (for the French, the concession of the Phnom Penh and Siem Reap airport to the French group Vinci; for the Japanese, the granting of multiple infrastructure projects by JICA, its ODA agency, to Japanese companies). See Meskell, Lynn (2016). 'World Heritage and WikiLeaks – Territory, Trade and Temples on the Thai-Cambodian Border', *Current Anthropology* 57 (1): 72–95; see also Peycam (2016). 'The International Coordinating Committee for Angkor'.

48 One of the worst examples of the combination of crass anti-intellectualism I came across while in Cambodia was when I met in 2001 the new British ambassador, the 'New Labour'-style Stephen Bridges. As I tried to explain to him the critical role of cultural and educational revival for supporting the fledgling Cambodian civil society, to convince him to help us by using the diplomatic purse to ship a couple of boxes of donated books from the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, I received the following answer from the ambassador who brimmed of excitement: "The first thing I would do to support the revival of Cambodian culture, had I had the means, would be to bring the Spice Girls into this country". Bridges could not, however, mobilize his services to ship the SOAS books over to Cambodia. I met him again toward the end of the decade. He was this time a full-fledged businessman, probably using his formal connections in Cambodia, to promote the case of international mining companies that had recruited him.

The centrality of the individuals, institutions and programs described in these three last chapters derives from their capacity to enable the experimental civic initiative that was the Center to exist. The first of these stakeholders were the humanities and social sciences academics. Only they were in a position to provide the Center with the substantive intellectual and pedagogical meaning it needed for its dual work in Cambodia. In exchange, CKS offered a new experience of reciprocity, of de-centering and re-centering in the process of intellectual production: a chance to perform 'area studies' as a mode of academic-social engagement, with the potential to contribute to the revitalization of humanistic scholarship. The second category of stakeholders, private funders, whether philanthropists or foundations, were in a position to support the experiment financially and, through their funding, to orient its long-term development and its economic and programmatic sustainability. The Center in turn provided them with an example of a new institutional and programmatic model that, at least for the foundations, would facilitate their efforts of conjugating global concerns with local transformations. The last category, international multilateral state organizations or national diplomacies, was critical to provide the Center with the kind of legitimizing institutional framework it needed in Cambodia and outside, a protection that would enable the not-for-profit, non-state civil society organization to contribute, indirectly at least, to these institutions' stated agendas of development and collaboration, beyond the limitations imposed by their public status.

The situation of a country like post-war Cambodia, in dire need of every possible support as far as institutional and intellectual capacity building capabilities is concerned, only reinforced the question of the social – and political – relevance of these international stakeholders. This significance became all the more apparent in a context of a country on life support, ruled by an oligarchy whose prominence since UNTAC often owed to the initial accommodations of these international actors and, for donors and diplomatic organizations, the continuation of policies that kept the country down. We are talking about expanding, or restricting, the frame of post-colonial international collaboration in an era of post-Cold War market democracy. What this account reveals, thanks to the experience of building an organization from the bottom up in 2000s Cambodia, is that on many occasions, the political potential for social emancipation of a non-state, non-for-profit, public good initiative like the cultural and educational model of CKS remained restricted for reasons that lay at the heart of Western societies and their political and economic institutions.

There are many reasons that can explain CKS's exposure to such limitations. The Center itself, and the ad hoc, 'by-chance', way it was built. In this account, I describe the extent to which it was sometimes unrealistically utopian, making

it difficult for these constituted social actors to espouse the narrative of a hybrid local-global, national-international, multi-sector, multi-purpose organization model. Certainly, mistakes were made in the way CKS was built and ascertained itself. My own directorship style, or that of other key members of the Center may not have always been adequate with the way these counterparts operated. A number of deficiencies can be pointed out: the model of internal governance of the Center for instance. These weaknesses were bound to exist when a new organization is built from scratch. The point I make here is that, on many occasions, a fundamental contradiction appeared between the way these 'stakeholders' operated and that of CKS for the profoundly new type of civic organization it embodied. This certainly had to do with the level of incompatibility that existed with the socio-economic and political environment in which these partners evolved. On numerous occasions, however, I saw how creative human agency could transcend what I regard as mostly structural – 'non-human' – constrains: the enthusiastic engagement of individual scholars (often young ones) to support the collaborative model impersonated by CKS; the visionary and politically committed support of a few foundation officers, or that of some individual philanthropists who sometimes went against the prescribed position assigned to them by social constraints. Or the discreet, sympathetic support displayed by international organization's officers or national diplomats when CKS needed protection.

