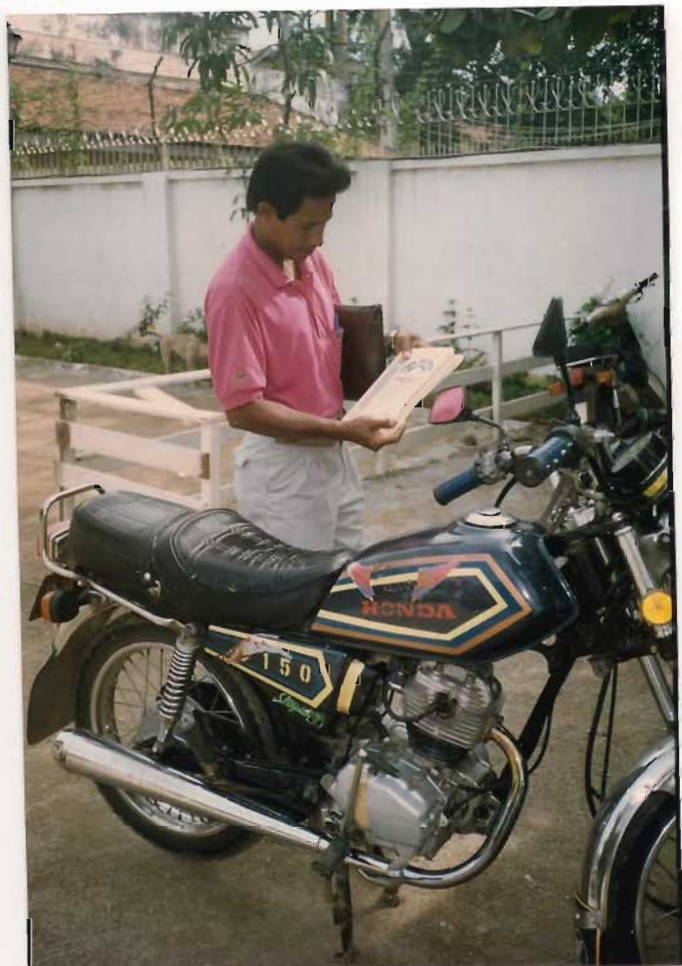
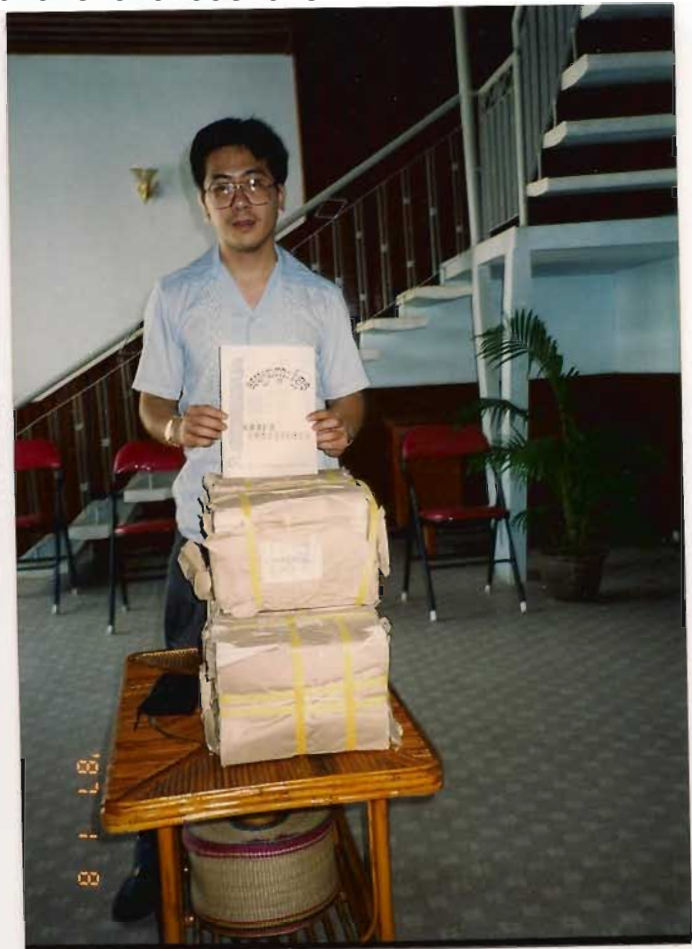


From Hann So's archives
Khmer Conscience Journal printed in Bangkok
and shipped to Phnom Penh to be distributed
in 92 before the elections















"Khmer Conscience" in Cambodia

SAN JOSE (NV) -- Khmer Conscience, a publication printed in English, French and Khmer, is based in San Jose. Khmer Conscience published every two months and is edited by Hann So. He announces plans to distribute the newsletter in Cambodia before the elections; these plans have been approved.

Hann So writes that "Khmer Conscience has decided to make its presence known in Phnom Penh. We have a small grant to publish and distribute 2,000 copies of our bi-monthly journal in Phnom Penh... It will be bilingual... We are in the process of translating the articles, and the next issue will be the first issue to be widely distributed in Phnom Penh."

He has already obtained permission from Prince Sihanouk, and expects a November issue to be distributed in Phnom Penh, "if everything goes OK."

Hann So proposed these points, "for the sake of Cambodia and her children":

-- Because of the pressing need to educate the Khmer people, he would like to publish Khmer Conscience monthly (in-

stead of every other month), if it is at all possible;

-- He could begin circulation in Cambodia by sending 2,000 copies as a start, but 5,000 copies is the target; this amount would allow Khmer Conscience to reach some people living in the provinces;

-- He solicits articles on any pertinent subject writers want -- the political situation, UNTAC, democracy, elections, reconstruction, etc. If you can supply a translation, fine. If not, Khmer Conscience staff will translate. You may use a pseudonym for publication, but you must identify yourself to the editor.

-- Articles can be 1 to 5 pages. If you write in Khmer, please type it in two columns with enough margins; if you can't type, the staff will.

-- Translators and those who have Khmer word processors are also needed.

-- Deadlines are the 15th of the month before publication, figured on a monthly issue. If there is not sufficient response, the two-month publication schedule will remain: Nov-Dec '92, Jan-Feb '93, Mar-Apr '93,

etc., and will distribute only 2,000 copies.

-- There is no set charge for Khmer Conscience, but donations are badly needed and would be greatly appreciated. Please send manuscripts or donations to:

Khmer Conscience
PO Box 611144
San Jose, CA 95161 USA

Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID)

Hann So also announces they are establishing a Khmer Institute of Democracy (KID) in Phnom Penh. Juljo Jeldres is acting director, and he is already in Phnom Penh. The project has Prince Sihanouk's authorization.

KID needs help for things such as providing materials on democracy, going to Cambodia to help for limited periods before the elections, help in contacting different organizations for grants and in establishing support groups in the US.

Hann So says, "We'll be very busy. Please help. Please let us know as soon as possible. I really appreciate your time and assistance."



Vol VI ក្បាល ៦ P.O. BOX 611144	No. 4 លេខ ៤	សម្បជញ្ញៈខ្មែរ	NOV-DEC 1992 វិច្ឆិកា ធ្នូ ១៩៩២ SAN JOSE CA 95161 USA
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*Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk
Chef de l'Etat
et Président du Conseil National Suprême du Cambodge*

Beijing, le 28 Septembre 1992

à KHMER CONSCIENCE

Bien-aimés Kaun-Chau,

'Je Vous remercie infiniment de Votre noble lettre en date du 26 Septembre 1992 et ai l'honneur de Vous faire connaître qu'au nom du C.N.S., je Vous autorise à faire circuler librement au Cambodge le Bulletin de "KHMER CONSCIENCE".

Quant aux questions soulevées par Vous concernant les votes par les compatriotes d'Outre-Mer, je les sou mets immédiatement au bienveillant examen de S.E. Mr Yasushi AKASHI, Représentant Spécial du Secrétaire Général des Nations-Unies. Seule l'APRONUC pourra décider à ce sujet.

S.E. Samdech Son Sann, S.A.R. le Prince Norodom Ranariddh et moi avons demandé à l'APRONUC d'accorder aux compatriotes d'Outre-Mer ce que vous sollicitez dans votre lettre précitée. Mais l'APRONUC en a décidé autrement.

Veuillez trouver ci-joint une photocopie de ma lettre à S.E. Yasushi AKASHI.

Très affectueusement Vôtre,

NORODOM SIHANOUK

KHMER CONSCIENCE is a private nonprofit organization created to provide charitable and educational services to the general public to enable consideration and nonpartisan discussion of the issues involved in seeking a democratic future for Cambodia. This journal is the forum of ideas and discussions. The views expressed are solely of the authors. Any donation is much appreciated.

សម្បជញ្ញៈខ្មែរជាអង្គការមិនមែនមិនមែនសម្រាប់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋខ្មែរនិងមិត្តបរទេសនូវការសិក្សានិងពិភាក្សាដើម្បីនាំមកនូវលទ្ធិប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ។ ព្រឹត្តិប័ត្រនេះជារឿងការសរសេររបស់អ្នកបោះពុម្ពជាតិប្រយោជន៍ដល់និងគំនិតក្នុងការដោះស្រាយបញ្ហាប្រទេសខ្មែរ។ អ្នកនិពន្ធមានករណីយកិច្ចខ្លួន ការខុសត្រូវនូវអត្ថបទរបស់ខ្លួន។ ព្រឹត្តិប័ត្រនេះចែកចំណូលដោយពុំគិតថ្លៃ។ ការណាអញ្ជើញអានរួចហើយ សូមមេត្តាចែកបន្តគ្នាអានឱ្យបានគ្រប់គ្នា។

KHMER CONSCIENCE

(បកប្រែក្រៅផ្លូវការ)
ចំពោះសម្បជញ្ញៈខ្មែរ

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(សេចក្តីប្រែក្រៅផ្លូវការ)

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Bangkok Post

Established in 1946

BANGKOK SATURDAY OCTOBER 3, 1992

Khmer democracy forum planned

A FORMER aide to Cambodian Head of State Prince Norodom Sihanouk heads for Phnom Penh today to set up an independent Khmer Institute of Democracy.