If there were structural limitations or differences therefore, they were mainly driven by a naive belief among leaders of these Western institutions in the supposedly natural benevolence of the binomen electoral democracy-global capitalism, and with them, the legitimizing forces of nation-state institutions to impose it on Southern societies, contributing thereof to the permanence of socio-economic hierarchies at national and global levels. It is these mechanisms, enhanced by the pervading neo-liberal ideology, that I believe prevented a model like CKS to move beyond what it almost miraculously built in just a few years. The very fact that the Center existed as an original civic program has raised new interests and hopes, a sign that at many levels of society, the dialectical determination between society and state-economic elite as it exists today is a fragile one.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I wrote that Cambodia in the late 1990s and 2000s could be historically situated at the intersection of three contradictory forces, each with its own genealogy and temporality. Two were of global magnitude. They were intertwined. They originated in the end of the Cold War with the triumph of ideologies pertaining to the U.S.-led 'international community': 'democratic developmentalism', promoted by a number of international non-governmental organizations, human rights groups, programs supporting 'free and fair' elections, the 'rule of law' and economic *laissez-faire*, supported by an aggressive resurgence of global capitalism featuring unprecedented levels of economic financialization, the rise of Internet and the GAFAM, and the accelerated integration of Cambodia into the realm of transnational ('multinational') corporations.[1] Both phenomena converged to support an optimistic meta-political discourse promoting 'market democracy' as the ultimate stage of development predicated by Francis Fukuyama's discourse on the 'End of History'.[2] The fate of post-Communist post-war Cambodia was to be shaped by an elected ruling elite enlightened by the virtues of both the market and electoral democracy who would be assisted by cohorts of international 'experts'.

Another simultaneous trend was emerging. Slower in its manifestations, because it was endogenous to the social evolution in Cambodia, it derived from the long process of secularization and social emancipation of Cambodian society and with it, an overt collective aversion against the destructive grand plans of the different state regimes that succeeded one another. This sentiment was coupled with the growing aspiration among a sizeable proportion of its members, mainly urban but also diasporic, for a process of development through autonomous non-state project-based initiatives. This kind of libertarian phenomenon was not necessarily synonymous with a virtuous civic behavior. Competition between egos or for funding turfs were fierce. It found nevertheless an echo among a rising number of urban middle-class youths and members of the second generation of refugee returnees who felt increasingly alienated by the authoritarian and corrupt practices of the CPP-led Cambodian state.

1 GAFAM is a commonly used acronym for 'Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft'. It has become a shorthand term for some of the most powerful profit-making companies in the world – all American, all tech giants – effectively constituting a global oligopoly epitomizing the neo-liberal hegemony on the world's economy, against any notions of public interest.

2 Fukuyama, Francis (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press.

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In post-civil war Cambodia, the simultaneous conjunction of these three forces led to the general decline of the normative symbolic power of the state, and with it, of the traditional position devolved to the country's pre-war elites. The old elite was now replaced by a new oligarchy, economically powerful but with little capacity to impose its – lack of – values upon society, except for demonstrations of unfettered raw power and ostentatious display of wealth. Such deficit in moral authority, reinforced by the collapse of the PRK state system, got partially filled by the quasi messianic international discourse on civil society and with it, an outgrowth in the number of independent grassroot initiatives of all kinds. The influence of returning war-exiled Cambodians together with a massive presence of foreign free-minded actors who entered the country in the wake of UNTAC, contributed to exacerbate a deep-seated tendency among Cambodians to move away from state or elite-originated enterprises. This trend embraced an historical phenomenon of collective self-preservation intensified as a result of the devastation of the previous decades – devastation perceived as inflicted from 'above' or 'outside'. At the heart of the three converging forces, culture and public cultural expression emerged as a highly contested space, particularly with the conspicuous presence of international programs and their emblematic appeal, of NGOs and associations of any sorts, with often the organizational entrepreneurship of Cambodian returnees.

CKS was conceived and developed in the midst of this fertile upheaval, along with other cultural and educational organizations, with the precedent of the CEDORECK and other initiatives in exile. As its founding director, together with a small group of individuals who worked on establishing it, I experienced first-hand this fluid, often confusing environment characterized by a lack of legal framework and legalistic culture, a weak state apparatus with poorly functioning administrations (including universities), and a rather loose adherence to civic values and institutions in both the domestic and international environments. Because of its ambitious mandate of re-building and re-centering humanistic education in Cambodia, with a strategic position as a local-global actor, CKS, from the outset, became both an object of interest and a target. This attraction rapidly grew once the Center could stand as a full-fledged organization with a coherent mission narrative and set of programs.

This interest in the CKS experiment stemmed from various constituencies. Among young educated Cambodians, the Center offered a relatively neutral and benevolent space for accessing so-called international-standard academic knowledge on the country and its region, and beyond that, on ways to engage in the global intellectual public sphere. Indeed, from its creation, CKS worked as both an accelerator of exchanges and a mechanism facilitating the integration

of Cambodians in the academic realm. Likewise, among foreign scholars and other individuals interested in engaging with Cambodians and Southeast Asians, it served as an effective locally-situated-yet-globally-connected hub. The Center's modular model and its interest in diversifying its base of operations made it an experimental space through which converged artists, urban activists, cultural and heritage conservationists, members of the diaspora, Buddhist monks, members of the Siem Reap and Phnom Penh communities, reading audiences, students and professors. Its centrality-in-action was the secret of its success. It was the matrix that allowed it to constantly renew its role and relevance within the Cambodian social landscape. This function as interface capable of acting beyond the confines of conventional academia excited curiosities and inspired individual engagements. Among them were young international area studies scholars, many of whom not yet fully integrated into the academic apparatus and its culture of competition.

The Center also attracted the attention of institutions. From the point of view of established actors including international organizations, what CKS embodied with its transnational and local commitments inspired both interests and a desire to control it. Unsurprisingly, the idea of CKS as a socially-engaged cultural and academic organization became an object of genuine attraction for what it could offer that was fundamentally new and innovative. For these same reasons, it found itself the target of state-authorized structures like UNESCO, EFEO and, with them, the diplomacies that supported them. Because it was located near the World Heritage site of Angkor, the hunting ground of these institutional actors, and because it operated independently from them, CKS appeared much bigger in their eyes than it actually was. The Center's simple existence was a reminder, to them and the Cambodians who witnessed its conflict with these cultural diplomacy organizations, of the fundamental dependency of the country and its official national narrative, putting them at odds with their claimed benevolence.

With a few philanthropic organizations, CKS became seen as a new and effective mechanism capable of supporting the intellectual and cultural revival of Cambodia's civil society. Among them was the Rockefeller Foundation which played a crucial role in enabling the Center to put into programmatic application the generous goals at the origins of its creation. Less easily explainable if one does not consider the degree of compliance of small organizations to the logic of power relations among institutional social actors, the Center became a highly-coveted prey for the ambitions of self-interested academics as well as a few wealthy philanthropists in need of legitimation at home – the two kinds finding and reinforcing each other. CKS's progressive vision, its

locally-anchored pedagogical programs, became objects of envy for what they represented in the circles of these actors, even when the significance they represented was lost to more mundane considerations.

As an organization, we reacted to these appetites by seeking to protect its integrity and independence. We sought increasingly complex strategies of allegiances with stakeholders or forces often bigger than the Center. Some were clearly of predatory nature. They were mainly outside Cambodia. CKS's unconventional mode of operation, its independence from hegemonic social, cultural and political interests, its innovative educational programs, in other words, its success, were seen among more conformist actors through a mixed gaze of envy and threat. It needed to be controlled and ultimately tamed.

By addressing the question of independence of a grassroot cultural and educational project like CKS, this account, I hope, helps to expose the degree to which 'advanced' (Northern) societies find themselves embedded within narrow lines supporting norms of competition and structural violence that limit true sharing and acts of reciprocity. I am certainly not the first one to point out the clear connection that exists between institutional state-sanctioned discourses and policies of 'development' as set out by the 'international community' with their support in favor of the integration of entire societies within the global market system and the imposed commodification of all forms of human actions, a system that brings social fragmentation, hierarchization and ultimately conflict.[3] The experience of CKS, a non-profit, non-state organization set in the historical post-Cold War neoliberal context must be taken as symptomatic of the difficulties encountered by many in both the South and the North when they try to engage in independent experimentation for the public good.

One can always argue that the CKS library in Siem Reap or its Junior Faculty Program, only affected a few hundred individuals in a country of less than fifteen million inhabitants. These initiatives could themselves be considered as marginal and inconsequential, like the position of academic and cultural institutions in a ravaged country such as Cambodia may seem trivial in comparison to the immediate humanitarian needs of millions of people still living a shattered life. All these contributions may seem indeed of limited consequence if one considers issues of larger concern like for instance the global

3 For instance, Escobar, Arturo (1995). *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press; Latouche, Serge (2004). *Survivre au développement: De la décolonisation de l'imaginaire économique à la construction d'une société alternative*. Mille et Une Nuits; Fergusson, James (2006). *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Duke University Press.

ecological crisis currently unfolding. Yet, the tribulations I experienced when working at the Center, however marginal they may be, should be regarded as illustrative of the difficulties of creating tangible local-global mechanisms of empowerment and the elaboration of a concrete strategy of decolonization of knowledge. With it, through inter-cultural exchanges, is the prospect of a new shared narrative that is less one-sided or unidimensional. This story must indeed be considered through the lens of an epistemological quest toward a de-centering of perspectives and methodologies, a need to rethink connections between minds and bodies, self and community, our local environment and the universal: the generation of a post-imperial *shared knowledge* as necessary for Cambodians as it is for everyone else, South and North included.[4]

Taking inspiration from engaged scholars from the South like Boaventura De Souza Santos or Achille Mbembe, I believe there is a future in an emancipatory intellectual trend rooted in human practices that respects local ecologies and the larger effort of recollection of multiple epistemologies.[5] From Olin-Wright, I recognize the universal necessity of relying on social non-state, non-profit enterprises put in the service of the public good. The Center for Khmer Studies, like my current work at IIAS, are endeavors that must include elements of trans-regional locally-situated capacity-building efforts in the service of a humanistic project 'without borders'.