Julio Jeldres, previously special assistant to the prince, is taking up an idea by Cambodian engineer Hann So, editor of the periodical *Khmer Conscience*, to set up a forum for expatriate Cam-

bodians.

A Chilean-born Australian, Mr Jeldres arrives in Phnom Penh only two days before the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) takes a major step towards general elections in the country next year. UNTAC begins voter registration on Monday under the terms of the Paris Peace Agreement. Mr Jeldres said the in-

stitute plans to work closely with UNTAC but stresses that its goals go far beyond the elections expected to take place by May next year.

In constant turmoil since 1975, Cambodia has not held democratic elections for about two decades.

The main objectives of the institute are to enable "worldwide" discussion of the democratic future of Cambodia and to "foster democratic values" among Cambodians, a statement says.

Mr Jeldres said UNTAC's electoral officer Professor Reginald Austin had been "very encouraging" toward the plans.

The director of UNTAC's human rights component Denis McNamara, Prince Sihanouk and his son Prince Norodom Ranariddh had also been supportive, he added.

Mr Jeldres travels to Phnom Penh with a modest grant from Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, who has taken "a personal interest" in the project, he said.

The institute will be headed by a Cambodian but pending his selection, Mr Jeldres is acting director.

The director has to be "reliable, down-to-earth and able to relate to all Cambodians," Mr Jeldres said.

Both he and his staff have to be neutral, non-partisan and show that they are "genuinely committed to democracy and human rights," he added.

To promote national reconciliation, the institute plans to invite one representative from each of the four Cambodian factions represented in the Supreme National Council (SNC) to sit on its board of directors.

Mr Jeldres is aiming for November 1 as the official opening of the institute in Phnom Penh, and for it to be fully operational by next January 1.



Volume 1 Number 10

Phnom Penh, November 20-December 3, 1992

1200 riel

Former Royal Aide Opens Think Tank

BY LEO DOBBS

Canberra Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has pitched in with Australian \$20,000 to help a former aide to Prince Norodom Sihanouk set up a pro-democracy, non-profit education, research and training center in the capital.

Julio Jeldres, who left the royal household last year after serving the former monarch for more than a decade, said the Khmer Institute of Democracy's immediate aim is to: "Make Khmers familiar with the modus operandi of a democratic government."

A longer term plan would be to turn the Institute—the brainchild of Cambodian exiles in California—into a "think tank that can help successive governments," added Jeldres who is the organization's acting director and a naturalized Australian from Chile.

Democracy has been an alien

concept for so many years in Cambodia and the 11-member board of the Institute (five Cambodians and six foreigners, to be with the ex-officio representation from each of the four major political factions, aims to rectify this by promoting widespread discussion on the topic. Public seminars, workshops and debates will be major vehicles for propagating democratic ideals and principles, with university students a key initial target.

The Institute will also sponsor education research to promote democracy as the nation prepares for its first multi-party general elections in years, and build up a corps of local teachers to spread the word and foster democratic values at the grass-roots level.

At the same time the Institute will open up links with other fledgling independent organizations sponsoring human rights and make contact with political parties—more than a dozen at the last count.

"Prince Sihanouk approved establishment of the Institute in Phnom Penh on Jan. 16 and on Aug. 12 he gave permission for my appointment as acting director," said Jeldres, who held the rank of ambassador when he quit the royal service in December.

Start-up funding has come from different sources in Australia and North America, including the generous gift from peace plan architect Evans and several thousand dollars from private donors in the United States.

Introduction

I launch an urgent and patriotic appeal to all our compatriots, wherever they are, inside the country or abroad, to join us in the struggle against foreign occupiers.

Prince Norodom Sihanouk, 1982¹

This is the call to action many Cambodians answered despite tremendous physical separation from their homeland. Dispersed by genocide and war, Cambodian refugees continued to be intimately involved with the livelihood of their nation during the Third Indochina War, which lasted from 1979 until the Vietnamese pulled out of Cambodia ten years later.² Whether writing fervently of the perils of Vietnamese imperialism or organizing a contingent to plead the United States Congress to intervene in Cambodia, the hearts and hands of many Cambodian refugees beat and toiled for the freedom of their home. A resistance to the foreign occupation roused the national pride of Cambodians on multiple fronts, from camps on the Thai-Cambodian border to major cities in the West and Asia. It is this national pride Sihanouk recognized as he wrote for support from exile.

At the conclusion of the Second Indochina War, communist regimes took full hold of the region. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975. 5,000 Cambodians were evacuated by United States troops. Those less fortunate to escape suffered three years of tremendous violence and murder. Under the Pol Pot-led Democratic Kampuchea, all cities were emptied and people were forced into the countryside to undertake a mass agrarian

¹ Sihanouk, Proclamation regarding the formation of the Coalition Government for a Democratic Kampuchea, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 9 July 1982, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

² I will be using *Cambodian* to refer to all refugees and people from Cambodia. However, throughout the paper, quoted materials will use both *Cambodian* and *Khmer* to refer to the people from Cambodia. I also use the term *refugee* broadly as the majority of Cambodians in the United States entered as refugees as defined by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR). Only a small number were designated as “immigrants” or “humanitarian parolees.”

revolution. The Khmer Rouge imagined an ideal past linked to the grandeur of Angkor and sought to re-create a pure society. The extermination of what they saw to be Western influence and corruption was necessary. Intellectuals and civil servants in the Lon Nol and Sihanouk administrations were slaughtered, as well as those who were slow to follow orders from Khmer Rouge cadres.

People died by the thousands from starvation and murder until the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978. Although an end to the Khmer Rouge, this began a ten-year period of occupation. Marked by the presence of troops and a government installed by Vietnamese communist leaders, the subsequent administration was seen as evidence of Viet Nam's desire for an Indochinese empire. In opposition to the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) led by Heng Samrin, Sihanouk, the Khmer Rouge, and republican non-communist organizations banded together to form the Coalition Government for a Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982. Operating militarily from camps along the Thai-Cambodian border, the CGDK enjoyed United Nations recognition and support from Cambodians in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia.

This paper will explore the resistance movement waged by Cambodian diasporas.³ As a transnational movement, the support for the CGDK from Cambodians overseas played a significant role in raising international awareness and intervention in their homeland. Although refugees, Asian American Studies scholar Khatharya Um challenges literature typifying Cambodians as victims, and instead calls for looking at refugees as “‘survivors’ who create

³ I use *diasporas* to refer to Cambodians forcibly dispersed in communities outside of the country in cross-border refugee camps and third-country resettlement. I also use the singular *diaspora* to collectively refer to Cambodians overseas.

something out of their crisis.”⁴ I will critically examine the resistance movement and the Cambodian diaspora. I seek to understand why, from their liminal positions, were Cambodian refugees motivated and enabled to influence homeland politics, ultimately resulting in the end of the Vietnamese occupation.

Guiding the search for the answer to this main inquiry is a series of additional questions. What role did nationalism play in uniting and prompting Cambodian diasporas to take part in the resistance? How did Cambodians’ relationships to the nation-state change as refugees? How did the home government view its displaced citizens? Broadly, how do the resistance movement and the Cambodian diaspora call into question the relationship between diaspora and nation-state? What links, if any, connect surviving the trauma of displacement with ending the Vietnamese occupation?

Political scientist Benedict Anderson believes nationality to be a “cultural artifact.”⁵ He argues that nationality, or nationalism, upon creation, becomes “capable of being transplanted to a great variety of social terrains.”⁶ Through the use of archival material and secondary texts, I have identified continuities of national expression that have endured regime changes and mass dispersal: a constant gaze to the past glory of the Angkor kingdom, a fear of eventual extinction, and belief that Viet Nam has had long-standing colonial interests in Cambodia. Faced with constant uncertainty of the future, fears of racial extinction and national disappearance marked the footprints of the refugees as they traveled further from Cambodia to resettlement sites. Although I believe it would be too broad to claim the existence of one monolithic Cambodian nationhood, together these could be seen as artifacts that collectively constitute the nationalism

⁴ Khatharya Um, “Diasporic Nationalism, Citizenship, and Post-War Reconstruction.” *Refuge* vol. 23, no. 2 (2006): 10.

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

compelling Cambodian diasporas to join the resistance, as well as justify their subsequent actions. I will interrogate the origins of these cultural artifacts and discuss the transformation of their significance through displacement.

As I investigate Cambodian national history and culture, I find it also necessary to understand what characterizes Cambodian refugees as a diaspora and the meaning of diaspora itself. The theoretical texts on diaspora and nation commonly position the two as opposing entities. However, the resistance movement complicates such a binary relationship. Kachig Tololyan, in the introduction to the first issue of the scholarly journal *Diaspora*, puts forth two differing roles a diaspora can take on: that of the “ally” or “Other” of the nation-state.⁷ I will discuss how the resistance movement moved between these roles depending on whose perspective one takes. During the occupation, questions of authenticity and legitimacy were raised as the international community and Cambodian diasporas had shifting views of which political entity—the CGDK or the PRK—embodied the true Cambodian state. The actions of Cambodian refugees influenced this debate and attests to the need to create another way to study diasporas and nations. Sociologist John Lie calls for a “diasporic intervention in nationalist historiography” and I intend to uncover how the period 1979 to 1991 can be studied to situate the diaspora equal to, rather than marginalized by, the nation-state. I will describe the tensions among Cambodian diasporas in how to unite and who to support as well as how the different Cambodian political leaders positioned themselves as authentic representatives of Cambodia.