Organizations like CEDORECK and CKS, represent an aspiration for a non-commercial, non-homogenized, civil society-originated sector of activity. These attributes of 'public service' or 'public good' were once assigned to structures like universities. This civic aspiration is ultimately political, and it is universal. In this account on Cambodia and CKS lays a common desire to contribute to society from the ground, free from the constructions of oligarchical state elites and immune to corporate recuperations – a Cambodian craving, born out of the terrible Khmer Rouge experience. The need to create an integrated trans-disciplinary model of collaboration adapted to post-colonial North-South contexts and with it, the importance of education as a long-term

4 As was confusedly inscribed on the front of Cambodia's National Library in Phnom Penh by the French colonial 'protectors', in a twisted effort to gain Cambodian popular recognition for France's self-proclaimed *mission civilisatrice*: "Force ties (people) for only a time; ideas enchain (them) forever". Since 2010, CKS has been presenting itself as an "American Overseas Center", minimizing the act of sharing in the process of knowledge making, an act once plainly sanctioned through its original hybrid Cambodian-International status.

5 De Souza Santos, Bonaventura (2016). *Épistemologies du Sud, Mouvements citoyens et polémique sur la science*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. Mbembe, Achille and Felwine Sarr (Eds.) (2017). *Écrire l'Afrique-Monde*. Dakar: Philippe Rey/Jimsaan. See especially Mbembe's article 'Penser le Monde À Partir de l'Afrique', pp. 381–393.

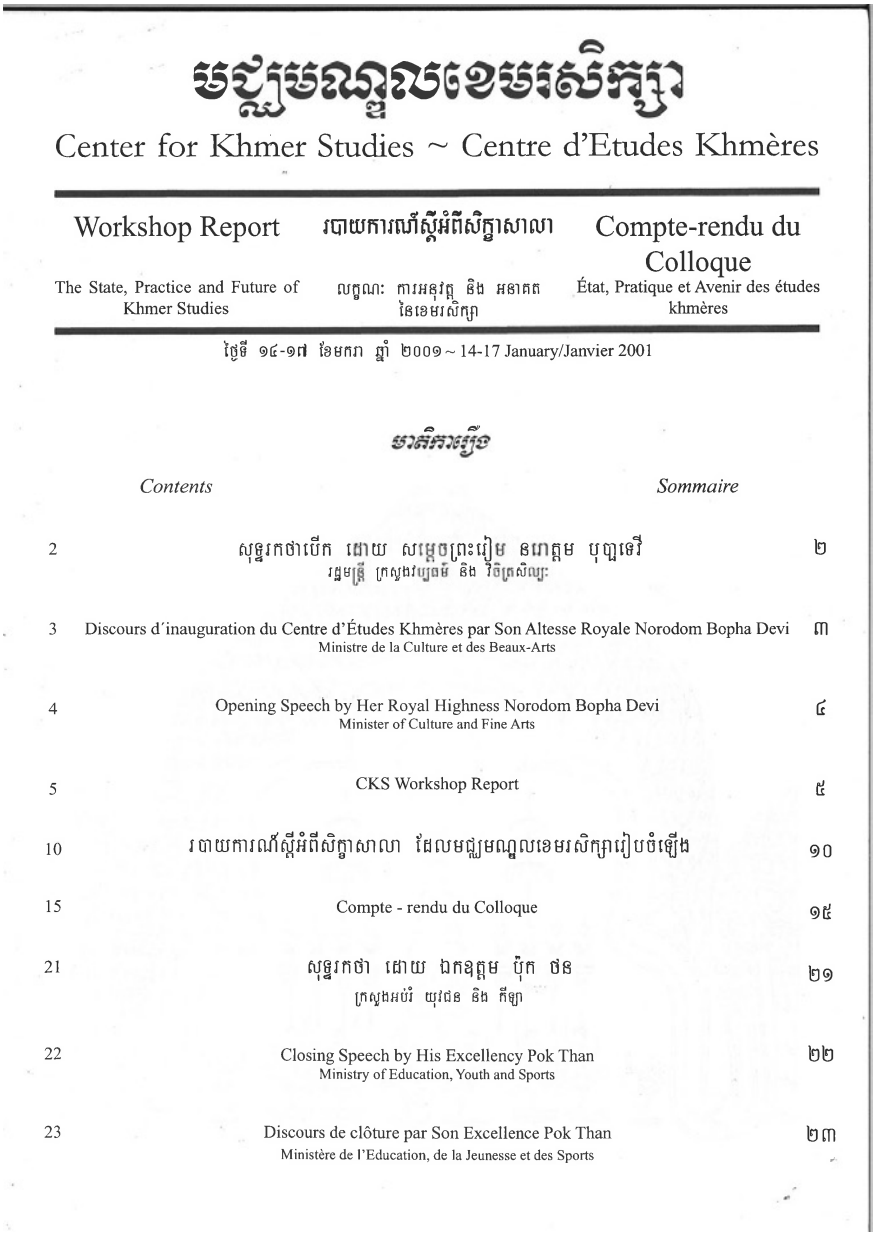
empowering mechanism enabling new communities of civic educators in the Habermasian-Fraserian model – and the emancipating effect it could have, even on established 'Northern' scholars. The obstacles CKS encountered in its institution building work have led me to recognize the structural constraints for such a model to take shape: an international higher education landscape suffering from an excess of hierarchy, bureaucracy and fragmentations, all symptoms of a sector entrapped in the excesses of the neoliberal order; narrowly focused state strategies mainly in the service of that order; insufficiently accountable institutional funders. These restrictions, I am persuaded, however embedded they are in a broader hegemonic politico-economic system, are not the result of concerted designs. There were no conspiracies against CKS. Only a lack of social and mutual responsibility and accountability, and perhaps also, a lack of civic judgement among institutional actors.