Understanding the resistance movement requires both a reading of elements of Cambodian nationalism as well as an examination of how refugees saw themselves in relation to the homeland. What diasporic identity was cultivated through displacement and occupation? I

⁷ Kachig Tololyan, “The Nation-State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface,” in *Sociology of Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Ajaya Kumar Sahoo and Brij Maharaj (Jaipur, India: Rawat Publications, 2007), 21.

will critically examine the discourse of *Khmer Conscience*, an open non-partisan periodical that circulated widely among Cambodian diasporas from 1987 to 1993. Sociologist Roza Tsagarousianou points out the usefulness of studying such examples of “diasporic media” as a “considerable and highly diverse array of organizations, practices, and settings where diasporic narratives are constructed.”⁸ Communication through such media is multidirectional and provides a space in which identity can be constructed and re-evaluated. To what degree did *Khmer Conscience* shape the production of a diasporic Cambodian identity and narrative?

Sociologist Thomas Faist argues that nationality is a “human right to combat statelessness.”⁹ I will not delve into a discussion on what constitutes a human right, but I will consider in this paper how participation in the resistance against Viet Nam functioned as a way to mitigate the pains of displacement, suffering, and violence resulting from genocide and war. How is the sovereignty of one’s homeland connected to one’s sense of self and belonging? Does having the ability to return to one’s country of origin impact the refugee condition? I will explore how surviving the losses and trauma incurred during displacement was linked to the survival of the Cambodian nation-state. In writing about Cambodian Americans’ efforts to preserve their culture, Um describes such acts as “the indomitable spirit of a nation, struggling to survive.”¹⁰ I will end this paper reflecting how Cambodian refugees managed their own survival through their efforts to save Cambodia: its national form, culture, and people.

⁸ Roza Tsagarousianou, “Reevaluating Diaspora,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 112.

⁹ Thomas Faist, “The Transnational Turn,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 253.

¹⁰ Khatharya Um, “Refractions of Home: Exile, memory, and diasporic longing,” in *Expressions of Cambodia: The politics of tradition, identity, and change*, ed. Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (New York: Routledge, 2006), 86.

Methodology and sources

Research for this thesis was conducted with the use of the Hann So Collection on Cambodia Archive, and secondary literature from UC Berkeley Libraries. Initial assessments of the Hann So Collection led me to read secondary sources on the French colonial period in Cambodia, Khmer-Viet relations, events in Cambodia post-1950, and the Khmer refugee experience. Additionally, I read theories of nationalism and diaspora to ground my analysis of the resistance movement. Regarding *Khmer Conscience*, earlier issues were acquired through interlibrary loan with Sacramento State University and UCLA. All other primary documents come from the Hann So Collection on Cambodia Archive, housed in the South/Southeast Asian Studies Reference Library. I was also fortunate to have corresponded electronically with Hann So himself and Vora Huy Kanthoul, a member of the original *Khmer Conscience* editorial board and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front.

Primary source: The Hann So Collection on Cambodia Archive

According to the official library description, “the materials of this collection focus largely upon Cambodian-American support for the forces opposing the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, in the years leading up to the Paris Peace Accords. The collection, which includes a broad range of documents in English, French and Khmer, spans the period 1979-1993, and is especially strong in documenting the development of the publication “Khmer Conscience.” This collection's materials consist of approximately 100 monographs on a range of cultural, political, and historical.”¹¹ Containing congressional reports, personal correspondences, essays, petitions

¹¹<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SoutheastAsia/speccol.html#TheHannSocollectiononCambodiaarchive>

and open letters to the US government and the United Nations, newspaper articles from United States and overseas periodicals, internal documents and propaganda of various Cambodian organizations and political factions, event and conference posters, governmental and UN reports on Cambodia, and most importantly the non-profit newsletter *Khmer Conscience*, the collection provides a wide array of information from multiple perspectives on the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia, among other significant issues affecting Cambodians in-country and abroad. The collection was assembled by Hann So, a current San Jose, California resident and long-time activist involved with the Cambodian refugee communities of California and all over the country.

So migrated to France at the outset of the civil war in Cambodia in 1970. So visited the United States in 1976 and remained to continue his education. He came as a tourist and during the Democratic Kampuchea regime, changed his status to that of “parolee.” According to So, “although I was involved with the refugees, I was not one of them because I did not have the same status and benefits like them...I was a Cambodian without a country until later on I became a naturalized American.”¹² The Vietnamese occupation in 1979 and the installation of a government headed by Heng Samrin prompted So to support the non-communist resistance headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Regarding his choice of who to support, So comments, “It was very easy. We fought for the freedom of all Khmers living in Cambodia and we wanted to get rid of the Vietnamese. So there was no hesitation in my part to support the non-communist resistance.”¹³ He organized demonstrations, rallies, meetings and conferences to educate Cambodians and the larger US public about the situation in Cambodia. So lobbied the US government to provide aid to the non-communist resistance and helped in fund raising as well. In

¹² Personal electronic correspondence, 16 January 2009.

¹³ Ibid.

1986, he founded Khmer Conscience, a non-profit organization in San Jose. With mission to continue educating the public, Khmer Conscience organized conferences and symposia on the situation in Cambodia and the plight of refugees. A newsletter of the same name also began publication with an educational purpose and to be a non-partisan forum for contributors.

So collected and preserved all the documents that came into his possession during his involvement in helping Cambodia regain independence. He began by collecting news articles in France and continued to do so in the United States. When asked about the purpose of the collection, So articulates, “It’s history. As you know, those who lived through the war in Cambodia will remember it forever, but for the new generation of Khmers who were born here in the US, they either learned about their roots from their parents or through readings. So this collection will enable them to understand better the struggle that their compatriots went through to regain independence for their homeland.”¹⁴

Hann So’s life and political activity are embedded in this archive donated for the purposes of educating young and future generations of Cambodian Americans. The collection contains many originals or duplicates of news articles, organizational propaganda and UN records. However, a sizable amount of the archive personally connects to him. From Khmer Conscience documentation, correspondences between other Cambodians, US government officials, US scholars and journalists, the collection’s historical records are also records of So’s political life, a very significant fact. When one approaches the collection, he will not find an identifiable thread as library assistants sorted and filed the documents into the order he sees upon opening the lid of the first box.¹⁵ What connects the collection across manila folders and boxes is

¹⁴ Personal electronic correspondence, 16 January 2009.

¹⁵ In a conversation with Virginia Shih, UC Berkeley Southeast Asian Studies Reference librarian, a graduate student was hired to sort through the donated items. The current form of the archive took three semesters’ worth of work in terms of reading, sorting, and filing the documents into accessible categories.

Hann So and every letter he wrote or is addressed to him, his personal essays, news editorials and articles quoting him.

While writing of the Dutch colonial archive, anthropologist Ann Stoler reflects on “rich ethnographic monuments stored in the non-eventful: in drafts of proposals, in unrealized plans, in short-lived experiments, and in failed projects.”¹⁶ My own experience has been similar with the Hann So Collection. Many individuals’ opinions and hopes for Cambodia constitute the majority of the archive. From the vantage point of today, how then do I interpret nationalist dreams printed on paper in relation to the documented course of history resulting in a clearly defined solution ending the Vietnamese occupation? As I read through the archive, I keep in mind Stoler’s important methodological consideration: “What historical weight to assign to a set of improbably visionary designs that were, for the most part, never implemented?”¹⁷ She thus provides a way to read the archive through articulating important boundaries of this collection and its utility. I look to the Hann So Collection for what it can tell me about Cambodians’ perceptions of themselves in relation to their displacement and homeland. Who embodies the legitimate Cambodian nation-state? What motivated Cambodians overseas to become active in homeland politics? The collection can certainly provide some evidence to answer these questions.

My research of the transnational political network linking Cambodian diasporas around the central issue of the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia lies, as Stoler writes, “not in the relationship between text and context, but rather the changing force fields in which these models are produced.”¹⁸ In her study of Dutch Indonesia, Stoler’s “changing force fields” are the social,

¹⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, “Developing Historical Narrative,” in *From the Margins*, ed. Brian Keith Axel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 157.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid.

cultural, and political contexts in which colonial administrators formulated plans, most of which never came to be. Similarly, in order to understand the diasporas' relationship to Cambodia, I must look to the changing political climate, the constant reflection and articulation of refugees' opinions, and their responses to difficult choices. What Cambodian diasporas felt about the occupation changed from 1981 to 1982 when the CGDK formed, and when Viet Nam supposedly withdrew troops at various points during the 1980s. How to unite as a community was tainted with differing feelings on the Khmer Rouge vis-à-vis the Vietnamese, especially as peace negotiations failed due to competing opinions on how the Khmer Rouge should be included in the settlement process. In the collection is a poster publicizing a Cambodian workshop on reconstruction and development.¹⁹ Hann So wrote multiple drafts of a plan for post-war development.²⁰ While the workshop may have contributed nothing to actual reconstruction and while no one may have ever seen Hann So's proposal, what I find significant is what is expressed through holding such a workshop and what So's proposal reveals about his relationship to his homeland. Such material makes the experience of being in the resistance movement less intangible and more accessible to me, the researcher. I become better able to grasp how a diaspora could be constitutive of the nation through understanding what the archive can provide.

In tackling the Hann So Collection for this thesis, my first attempt at rigorous research, I feel like historian Nicholas Dirks upon beginning his research on pre-colonial Southern India. When entering a record room, Dirks realizes that his "interest in the small and contradictory ruptures of history was not designed for easy access...most documents were by themselves mere

¹⁹ Cambodian Workshop on Reconstruction and Development, 1 July 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

²⁰ Hann So, "Cambodia: Reconstruction and Development Plan," Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

reminders of the quotidian tedium of history...the archive is a glorious monument of history, but the documents within are simply the sedimented detritus.”²¹ While an honest account of the immensity of his work, Dirks also introduces an important issue: that of how much authority to assign the archive. I realize that the Hann So Collection is not the ultimate source for studying Cambodian nationalism, the transnational movement to end the occupation, or even how to describe the political actions of Cambodians in the United States. I myself am restricted by my language abilities and have had to forego translating the documents in French and Khmer in order to focus on the English materials and secondary sources. As Dirks writes, the archive has a character of “monumentality” for the historian, and particularly for me, an undergraduate making his first foray into intense, independent research. While I am conscious of the limitations in this archive, I do believe this personal collection has much to tell on a subject for which very little study has been conducted. During the research process, the Hann So Collection’s adequacy, authenticity, and status of academic appraisal have been called into question. Such critique reveals an “ignorance of the archival structure of the conditions of historical knowledge,” a structure embedded with power and claims of authority influencing what can be considered an “official” archive suitable for research purposes.²² What I hope to do with the collection and this paper is to avoid monumentalizing the archive and make room for personal and marginalized stories of politically conscious and active Cambodian refugees to be told.

²¹ Nicholas Dirks, “Annals of the Archive,” in *From the Margins*, ed. Brian Keith Axel (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 157.

²² *Ibid.*, 50.

Secondary literature review: Nation and diaspora

For my theoretical base, I explored scholarly works on nationalism and diaspora. Most texts incorporate a framework of transnationalism. How I use nationalism and diaspora will be discussed in this section utilizing various scholars' ideas as I attempt to define the relationship between the Cambodian diaspora and Cambodian nation-state. Regarding transnationalism, I means this term as a lens for viewing the experiences of "transmigrants," those who move from one country to another and maintain on-going relationships with people and institutions in two or more countries. Although the Cambodian refugees are not typical migrants due to their forced displacement, the resistance movement was transnational in character as it was coordinated from border camps to countries of third-resettlement in the West. I will describe in detail also further in the paper exactly how the movement functioned transnationally. For now, I will discuss meanings of nationalism and diaspora in order to understand the specific expressions of Cambodian nationalism, and the relationship between the diaspora and homeland. Differing perceptions of each inform the identity of authentic nation-state, the resistance movement, and the larger Cambodian diaspora.

Anderson traces the development of nationality as a cultural artifact in *Imagined Communities*. In his study, he questions how nationalism came into being and has come to have such emotional legitimacy in the hearts of many. From this intangible grounding in human emotion, Anderson claims that nationalism invents nations where none exist. A nation is therefore an "imagined political community."²³ Similarly, sociologist Robin Cohen argues, a "diaspora can be held together and recreated through the mind, cultural artifacts, and shared imagination."²⁴ How does the significance of cultural artifacts affect how one might view the

²³ Anderson, 4-6.

²⁴ Robin Cohen, *Global Diaporas: An Introduction*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 26.

national and diasporic communities? How can one conceive of them as one, rather than two distinct entities in the Cambodian case? These scholars provide a lens to read and study what I have identified as continuities of national expression in Cambodian history and culture: a heightened romantic view of the Angkor kingdom and a fear of extinction, partly informed by a related trend of territorial conflict with Viet Nam, long positioned as a natural enemy seeking to absorb Cambodia as part of an imperial project. The French re-imagination of Angkor became firmly entrenched into national history and culture as a constant reminder of previous greatness and the promise of future uplift and achievement. Anthony Barnett comments, “most expressions of nationalism contain a fear of extinction.”²⁵ This proves to be especially true for Cambodia, given its colonial tutelage and historical territorial conflict with Thailand and most notably, Viet Nam. Images and rhetoric revolving around these themes of past grandeur and fear for the future are replete in the Hann So Collection. Together, these national artifacts provide a cultural lens to understanding the Cambodian diaspora and the resistance movement. In demonstrating how national artifacts continue to function among diasporas, where then does the difference lie in how the Cambodian diaspora conceives of itself with how the Cambodian nation-state has been imagined by its citizens? Further in this paper I will explain the origins of these cultural artifacts as invented objects reflective of contemporary Cambodian society. Throughout time they have evolved to a high degree of multi-faceted complexity and emotional legitimacy that their significance and implications for the integrity of the nation continue to have profound impacts on dispersed citizens.

Lie argues there has been a nationalist marginalization of diaspora. He believes that a diaspora can be constitutive of the nation. Due to sudden, forced flight to survive, Cambodia as a

²⁵ Anthony Barnett, “Cambodia will never disappear.” *New Left Review* 1, no. 181 (February 1990): 101.

nation, as a home, to the refugees remained the central community to which their destiny was fixed.²⁶ The ways in which diasporas contest the dominance of the nation-state system apply to the Cambodian case unevenly. Overseas Cambodians were a driving force in changing the political situation of Cambodia. The resistance movement was an effort to save the state and preserve the national form against cultural and territorial invasion. How does a diaspora disrupt the salience of the nation-state in international politics in a quest to restore the ancestral home? To study the Cambodian diaspora and Cambodia collectively as a “nation unbound,”²⁷ Lie suggests developing a transnational historiography and social science, what he calls a diasporic intervention in nationalist historiography.²⁸

Social scientists Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller provide an approach to studying the unbound nation: the social field. Taking from Pierre Bourdieu and the Manchester school, Levitt and Schiller acknowledge that social relationships are structured by power, and that there is a struggle for position by participants. The interplay of this power struggle constitutes the social field and is ever changing, not fixed. Levitt and Schiller define the social field as a

“set of multiple, interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed. [It is] multidimensional, encompassing structured interactions of differing forms, depth, and breadth that are differentiated in social theory by the terms organization, institution, and social movement. National boundaries are not necessarily contiguous with the boundaries of social fields. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries while transnational social fields connect actors, through direct and indirect relations across borders.”²⁹

Through the lens of the social field, the focus is on the social interactions, which expose migrants’ relationships, encounters, and daily practices that bind diasporas together and maintain

²⁶ John Lie, “(Korean) Diasporic Nationalism,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 528.

²⁷ Linda Basch et al quoted in Cohen, 136.

²⁸ Lie, 258.

²⁹ Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 162.

the nation. Levitt and Schiller further argue, “one central individual may have high levels of contact with the homeland and is the node through which information, resources, and identities flow. While other individuals may not identify with or take action based on those ties, the fact they are part of the same transnational social field keeps them informed and connected so that they can act if events motivate them to do so.”³⁰ Levitt and Schiller point exactly what I will illustrate in this paper about Cambodian diasporas involvement in the resistance movement. Um describes Cambodian diasporas in the west functioned as the “nodes...that money, human resources and other forms of support flowed [through]” to the fighting forces on the border.³¹ Additionally, individuals such as Hann So and Vora Huy Kanthoul are examples of individuals with high levels of contact with Cambodia. So printed and circulated *Khmer Conscience*. In his transnational field were scholars, journalists, and activists, some of Cambodian descent, who were highly involved as well in Cambodian politics. Readership also included those who did not have the time to be as engaged but desired to remain informed about current events. Kanthoul describes himself as the focal point for the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front in California during the occupation.³² The lens of the transnational social field is thus a very powerful approach to understand how the Cambodian diaspora constructs a sense of nationhood and belonging.

Also focused on interactions within diasporas and with the nation-state, sociologist Riva Kastoryano introduces “transnational nationalism.” This type of nationalism finds expression and develops beyond and outside the borders of the state and its territory. Diasporas return to arouse

³⁰ Levitt and Schiller, 162.

³¹ Khatharya Um, “Political Remittance: Cambodian diasporas in conflict and post conflict,” in *Diasporas in Action*, ed. Hazel Smith and Paul Stares (New York: United Nations University Press, 2007), 263.

³² Personal electronic correspondence, 28 April 2009.

nationalist sentiment inside the country.³³ She contrasts transnational nationalism with diasporic nationalism, best illustrated through the differences in relationship between the diaspora and the nation-state of ancestry. Whereas “diasporas point to nations defined by ideals vested in past symbols and projects itself into the future with the same myth, the nation of transnational nationalism is in the throes of the interaction between the states of emigration and immigration.” She adds that transnational nationalism favors the formation of a transnational community and a public space that promotes mobilization and participation across nation-states.³⁴ Such a framework emphasizes, similarly to Levitt and Schiller, the possibilities that potentially arise from interactions between diaspora and homeland.