Even in its difficulties to achieve its original goals, the process of establishing CKS can also be regarded as a success: it revealed how much people can create and innovate in spite of the abovementioned constraints. With them, it is the realization among many that the higher education and culture sectors must reclaim their role as spaces of emancipation and civic agency. Because, in determining new intellectual priorities, they can contribute to transcend entrapments at the origins of often false hierarchies. One thing that is at stake here is the re-invention of the University as an inclusive social body, beyond national, economic, bureaucratic, ideological and epistemological boundaries, as a laboratory for new social and intellectual relations.[6]

What is left from this story or personal account is a bitter-sweet sense of an unfinished business. This sentiment of frustration was best demonstrated by the way CKS's flagship integrated initiative, Junior Faculty Training Program, was prematurely discontinued because of a senseless decision emanating from the new leadership of a major New York-based foundation. As the JFTP example showed, the origins of these limitations of the models of intervention represented by CKS, I came to realize, lay less in the obstructions of an otherwise absent (and in any case unaccountable) Cambodian state apparatus, but rather, in broader territories situated in the heart of the normative ideological model of what stands as 'development' in the so-called 'advanced' societies: institutions and social forces that too often restrict rather than enhance our capacities to invent more sustainable futures.

6 The Latin etymology of university, *universitas*, describes a group of persons associated into one body, society, company, or community. The term itself refers to the notion of *universus* or 'whole', 'aggregate', 'entirety'.

Appendix: Report on CKS's Inaugural Workshop (2001)



មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលខេមរសិក្សា

Center for Khmer Studies ~ Centre d'Etudes Khmères

Workshop Report — The State, Practice and Future of Khmer Studies

របាយការណ៍ស្តីអំពីសិក្ខាសាលា លក្ខណៈ ការអនុវត្ត និង អនាគត នៃខេមរសិក្សា

Compte-rendu du Colloque — État, Pratique et Avenir des études khmères

ថ្ងៃទី ១៤-១៧ ខែមករា ឆ្នាំ ២០០១ ~ 14-17 January/Janvier 2001

មាតិការឿង

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CKS WORKSHOP REPORT
The State, Practice and Future of Khmer Studies, Siem Reap, 14-17 January 2001

This report draws on the ideas and recommendations of the 130 participants, divided into 11 disciplinary panels, who convened on 14-17 January 2001 at Vat Damnak for a CKS workshop entitled "The State, Practice and Future of Khmer Studies", sponsored by CKS. The document summarizes the remarks made by panel leaders, supplemented by recommendations made in anonymous individual questionnaires. The reports and recommendations have been edited slightly, but we have made no effort to impose priorities onto those proposed by participants in the workshop.

What follows provides a lively picture of the field of Khmer Studies today as well as a range of recommendations which could help enhance Khmer studies in Cambodia and abroad especially for Cambodian scholars. We were very impressed by the vigor and variety of the suggestions that were made. We came to the conclusion that the field of Khmer Studies has reached a point where exciting developments in many academic disciplines are coming into view.

Unfortunately, funding for the more ambitious projects will be difficult to obtain, and panel leaders, while generally optimistic, pointed to a range of difficulties confronting scholars in the field.
Moreover, several distinguished scholars who were invited to the conference were unable to attend. For this reason, some panels were weaker than we might have wished.

Finally, it was impossible to organize the panels so as to avoid overlapping commitments among scholars whose work extends into several disciplines.

Nonetheless, we believe that what follows is a sound basis for future discussion. It will serve to inspire a range of academic initiatives, conferences and projects, some of which might well be sponsored by the Center.

The workshop's value is enhanced by the fact that it took place in Cambodia and involved so many Cambodian participants, working alongside participants from many other countries.

David Chandler and Philippe Peycam
(Organizers)

The eleven disciplinary panels organized for the workshop were as follows: Ancient History, Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History and Conservation; Libraries and Archives; Linguistics; Literature; Modern History; Philosophy and Religion; Plastic and Performing Arts and Vernacular Architecture

1 - Report of the Ancient History Panel

(Panel leaders: Dr. Long Seam and Dr. Michael Vickery)

The panelists agreed that there is an urgent need to revise, correct and update the work of previous generations of scholars. A change of emphasis is needed to stress social and economic history rather than focussing on the political elite. Ancient Khmer language inscriptions are central to this changing focus.

The ancient history of Cambodia should not be studied in isolation but in contact with neighboring cultures especially Champa and the Mon states of central and northeast Thailand, and the geographic dimension is equally vital to the study of ancient Cambodia.

There is a need to develop a database of information on temples, inscriptions, water features and habitation areas using GIS technology and computer mapping techniques with availability through the Internet. In this regard, there is a need to make greater use of environmental data to analyze changes in settlement location and the rise or decline of urban centers, the evolution of Khmer settlements, the identification of trade routes and economic subsistence patterns, etc.

There is also a need to deal with temple sites outside the Angkor region, including those badly damaged, in close cooperation with archaeology.