Transnational nationalism describes a way of acting within the social field. Levitt and Schiller comment that the social field lens allows one to analyze ways of belonging, which are characterized by action and awareness of what action signifies. Such consciousness driving the actions of diasporas can shift positions of states within the world order as well as effect internal changes within states.³⁵ Political scientist Paula Graham develops how this can come about through her study of Dominicans in New York City. Drawing from the ways in which Dominican migrants are simultaneously part of New York City and the Dominican Republic, Graham calls for a deeper understanding of political incorporation and re-incorporation in traditional immigrant studies. Conventional theories are limiting and do not provide a full picture of the rich political life across borders. Graham argues that a process of simultaneous incorporation into more than one national context can occur and may be reflected in formal and informal political practices. Like differing engagement in the transnational social field, political incorporation is a continuum, and where a migrant falls may be explained through individual

³³ Riva Kastoryano, “Turkish Transnational Nationalism,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 426.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Levitt and Schiller, 167.

interests and opportunities.³⁶ For those who are actively engaged in the homeland and host state, their participation can best be characterized by what Anderson calls “long-distance nationalism.”³⁷

In discussing biological metaphors of belonging, Schiller defines long-distance nationalism as “identification with a distant territory called home that then takes on a transnational project to build a state.” It is action-oriented and links a dispersed population to a specific homeland and its political system. Acting upon this nationalism is a way of belonging in the transnational social field. Anderson, however, complicates this relationship and calls out the exile for being “well and safely positioned in the First World,” contributing to serious politics while being radically unaccountable as he plays national hero. From the safety in a Western country, the exile resides in a “metropole that marginalizes and stigmatizes him [but] simultaneously enables him.”³⁸

Historian Marie-Paule Ha points out in the current postcolonial context, diaspora refers to political and cultural situations arising from Western colonialism as diasporic moves tend to be from the “third world” to the “first.”³⁹ The position of the long-distance nationalist is thus called into question and while he may see himself as an ally to the nation-state, others may instead “Other” him. Rightful responsibility and duty, and upon whose shoulder it falls now becomes a concern. What degree of legitimacy does long-distance nationalism hold when it is an expression of those who have escaped the political turmoil and violence of the homeland? Comparative literature scholar Rey Chow declares

³⁶ Paula Graham, “Political Incorporation and Re-Incorporation: Simultaneity in the Dominican Migrant Experience,” in *Migration, Transnationalization, and Race in a Changing New York*, eds. Hector R. Cordero-Guzman et al (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 88-9.

³⁷ Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*. (London: Verso, 1998), 73-4.

³⁸ Schiller, “Blood and Belonging: Long-Distance Nationalism and the World Beyond,” in *Complexities*, eds. Susan McKinnon and Sydel Silverman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 290.

³⁹ Marie-Paule Ha, “Cultural Identities in the Chinese Diaspora,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 387.

“It is not the job of the diasporic intellectual to protest against the intrusion of foreign imperialism on native soil, nor against the continued cultural domination of the homeland by foreign forces in the postcolonial period. Such struggles are for people on the ground. Diasporic intellectuals have to guard themselves against the temptation of exploiting their roles as distant patrons of the homeland culture while simultaneously being privileged ‘ethnics’ and ‘minorities’ in the West.”⁴⁰

Anderson’s argument, while substantiated through other scholars, does not hold up primarily due to his claim that the long-distance nationalist’s politics are “deeply rooted in a consciousness that his exile is self-chosen.”⁴¹ For Cambodian refugees, this was certainly not the case. Their positions in the West were a result of violent, forced dispersal. As one refugee explains, “When my wife and I decided to leave, there was really no other decision to be made. If we wanted to live, we would leave.”⁴² Describing his escape from the Khmer Rouge, the voluntary nature of his decision would indicate whether he continued to live or not. The choice to move to a Western country of third-resettlement was also largely out of the hands of Cambodians escaping the Khmer Rouge in the first refugee wave, or the famine and Vietnamese occupation in later periods of mass outflows from the country. Western countries were providing the shelter fleeing Cambodians sought. With this in mind, I challenge Chow’s dichotomy of “diasporic intellectuals” and “people on the ground,” and the rights she accords to both.

Chow makes a judgment about the rights and proper role of the “diasporic intellectual” that divides him from the homeland and the “people on the ground,” which are those left behind: family, friends, and specifically, in my study, the soldiers under direction of the CGDK fighting from the Thai-Cambodian border. They were supported by “diasporic intellectuals,” such as Hann So and Vora Huy Kanthoul. Composed of both groups, the resistance could not function successfully without the Cambodian diaspora. Furthermore, geographer Jennifer Hyndman

⁴⁰ Quoted in Cohen, 132.

⁴¹ Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons*, 74.

⁴² John Tenhula, *Voices from Southeast Asia* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1991), 71.

states, “Political borders designate a constitutive outside, a basis for identity formation against the identity or threat of something else.”⁴³ With the invasion and subsequent Vietnamese-installed government, borders—legal, physical, and ideological—were erected, and united those against the PRK with a common goal. The success of the fighting forces along the Thai-Cambodian border was intimately tied to the ways in which refugees in the West balanced their struggles in adjustment with political organizing around the conflict in Cambodia. The Cambodian diaspora and Cambodia was bound together politically in the struggle to overcome foreign occupation. Reflected by Vannee Dœur, president of the Cambodian International Trading Corporation, he writes in a message to fellow expatriates, “I strongly urge everyone one of you with practical skills and know how along with real commitment and responsibility to join in this process for the sake of our survival...Together we succeed, not just survive.”⁴⁴

Through this extended discussion on theoretical texts addressing the nation and diaspora, I hope to demonstrate how closely intertwined the Cambodian diaspora was to the Cambodia nation-state during the period of study. In a transnational framework, the relationship changes as the diaspora is no longer solely defined by the overrated emphasis on perceived nostalgic links and memories of the original homeland.⁴⁵ Cohen asks how nations, real yet imagined communities, are brought into being, made and unmade, both on the land people call their own and in exile.⁴⁶ Considering the diaspora and nation-state together as a nation unbound in a transnational social field provides such a way out of the privileged nation-state paradigm. I will set Cambodian history and the Hann So Collection within these approaches to understand the configuration of the resistance movement as a representation of the diasporic experience

⁴³ Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1-2.

⁴⁴ Vannee Dœur, “Urgent message to all expatriate Khmers,” n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁴⁵ Tsagarousisanou, 106.

⁴⁶ Cohen, 127.

Secondary Literature Review: Cambodian refugee studies

One of my aims for this paper is to widen the scope of research on Cambodian refugees and Cambodian history and politics. The majority of existing literature on Cambodian refugees is largely limited in topic coverage and is prone to exoticize refugees as the victims.

Asian American Studies scholars Sucheng Chan identifies these limitations. Many autobiographies, short oral histories, and scholarly texts describe the experience of the refugees pre-arrival. In the case of Cambodians, the Khmer Rouge genocide has received much scholarly attention. In fact, currently the world is once again focused on the atrocities of Democratic Kampuchea as the Khmer Rouge genocide tribunals have just gone underway. The image of the refugee as a victim of war, violence, famine, and mine fields was cultivated through popular media. According to Chan, “what most Americans know about Cambodians is based on a handful of stark images: piles of skulls and bones, bedraggled people straggling across the Thai-Cambodian border, emaciated individuals with vacant stares, and babies with bloated bellies.”⁴⁷ In regards to refugee life in the United States, the literature emphasizes mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Additionally, much has been made of the gang violence plaguing Cambodian refugee communities, and the intergenerational conflicts within families.⁴⁸ On the opposite end, much the success of refugees’ integration has been studied through the entrepreneurial efforts of individuals pulling themselves and their families out of poverty. Beginning with Ted Ngoy, many Cambodians became socioeconomically mobile through becoming prosperous doughnut shop operators. The “doughnut king” (and queen) has become a

⁴⁷ Sucheng Chan, *Survivors* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), xiii.

⁴⁸ Chan, xii.

popular stereotype of Cambodian Americans.⁴⁹ Beyond these topics, very little else has been studied about Cambodian refugees in the United States.

According to Chan, most Southeast Asian refugee literature has been mainly about the Vietnamese experience. Certainly this is owing to the fact that the United States had a longer relationship with this country. However, popular media also focused attention on the war in Southeast Asia as the “Vietnam War,” which has functioned to marginalize the United States’ involvement in Laos and Cambodia. Following the fall of Saigon and the takeover of communist regimes in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia, the United States army evacuated approximately 128,000 Vietnamese in April and May 1975. This is an overwhelming contrast to the 5,000 Cambodians and 2,000 Laotians admitted to the United States for refuge.⁵⁰ Of the literature that does exist, refugees are further exoticized as victims. For instance, in his compilation of oral histories, John Tenhula begins each transcription with a description of the scene before his conversation begins. Sam Son is seen by Tenhula as “a very soft-spoken man...His eyes never meet mine...it appears difficult for him to answer my questions. There are very long pauses—reflection, maybe—before he answers my questions.”⁵¹ Sokhoa Gioi, a domestic worker, is “a diminutive person.” Tenhula further speculates, “There are certain things she doesn’t want to discuss, and I feel her past is frozen.”⁵² This discourse in Tenhula’s text describes these two Cambodian refugees in the ways Asians have been racialized in the United States as quiet, subservient, and passive beings. Where then does one find another depiction of Cambodian refugees?

Asian American Studies scholar Khatharya Um has produced scholarly articles revealing

⁴⁹ Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 241.

⁵⁰ Tenhula, 54.

⁵¹ Tenhula, 46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

how Cambodian refugees are more than just victims. For this thesis, I have made use of her work positioning the Cambodians in the United States within the larger diaspora. Through this transnational lens, she has articulated the impact of Cambodians' "political remittances" during the occupation fueling the resistance.⁵³ In observing cultural practices in Long Beach, California, Um sees an assertion of nationhood enduring in diaspora.⁵⁴ Chan has published a volume of oral interviews of Cambodian community leaders in the United States entitled *Not Just Victims*.⁵⁵ She profiles twelve highly educated men whose narratives demonstrate how Cambodians address issues within their communities as well as remain involved with Cambodian development and politics. In the anthology *Cambodian Culture Since 1975*, various scholars demonstrate how Cambodians have reinvented their culture abroad, from music to literature to Buddhism. In doing so, Cambodians are defying the fear of extinction that followed them in flight as war and genocide destroyed their country.⁵⁶

Through my research I will demonstrate further the creative potential of Cambodian refugees in examining the ways that they participated in the resistance movement. With a focus on the homeland and active engagement in its politics, whether through conversations with other Cambodians or by writing directly to the officials of their host governments, Cambodian refugees were not just consumed with their difficulties in adjustment. Possibly the resistance would not have succeeded and the occupation never ended had it not been for the ability of the diasporas to raise international awareness about the situation in Cambodia. I will explore how out of their involuntary flight, Cambodian refugees were agents of change.

⁵³ Um, "Political Remittances," 263.

⁵⁴ Um, "Refractions of Home," 86.

⁵⁵ Sucheng Chan, *Not Just Victims* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ May Ebihara et al, *Cambodian Culture Since 1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 7.

Cambodia, 1950-1982: An Overview

Events in Cambodia during the postcolonial period have been labeled as tragic.⁵⁷ Rife with war, regime changes, genocide, foreign invasion and occupation, mass population dispersal, and an increasingly felt fear of extinction, it is remarkable to still see Cambodia on the map today. From the vantage point of the resistance movement, Cambodia throughout the 1980s was on the verge of disappearing off the face of the earth, swallowed by Viet Nam in its quest for an Indochinese Federation. This section will provide a brief overview of significant events during the occupation period leading up the 1991 Peace Accords. The domestic and global political context surrounding post-1950 Cambodia is significant to understanding the formation of the Cambodian diaspora and its response to homeland politics.

Following the 1954 Geneva Accords, Cambodia relinquished its status as a French protectorate and became an independent, sovereign entity. Sihanouk, from 1954 until 1970, governed as the country rapidly grew and changed to accommodate its newfound independence in the current global scene. Abdicating the throne and running successfully for office in 1954, Sihanouk garnered much attention from both Cambodian citizens and other countries. Through his Sangkum Reastr Niyum (Sangkum) party, Sihanouk enacted many socialist policies and joined Cambodia to the non-aligned movement. In nationalizing certain market sectors and affirming Cambodian culture, Sihanouk secured his position as head of state, defeating and suppressing other political factions, such as Cambodian democrats and communists. As he continued to build up a sense of national pride and put Cambodia to the fore, Sihanouk severed diplomatic ties and ceased the flow of aid from the United States in 1963.

Sihanouk subsequently also cut ties with the US-installed Saigon government in South Viet Nam. Although publicly part of the non-aligned movement, Sihanouk in 1965, allowed the

⁵⁷ David Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

North Vietnamese to run military supply lines through Cambodia. In response to growing fears about losing the war in Viet Nam, the United States sponsored a military coup in 1970. Ousting Sihanouk while out of the country, the national assembly put General Lon Nol into power. On 9 October, Lon Nol declared Cambodia to be the Khmer Republic.⁵⁸ The United States also began open, massive, sustained carpet-bombing along the Cambodia-Southern Viet Nam border.

On 23 March 1970, Sihanouk declared war from Beijing: “The liberty, democracy, prosperity, unity and national union which our people enjoyed not long ago have all been destroyed, reduced to nothing.”⁵⁹ He proposed a Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (GRUNK), a national liberation army, and a National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK). A precursor to the future CGDK, FUNK was headed by Sihanouk and composed of the Khmer Rouge, headed by Pol Pot. Although a union formed in order for Sihanouk to have an armed resistance to supplement his political power, history ultimately resulted in the reversal of the balance of power between Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge. In May 1972, Sihanouk commented on his relationship with the Khmer communists: “[I am] 100 percent with the Khmer Rouge. I am useful to them because without me they wouldn’t have the peasants, and you can’t make revolution in Cambodia without the peasants. Even if one day, they want to assassinate me, what does that matter? Aren’t they fighting against my enemies? What sort of patriot would I be if I made everything revolve around my own person and my personal antipathies?”⁶⁰ Such reasons would later be echoed during the occupation.

From 1970 to 1975, Lon Nol followed the directives of the United States in the drive to suppress the North Vietnamese communists. This period was characterized by a violent “Khmer –Mon” ethnic nationalism that capitalized on the long-standing historical hatred between Viet

⁵⁸ Chandler, 206.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 201.

⁶⁰ Chandler, 209.

Nam and Cambodia. The Lon Nol regime and the Second Indochina War eventually resulted in disaster as communism took over the former French colonial empire. 17 April 1975 marked the beginning of Democratic Kampuchea and three years of a radical agrarian revolution and wide-spread auto-genocide.

Nearing 1.5 million deaths under Pol Pot's orders, Democratic Kampuchea came to an end with the invasion of Vietnamese troops in December 1978. Within one week of invasion, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was declared, and suggested a smooth, legitimate transfer of power.⁶¹ Heng Samrin led the PRK with Cambodians who were former Khmer Rouge cadres as he was. Hailed as a "second revolution," the PRK was composed of "Hanoi veterans," those Cambodians who fled to Viet Nam in 1954 as well as those who defected from the Khmer Rouge. The PRK was seen by many as a satellite of Viet Nam. Although the Vietnamese were welcomed for ending the violence under Pol Pot, the continuing influx of troops, another policy of de-urbanization (reminiscent of the Khmer Rouge), and wide-spread famine pushed many Khmers to leave as refugees for the Thai-Cambodian border.

The refugee flow undermined the stability the PRK attempted to establish and show the world. In response, Vietnamese troops began to guard the border, laying mines and using armed force to push Khmers back into Cambodia.⁶² Given a lack of a national food supply and the presence of armed Vietnamese troops, the occupation began to be seen as an attempt to establish an Indochina Federation headed by the Vietnamese. A colonial maneuver many were eager to counter, in 1982 the CGDK was organized. Composed of Sihanouk's National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), the Khmer Rouge, and the non-communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), the CGDK enjoyed

⁶¹ Ibid., 312.

⁶² Stephen R. Heder, *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance* (Chulalongkorn University: Institute of Asian Studies, 1980), 27.

United Nations recognition as the official government of Cambodia.⁶³ Such recognition was a highly contentious decision, affecting the flow of international aid. Western governments and international agencies were at a bind for how to support the Cambodian refugees on the border without implicitly recognizing the PRK.⁶⁴ According to Kanthoul, Viet Nam violated the principle of sovereignty by unseating the Khmer Rouge from power and installing another government. Democratic Kampuchea had been recognized by the United Nations since Lon Nol's ouster, which carried over when the coalition was formed.⁶⁵ The CGDK waged an almost decade-long resistance movement. The following section will describe the resistance movement in detail, outlining its transnational character and the strategies utilized to raise international concern for Cambodia.

⁶³ William Shawcross, *Quality of Mercy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 354.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁶⁵ Personal electronic correspondence, 28 April 2009.

The resistance movement

The resistance movement functioned as a representative of the diaspora in its support of the CGDK. A project to restore the homeland, and possibly for eventual return, is a hallmark characteristic of a diaspora. The effort was truly transnational as over half a million Cambodian refugees sought safety in third-country resettlement in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Europe. Although my evidence depicts the organizing of Cambodians in the United States, the flow of resources across resettlement sites in the West and the Thai-Cambodian border refugee camps “necessarily situates the discourse and analysis of Cambodian diasporan intervention in a larger context than the United States.”⁶⁶ In 1979, 14,000 Cambodians in the United States had formed an informal transnational network.⁶⁷ During the course of the 1980s, 50,000- 60,000 refugees ended up taking part in the resistance against Viet Nam, and contributed their money, talents, knowledge, and skills to effect change. From arming and leading those on the border against Vietnamese troops to lobbying, fundraising to educating the public and acquiring signatures for petitions, the success of the resistance movement was dependent on the choices of Cambodian diasporas.

In the United States, many national and local organizations formed to raise awareness about the situation in Cambodia. The Committee to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge (CORKR) was especially active on the national scene as well as the Cambodian Network Council (CNC). Cambodian organizations made their opinions known and pushed their host governments and the United Nations to act. The Cambodian Relief Association of Lynwood, Washington highlights the importance of acting immediately: “The Cambodian people are dying of political repression, bombs, and bullets, of diseases and sicknesses, of starvation and hunger,

⁶⁶ Um, “Political remittances,” 253-5.

⁶⁷ Chan, 82.

and SOON, they will be completely wiped out.”⁶⁸ Before a subcommittee in the House of Representatives, Than Pok and Vora Huy Kanthoul urged congress to support the non-communist resistance.⁶⁹ In a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, Mour Ley, on behalf of the Federation of Khmer Serei, demands verification of Vietnamese withdrawal, the prevention of genocide, and fair elections.⁷⁰ Cambodians active in the resistance expressed their urgency, made demands, and ensured that political promises were fulfilled.

Cambodian refugees made their presence and patriotism palpable. In a letter to President George H.W. Bush, Cambodians in the US urged him to intervene in Phnom Penh as he did in Iraq.⁷¹ Similar calls to action were addressed to national and international political leadership, such as the United Nations. Even when the media highlighted the horrors of the Khmer Rouge genocide, and failed to mention the Vietnamese occupation the refugee community responded to make their situation clear and understood. In regards to a news special by Peter Jennings of ABC, a Hann So called out the reporter stating “[it is] an injustice to the Khmer people to make Vietnam a non-issue,” and went further to ask “why do members of the Congress or even the media keep silent on this very important question of the continued influence of Vietnam in Cambodia?”⁷² Through such public questioning of very visible figures, like the US president, were Cambodian activists able to draw attention to the plight of their compatriots in Cambodia. This provides an interesting juxtaposition to the ways in which the genocide of the Khmer Rouge

⁶⁸ Cambodian Relief Association, Poster, Lynwood, Washington, n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁶⁹ Than Pok and Vora Kanthoul, “Statement before subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs,” Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, 1 Mar 1989, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷⁰ Mour Ley, Letter to Javier Perez de Cuellar, 10 March 1990, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷¹ Anonymous, Letter to President Bush from all peace-loving Cambodians, 5 March 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷² Khong Hann So, “Justice and Peace for the Khmer People,” *Khmer Conscience* Spring 1990, p. 4, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

was kept a secret from the world for the better part of three years. While the American public was ignorant of the mass killings of Cambodians as they were happening, it was after the fact that films, news stories, and other means of mass communication were used to highlight this recent holocaust; at the same time making silent the current voices of opposition to the Vietnamese occupation.