The panelists suggested the following projects:

- Publish new inscriptions with original texts and indexed by chronological order with translations in modern Khmer and in French and English (about 4 volumes).

- A training scheme to teach Sanskrit to 1 or 2 Cambodians could be set up. This could be achieved cheaply by sending selected students to Bangkok where they could take a two-year course at Silapakorn University. They could then be sent to India for a period of two to three years at one of the Sanskrit teaching centers such as Puna. In about 5 or 6 years, Cambodia could then have the beginning of a revival of Sanskrit studies with local Sanskritists.

- Develop a project of general mapping of temples and

inscriptions by region and time period would also contribute to further understanding of Cambodia's Ancient history. This could be done through the development of a GIS database of Greater Cambodia, with various thematic layers to enable cross-referencing of different fields of knowledge on the common basis of geographical space. Paleo-botanical and archaeological dating of ancient upland fields and hydraulic structures should also be incorporated into that project.

- Organize a conference on Pre-Angkorian history that would bring together researchers of different expertise (epigraphists, archaeologists, hydrologists, historians, geographers, art historians, etc.) and individuals and institutions already engaged in individual projects. This could contribute to the development of a more comprehensive research, teaching and publishing program for this very important period of Cambodian history.

- Translate and analyze ancient Khmer medical manuscripts and work in cooperation with medical anthropologists so as to lead to a publication on ritual aspects of traditional Khmer medicine and pharmacopoeia.

2 - Report of the Anthropology Panel

(Panel leaders: Dr. William Collins and Dr. Phong Tan)

The panel noted that those attending it had a wide range of research interests. Two themes emerged: the basic documentation of contemporary Cambodian culture and the monitoring and analysis of dynamics of social change/ modernization context.

The panel found that very few research areas were well covered, but noted that some valuable work had been done in the fields of colonial research and development studies, in examining high culture (seen in terms of the Angkorean male elite) and some surface features of Cambodian life.

On the other hand, a great many research areas were poorly covered, or had not yet been covered at all. What seemed to be lacking from most of them was a Khmer perspective and an in depth approach useful for examining, monitoring and documenting Cambodian culture and the changes that are underway. Some of the areas that need to be studied include family life (marriage, child-rearing, sexuality, domestic abuse); youth culture (urbanization, global cultural influences); Peasant life (customary law, local knowledge, conflict resolution, eldership); health care practices; religion (continuities and changes in the practice of Buddhism and the incursions of Christian missionary activity; Khmer identity (regional dialectic and cultural variations); and diaspora studies (including relations between overseas and domestic Khmer).

The panel stressed that "Khmer culture" is a contested notion that requires monitoring. "Culture", indeed, is one of the many dimensions of change in Cambodia, and so are the categories "Khmer" and "Khmer studies". Finally, the panel emphasized the importance of ethics for field researchers. At present, research stays in village settings are often far too brief, and there is also a great need, among Cambodians, to improve qualitative research methodology, via training and hands-on experience.

3- Report of the Archaeology Panel

(Panel Leaders: Dr Son Soubert and Dr John Miksic)

The panel's ten prioritized recommendations, with suggestions for CKS involvement, ran as follows:

1. Within 3 year time frame

1. Development of rescuer archaeology teams. CKS might pay a role by coordinating agencies that provide training for team members, by insuring coordination among participants, seeking international assistance. Thai examples (e.g. Ban Chieng) should be explored.

2. Archaeological site survey: Provide a forum for participating agencies; assist in identifying priority areas; compile a national register of sites/date base; train field staff; develop archive of remote sensing data.

3. Heritage tourism and community development: CKS, working with government agencies, could develop an integrated strategy for utilizing archaeological sites to generate income for local communities. Can the model of the visitor center at Preah Khan be exported? Work with monasteries to instill understanding of heritage, and develop monasteries as heritage centers. Local museums might be established, also.

4. Ceramic Studies: CKS might find a supporting institution to establish a ceramics library.

5. Mekong project: CKS might act as a link between Khmer scholars and others working in related areas of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam.

6. Underwater archaeology: CKS might identify international partners to survey underwater sites.

7. Physical anthropology: CKS might promote regional connections to conduct joint research on human bones found at Khmer archaeological sites.

2. Within 5-10 year time frame

CKS might explore the possibilities of research in environmental archaeology and prehistoric archaeology.

In general, the panel noted that field archaeological research in Cambodia was scarce. More research is needed on pre-Angkorean and Angkorean uses of water, settlement patterns, etc. Sites in eastern Mekong (i.e. Angkor Borei) need to be examined closely, and excavations should be undertaken

at such early sites as Sre Ampil, Vat Ang They, and Phnom Kulen.

The panel also stressed the need to publish research findings, especially in Khmer.

Finally, the panel proposed that CKS convene a multi-disciplinary conference-workshop on pre-Angkorean history as a first step toward a coordinated, coherent effort, as is happening at Angkor with the ICC. CKS should work with RUFA toward that end.

4 - Report of the Art History-Conservation Panel

(Panel leaders: Dr Hiram Woodward, Jr and Ly Boreth)

The discussion focussed on individual proposals and on the issue of communication and administration once projects are underway.