In a struggle for visibility in the world community, the connections created between Cambodians in diaspora strengthened the movement within Cambodia and internationally as well. Echoing Sihanouk, So implores his readership that it is “imperative that we, Khmers living overseas, group and work together to help bring peace and democracy in Cambodia.”⁷³ Additionally, many of the Cambodian organizations in the United States raised awareness on both the conflict in Cambodia and the issues refugees were facing. The opening statement in the program to a CNC convention demonstrates the need for unity to uplift the Khmer people: “Without formal coordination and networking structure, our contribution to the development and advancement of our community and in our homeland remains fragmented and incomplete.”⁷⁴ The critique on community reveals a push to strengthen diasporic consciousness and action. Solid ties and cooperation across diasporas would allow Cambodian refugees agency in advocating for their issues in resettlement and for Cambodia. The resistance was a movement coordinated from multiple locations. As Cambodian diasporas began to increasingly advocate on behalf of Cambodia, how did they situate themselves to a state in which they no longer lived in? Why unite and strengthen political influence and power?

⁷³ Khong Hann So, General letter in *Khmer Conscience*, 28 Jan 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷⁴ Cambodian Network Council, 3rd Annual Convention: “Community, Empowerment, Integration and Identity,” Seattle, 5-6 July 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

In a letter to Hann So, Bunroeun Thach exhorts, “Today our brothers and sisters at the front are physically resisting the youn foreigners to save our Khmer sovereignty. We Khmer “diaspora” should not let their struggle go down. Knowing that they are giving their lives to oppose the youn-ization of Srok Khmer, we must support them...condemn the youn invaders and their supporters.” Thach identifies Cambodians overseas as a diaspora with the obligation to support their compatriots fighting on the border, preventing the “youn-ization,” or Vietnamization, of Cambodia. He calls the diaspora to urge the international public to agree with many Cambodians’ non-recognition of the PRK and its allies, such as the Soviet Union. Thach calls the diaspora to fulfill its role as an ally to the nation-state. Being outside the country and in places of privilege and wealth, the refugees did occupy a unique situation to assist their compatriots fighting on the border. In an open letter to CGDK leaders, refugees write, “[We have to] realize as survivors we carry special responsibilities to bear witness, seek justice, and assistance for Cambodians and Cambodia.”⁷⁵ Both the refugees and those fighting on the border recognized these “special responsibilities,” as seen in the calls for collective action.

By casting themselves in this image, the diasporic community takes on significance in the process of independence and nation-building to the extent that inaction is deemed unacceptable. In passionate vitriol, Thach warns, “If by knowing that our Khmer individual and national identity is being threatened by youn and their supporters, yet do nothing, or worse, cooperating with these Khmer killers then we, Khmer ‘diaspora,’ – especially the intellectuals – are not worthy of being called human beings.”⁷⁶ Hann So similarly echoes the refugee’s accountability to the nation-state, “Nobody will waste a tear for the destruction of Cambodia if we, Khmers

⁷⁵ Open Letter from Cambodians to Cambodian political leaders, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷⁶ Bunroeun Thach, Letter to Hann So, 14 June 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

living all over the world, do not stop internal quarrels and do not decide to unite.”⁷⁷ So develops further the idea of the refugees having a special duty to the nation by writing of their potential failure to act as the key factor in the loss of Cambodia to Viet Nam. The downfall of Cambodia would matter to no one if the refugee community did not do anything to save their home.

As Cambodians named themselves allies to their homeland, so too did the factions of the CGDK. The manifesto of the KPNLF includes the Cambodian diaspora as part of the national project to save Cambodia from the Vietnamese. Its “mission [is] to unite all patriots and nationalist Khmer fighters of all political persuasions within and outside the country to combine their efforts, means, and action with a view to expelling the invaders from our territory and recover its independence, sovereignty, and integrity.”⁷⁸ FUNCINPEC also put out an invitation to the diaspora to participate in the reconstruction of the homeland.⁷⁹ These statements reveal a convergence of how the diaspora conceived of itself and how the CGDK, one party claiming to be the authentic state, recognized that without the Cambodian diaspora, it would not have the resources necessary to push back Viet Nam. Conceptualizing Cambodia as an unbound nation mirrors how nationalists in the earlier half the twentieth century promoted a territorially elastic notion of Cambodia in order to include the Khmer Kraom residing in Viet Nam and ethnic Khmer in Thailand.⁸⁰ In contrast, the diaspora was “Othered” by the PRK, which held the seat of power in Phnom Penh.

⁷⁷ Hann So, “Why Do We Have to Unite?”, 23 August 1979, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷⁸ Khmer People’s National Liberation Front Manifesto, n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁷⁹ FUNCINPEC Party Brochure, September 1992, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁸⁰ Penny Edwards, *Cambodge* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 215.

Cohen considers diasporic Jews “as pathological half-persons—destined never to realize themselves or to attain completeness, tranquility, or happiness so long as they were in exile.”⁸¹ Similarly, Cambodian refugees faced the possibility of being seen as *anikachun*, an alien or foreigner.⁸² At the beginning of his administration, Heng Samrin made it clear that no Cambodians from the diaspora would be allowed to return to the country.⁸³ In Kathryn Poethig’s study of the dual citizenship debate in the 1990s, diasporic Cambodians were still not welcome. Hun Sen, at the signing of the peace agreements in 1991, led a party hesitant about allowing exiles to serve in government. The debate revolved around the terms *Khmer Angkor* and *anikachun*. *Khmer Angkor* refers to “true” Cambodians descended from the Angkor kingdom. *Anikachun* describes citizens of a country living abroad or resident aliens. Previously used as a reference to Vietnamese in Cambodia, to be *anikachun* meant that diasporan Cambodians had lost their “Khmer soul” and “thus returned as the inassimilable other.”⁸⁴ I do not intend for this paper to be a discussion on what constitute an authentic Cambodian. I will again introduce Cambodian notions of nation and belonging when discussing the legitimacy of the PRK later in this paper. However, for now, I wish to only focus on how the diaspora was positioned as the “Other” to the Hun Sen administration. According to Gabriel Sheffer, homeland governments prefer that its migrants retain original citizenship, and highly meddles it its diaspora’s affairs due to frequent worry about mutiny.⁸⁵ Poethig articulates that for the Hun Sen-led government in the 1990s, dual citizenship was not preferred because of the possibility that returning Cambodians

⁸¹ Cohen, 4.

⁸² Chan, 249.

⁸³ Shawcross, 257.

⁸⁴ Kathryn Poethig, “Sitting between two chairs: Cambodia’s dual citizenship debate,” in *Expressions of Cambodia*, eds. Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier and Tim Winter (London: Routledge, 2006), 75.

⁸⁵ Gabriel Sheffer, “The Emergence of New Ethno-National Diasporas,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 49.

would destabilize the state.⁸⁶ Although an argument set in the 1990s, I believe the diaspora was viewed in the 1980s also as a force that could potentially, and eventually did, dismantle the Vietnamese-installed PRK and halted what many perceived to be the realization of an Indochinese empire controlled by Hanoi.

The transnational resistance could essentially be seen as the representative of the Cambodian diaspora. It led a project of national restoration, making it possible to also return from exile. Cambodian refugees saw themselves to be privileged positions, despite their liminal status, to influence the events in Cambodia. Their self-perception as allies, as one in the struggle with their compatriots on the Thai-Cambodian border, was affirmed by the call to action by the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC as these organizations strategized to accomplish their goals. In contrast, from the perspective of the PRK, the resistance was a threat to its Cambodian state. To the extent that this fear was felt, diasporan Cambodians were not even allowed to be admitted back into the country at various points throughout the struggle. I will investigate further the perceived unity among the CGDK and the resistance, and the differing views among Cambodian refugees regarding the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge. Competing opinions on who embodied a legitimate, authentic Cambodian state when four political factions each claimed to represent a truer Cambodia than the others contributed to the delayed peace settlements. In this next section, I will discuss in detail the cultural artifacts cultivated in the past and transported across the world that motivated Cambodian diasporas to undertake any kind of action.

⁸⁶ Poethig, 78.

“We have to save the race from certain extinction”

“The Ho Chi Minh’s dreams of an Indochinese Federation under the surveillance of Hanoi will begin to realize if we Khmers living outside do not decide to do something right now. We have to save our race from certain extinction.”

Hann So, 1979⁸⁷

In examining the Hann So collection, the rhetoric of many public statements from Cambodian leaders and organizations raised a fear of extinction to motivate their fellow refugees to take action in supporting efforts to end the Vietnamese occupation. This was a common link across politically active Cambodians within the United States and across countries. It was also a sustained argument throughout the occupation period. In a 1979 press release, the Federation of Cambodian Associations stated: “The long-feared possibility of the extinction of the Cambodian people as a race and Cambodia as a nation is more real now than ever before.”⁸⁸ Twelve years later, a young refugee living in the United States asks Hann So, “Was the fall of our motherland inevitable? I understand that Vietnam has traditionally loathed and often schemed to possess our country. I also suspect that Vietnam and the Khmer Rouge conspired together.”⁸⁹ Both statements point to historical moments and conditions that shape how Cambodians overseas perceived the political turmoil of their homeland from their displaced positions.