In the field of conservation, the panel cited the need to develop training in object conservation, taking into account today's techniques, Cambodia's tropical climate, etc. As far as monuments were concerned, the panel noted the effects of tourism and the need for an integrated approach.

Issues that art historians might address included a re-examination of Chinese, Indian and Cham influences on Cambodian art, and interactions with Cambodian society. There is a need for comparative studies of temples in South and Southeast Asia.

The panel also stressed the need to integrate Cambodian art histyory with the art histories of neighboring countries. Echoing the ancient history panel, panelists suggested that more Cambodians be trained in epigraphy (Sanskrit and Old Khmer).

Specific research proposals included site workshops at monuments to reflect the diversity of approaches to the temple: object conservation workshops; establishment of a digital image library; publication of popular, Khmer language guides of sound scholarly quality (NB: Some of these projects seem to overlap with APSARA's mandate).

Other, smaller scale projects proposed by the panel included: folk art and handicrafts: Organization of an exhibit on that topic?); a project identifying looted objects from sites; a study of jewelry depicted on reliefs and found on sculptures; post-Angkorean art (rarely a priority for researchers).

5 - Report of Libraries and Archives panel

(Panel leaders: Sisowath Ritarak and Peter Arfanis)

After acknowledging the importance that archives and libraries have as resources for research, the panel noted that libraries and archives must develop their services to keep pace with the growing number of Cambodian scholars. The panelists added that students at RUFA, RUPP and the Royal Academy could contribute to the growth of libraries and archives in Cambodia by making use of them for their research.

The panel put forward the following objectives:

1. To produce a database on CD ROM combining existing databases of the National Library, the National Archives, the Buddhist Institute, the International Documentation Center of Angkor and other libraries and documentation centers. The database will be distributed to libraries for scholars to consult. The Hun Sen library at RUPP will make its own database available over the Internet in 2001.

2. Through the Association of Cambodian Librarians, to develop a long-term strategy for the development of Cambodian libraries and archives.

3. To encourage the development of oral history components in CKS and in the Royal Archives of Cambodia so that oral history projects can be conducted and the outcomes deposited in libraries and archives for long term preservation and access.

4. To encourage book production in Cambodia. At present there is no organized chain stemming from book writing or translation to publishing and diffusion (NB: the literature panel also raises this point; see below).

5. Help is needed for conservation work at "old" collections, such as the National Archives (colonial material), National Library (holdings from the colonial era), the Museum library and manuscripts held by the Buddhist Institute, among others.

6 - Report of the Linguistics Panel

(Panel Leaders Dr Silvain Vogel and Dr Jean-Michel Filippi)

The panel noted with regret that there was a lack of communication and of communication devices that might enable linguistics researchers in Cambodia and abroad to communicate with each other. Many researchers have no idea of the emerging areas of research, or new publications. The creation of a website dedicated to linguistic research in Cambodia is urgent.

To assemble a lexicon of Khmer, a computerized Khmer language database is essential. Until very recently, dictionaries in Cambodia were not based, theoretically, on the frameworks laid down by modern lexicography. A computerized database would be useful for creating Khmer-foreign language dictionaries based on modern principles and current demands.

The panel noted an urgent need to write, publish and distribute a grammar of Khmer that would take into account recent

theories in the fields of syntax and semantics. In addition, panel members noted that there were only a small number of descriptions of Khmer dialects, mainly those spoken in Thailand. Standard Khmer and Khmer dialects needed to be analyzed with the devices of modern, experimental phonetics.

Projects suggested by panelists included the following:

a. An historical study of the Khmer language, as written and spoken between 1945 and the present. The study would take note of the political interventions (reforms) and their effect on the language. The periods before and after the creation of the first Khmer-Khmer dictionary in 1956 need to be compared.

b. A manual for teaching Khmer based on scientific methods.

c. Research is urgently needed on ethnic minority languages.

7 - Report of the Literature Panel

(Panel Leaders: Dr Tomoko Okada and Dr Rachel Harrison)

The panel focused on how to inspire further work on Cambodian literature.

Some of the panel's findings were quite pessimistic:

1. Despite Cambodia's long and vigorous literary heritage, literature from c. 1960 is of relatively poor quality.

2. Serious intellectual losses occurred after 1975, and very few writers are currently producing literary works.

3. Writers find it difficult to publish their works, and many have to resort to journalism or to writing low quality work to earn a living.

4. Cambodia lacks a reading culture. Novels and short stories are expensive, and Cambodia's low levels of literacy make written works inaccessible or irrelevant to most of the population.

5. An unfortunate legacy from the west has been that inappropriate frameworks and terminologies are often used for literary classification in Cambodia. Terms such as "classic" and "romantic", "realism" and even "literature", adopted from the West, are inappropriate for much Cambodian literature. The rare histories of Khmer literature that exist use inadequate or outdated classification methods.

The panel made the following recommendations:

1. Support the creation of a regular literary magazine.

2. Support informal literacy groups and enable easier publication of their works, in Khmer.

3. Offer an annual literary award to stimulate literary production and reader interest.

4. Provide writers with information about international organizations that offer scholarships and support.

5. Implement projects for the translation of Khmer literature so that it can become more widely accessible, and come to occupy a place in the international literary world.

The panel suggested the following research projects:

a. Critical work on literature from the middle and early modern periods, especially material from the 1700s to the first half of the 20th Century.

b. Modern Khmer literature needs to be drawn into modern, comparative and interdisciplinary realms. Modern Khmer poetry is also under-studied.

c. An anthology of modern Cambodian literature, both in Khmer and foreign languages, needs to be developed.

d. Analyze ancient inscriptions from a literary perspective.

e. Arrange for translations, into Khmer, of recent analytical work on Khmer literature.

f. Collect on microfilm Khmer literary texts composed before 1975, now scattered in libraries overseas.

8 - Report of the Modern History Panel

(Panel leaders: Dr Ros Chantrabot and Dr Stéphane Dovert)

Panelists stressed the necessity of Southeast Asian countries getting to know each other better. The lack of knowledge of other Southeast Asia languages is a barrier to scholars seeking to widen their research. They also noted that much research in modern history and social science in Cambodia is initiated for non-academic reasons disconnected from Khmer interests.

Few academic books are locally published, diffusion is chaotic, and none appear in Khmer.

The new MA program at the Royal Academy may allow some young Khmer to conduct research on such topics as the history of the press, administration from 1979 to the present, and the UNTAC period, to name only three.

Panelists urged that a website be created serving modern historians, and also that the most important books written in foreign languages on Cambodia's modern history, the histories of neighboring countries, and the history of SE Asia be

translated into Khmer.

Specific research topics singled out by the panel included:

1. Work on the so-called "Middle period" of Cambodian history (c. 1430- 1863).

2. Work on the impact of colonialism on Cambodian society, and specifically on minority populations.

3. Work involving local and oral history, complementing existing work at a more general level.

4. Work on the history of Cambodian Buddhism, related to the history of Buddhism in neighboring countries.

5. International history, e.g. Cambodian-American relations, relations between China and Democratic Kampuchea.

9 - Report of the Plastic and Performing Arts panel

(Panel leaders: So Chenda and Kuon Tan)

This panel was very varied, but all the panelists agreed on two major priorities, namely (1) the need to document, preserve, revive and revitalize and (2) the need to expand definitions of "Khmer art", especially with regard to 20th century modernism and contemporary practices.

Panelists made the following suggestions as to ways in which CKS might help:

1. CKS could help to collect documents and records of traditional Khmer arts, especially from artists who are old -- e.g. in such areas as shadow puppetry, traditional painting, kbach, Khmer music and dance and the arts of other ethnic groups. In order to do this, old artists need to be teamed up with researchers who know how to interview and to write, perhaps while staying at the Center.

2. CKS could help researchers in Cambodia and abroad to keep abreast of developments in the plastic and performing arts, via an email discussion-bulletin board, the CKS newsletter, and annual workshops devoted to specific topics.

3. CKS could help publish more books on Khmer arts, in Khmer.

4. Panelists were curious about the role CKS might play with performing and practicing artists. CKS might provide funds to subsidise an artist in residence, as well as a venue where artists can come to write documents about their arts.

Other suggestions from the panel included CKS becoming involved in setting up a photography course at RUFA, or sponsoring an exhibit of Cambodian handicrafts, e.g. weaving, incorporating contemporary practices.

10 - Report of the Philosophy and Religion Panel

This panel did not convene formally, due to a lack of panelists, but Olivier de Bernon, David Snellgrove and Chhay Yiheang contributed the following recommendations.

1. Research in Buddhism in Cambodia between the 5th and 13th centuries

2. Buddhism as it is practiced and lived by the Khmer is understudied. There is a need to develop the field of religious anthropology. Normative concerns often prevail among Cambodians actively engaged in Buddhism and there is a lack of interest in the observation and description of phenomena as they are observed.

3. There is an urgent need to conduct comparative research on religious practices in neighboring countries.

11 - Report of the Vernacular Architecture panel

(Panel Leaders: Richard Ho and Lek Sareth)

The panel defined "vernacular architecture" in its broadest sense, and came up with the following recommendations:

1. CKS should build up a resource library of research, documentation, dissertations and theses, by contacting authors to contribute their research. The collection should include extensive visual materials.

2. A page on the CKS website should deal with vernacular architecture; the newsletter can also be used to disseminate information on research sources and opportunities.

3. CKS should organize a conference on vernacular architecture in Cambodia, as well as a public exhibition on the subject.

4. CKS should seek to obtain sufficient funding to identify a traditional Khmer house for preservation and study on the grounds of Vat Damnak.

Specific projects that were mentioned in panelists' questionnaires included the following:

a. Architectural inventory of Siem Reap province

b. A preliminary survey of historic towns in Cambodia

c. Study of tourism and its impact on cities like Siem Reap

d. Workshop and field study of a typical Khmer village (near Siem Reap?)

e. Typology of traditional Khmer houses and Vats

f. Development of a glossary of technical and theoretical terms for vernacular architecture

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