Hann So, in the opening quotation, writes of extinction and Viet Nam’s colonial ambitions as if history predicted their coming. I will explain the origins of these fears and views of the past, which I have termed as cultural artifacts functioning as essential elements in the

⁸⁷ Hann so, “The Turning Point,” 28 August 1979, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁸⁸ Federation of Cambodian Associations, “The scourge of the famine in Cambodia,” 4 September 1979, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁸⁹ Sophal Ear, Letter to Hann So, 16 March 1991, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

nationalism felt by Cambodian diasporas. The long history of these fears suddenly came very close to fruition with the onset of the Khmer Rouge genocide, the flight of refugees, and the Vietnamese invasion. Understanding how these artifacts came to be integral to national history and culture is critical to dissecting the political upheaval and violence in the latter half of the twentieth century. The war and trauma of this period gave whole new meaning to extinction and disappearing. I will explore how this essential element of national history is transformed through disaster and displacement. I argue that the refugee condition adds a crucial tangible dimension in perceiving these fears, which lead to action against the occupation.

According to historian David Chandler, the French created “Cambodia” and “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.”⁹⁰ Some scholars would disagree with this, as further research needs to be conducted on the pre-colonial period. Edwards argues French and Cambodian literati elaborated upon a national culture.⁹¹ What this culture was at the time was largely a result of French colonial archaeology among the ruins of Angkor Wat, the last testament to the kingdom of Angkor, the peak of Cambodian civilization. Without written records, Angkor Wat’s significance was largely forgotten by the 1800s. Beginning with Henri Mouhot’s “discovery” of Angkor Wat ruins, the French had the power to re-imagine Cambodian civilization’s historical trajectory to fit their history and desires. Both Barnett and Chandler agree that the French manipulated Cambodian collective memory to justify their colonial tutelage. They also decreed that Cambodia’s subsequent attempts to live within their means represented a decline.

⁹⁰ Chandler, 6

⁹¹ Edwards, 7.

The new colonial subjects were told that they were “needful of protection and the worthy descendants of the kings of Angkor.”⁹² With a steady eye towards a past largely informed by ruins and French scholarship, Cambodians lived with the overhanging awareness of being a degenerate form of their ancestors, and thus constantly strived for advancement and uplift. Extinction was seen as a natural outcome that required active intervention to prevent. The symbol of Angkor Wat endured the end of French colonial rule and persisted from Sihanouk to the PRK.

The perception of the French as saviors was in part informed by the cessation of Vietnamese irredentism. Between Thailand and Viet Nam, Cambodia’s boundaries constantly shifted due to alliances and territorial advances. In 1813, Viet Nam turned Cambodia into a protectorate, and then a province in 1834.⁹³ The ruling Nguyen dynasty of this time was charged with cultural colonization. Emperor Minh Mang wrote, “[The Cambodians] should be taught to speak Vietnamese. [Our habits of] dress and table manners must also be followed. If there is any out-dated or barbarous custom that can be simplified or reprised, then do so.”⁹⁴ Such acts were magnified in Cambodian national memory. The arrival of the French halted the assimilation of Cambodia into Vietnamese territory. However, this resulted in a border delimitation that placed Kampuchea Kraom, southwest Cambodia, within Viet Nam, a loss that continues to be popularly lamented.⁹⁵ Hann So echoes this history in 1979, exhorting: “We remember the loss of Prei

⁹² David Chandler, “From ‘Cambodge’ to ‘Kampuchea.’” *Thesis Eleven* 50 (August 1997): 37.

⁹³ Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and Causes of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 24.

⁹⁴ Quoted from Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 158.

⁹⁵ JR Pouvatthy, “The Vietnamisation of Cambodia” (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Strategic/Int’l Studies, 1986), 6.

Nokor (Saigon) in 1696 and whole of Kampuchea Krom in 1840.”⁹⁶ From a personal essay titled “The Vietnamese Imperialist,” this piece was written within the first year of the occupation. As thousands of Cambodians fled during the occupation period, the history of attempted conquest by Viet Nam became a real, lived experience. Colonization was an expanding reality. Cambodia was on the verge of disappearing from the map of the earth in the eyes of displaced Khmers.

The Khmer Rouge genocide was another move towards fulfilling the fear of extinction. For three years, the people of Cambodia witnessed their families and friends die by the masses. One-fifth* of the population was killed during the Khmer Rouge regime. Depopulation through murder and flight resulted in a trauma compounded by a cultural awareness of decline and disappearance. Together, the genocide and occupation had a tremendous emotional and mental impact on the Cambodian people. Sophal Ear’s letter to Hann So expressed an opinion of collusion between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese. Similarly, the manifesto of the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front states: “The Khmers Rouges and now the Khmers Vietminh continue to lead the country and the innocent Khmer people into slavery, then extermination and soon extinction.”⁹⁷

I have described the origins of extinction in Cambodian national history and culture. The genocide and occupation serve as events in which I argue the Cambodian people experienced a process that could eventually lead to extinction. This fear was one motivating factor to explain the actions of overseas Khmers in organizing themselves to act for political change within their homeland. As enduring national myths, Angkor Wat and a fear of extinction became historical fact. In light of the violence post-1950, historical fact became a lived reality. Considering those displaced overseas and on the Thai-Cambodian border, I will now discuss how the refugee

⁹⁶ Hann So, “The Vietnamese Imperialist,” 31 October 1979, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

⁹⁷ KPNLF Manifesto, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

condition impacts the fear of extinction and the role of the nation in the lives of Khmers in diaspora.

The fear of extinction has followed the Cambodian people throughout history and across distances of flight. As an ongoing trauma, the process of transit from Cambodia to border camps or the country of third resettlement continues the extinction event begun in Cambodia. Escaping certain death by fleeing to an unknown destination, displacement adds a qualitatively different aspect to the realization of near racial extinction. The uncertainty of the journey coupled with the separation from the homeland was severely impairing mentally and physically. Um writes, “for the older generation, nation and identity are territorially rooted, and there can be no wholeness without the reconnection between place and being.”⁹⁸ She adds, “the ‘home-land’ for many Cambodians becomes a hyphenated notion, problematized by physical and psychical dislocation, by memories too painful to relive and even more painful to let go.”⁹⁹

The pain of displacement and the colonial presence of Viet Nam through the 1980s were constantly on the mind of the refugees actively organizing to end the occupation. These fears were argued before United States congressmen, the United Nations, and prevalent among public statements from Khmer leaders and organizations in their attempts to garner support for the coalition government and international intervention. I believe the transmission of a national fear across the Cambodian diaspora served to motivate the refugees as they mitigated displacement. Hann So urges his compatriots to take action as “Right now time is against us and we have to run very fast if we want to have a home for our children.”¹⁰⁰ He also gives a somber reminder of the

⁹⁸ Um, “Refractions of Home,” 94.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 90.

¹⁰⁰ So, “Why we have to unite!”

results of inaction: “Even if we decide not to go back home, our conscience will not be serene when learning about the extinction of the Khmer race.”¹⁰¹

The homeland and return are prevalent in these statements, as well as throughout many other personal and public documents in the collection. The significance lies in how the nation of Cambodia functions in the call for action. So imagines an eventual return and the need to secure a home for future generations. In tying the extinction of the Cambodian race to the physical occupation, he gives mental weight and burden to the responsibility of acting to save the race and nation. Although individually, not all refugees overseas will return to Cambodia, So brings to surface the anxiety of possible extinction. Knowing and working to prevent the demise of Cambodia and Cambodians is central to the diasporic identity as informed by a fear born in the nation-state.

The prevalent theories on diaspora highlight traumatic banishment and a struggle to survive and return. However, they seem to imply that such fear is separate from the experiences and culture of the homeland. In the case of the Cambodian refugees, their violent and sudden upheaval from Cambodia was a fulfillment of a historical prediction of eventual demise and extinction. Their diasporic experience is inherently linked to the nation. Scholars have positioned diasporas as disruptions to the traditional prominence of the nation-state, but in this case, the diasporic experience has significance to the refugees because of their upbringing in Cambodia. Their flight and actions to save Cambodia revolved around their relationship to the nation-state. Having provided a examination of the cultural artifacts constituting the nationalism the prompted Cambodian diasporas to take part in the resistance, I will now reveal the tensions in the movement and the uneasy sense of unity among Cambodians.

¹⁰¹ So, “The Turning Point.”

“United, we shall succeed in our liberation war”¹⁰²

Following the genocide and occupation, the paranoia of extinction could not be dismissed. There was only one solution to save the homeland: Cambodians everywhere must come together to combat foreign occupation. For some, the situation in the 1980s was a war of liberation. A list of “Cambodian concerns” states “the current war in Cambodia is truly a war between Vietnam as invader and the Cambodian National Resistance, which is for Cambodia’s independence, sovereignty, and integrity.”¹⁰³ However, one concern that was constant through the occupation period was the contradictory existence of the CGDK, a coalition involving the Khmer Rouge and non-communist organizations. The formation of the CGDK in 1982 signified a move of unity among three competing factions—the Khmer Rouge, FUNCINPEC, and KPNLF—who all espoused a nationalism harking to the glory of Angkor and denouncing the Vietnamese as historical enemies. Such a coalition allowed Khmers from various border camps and places of asylum to come together to fight for a free Cambodia. While in one sense Khmer nationalism kept a nation together under in the face of invasion and displacement, the three factions each claimed its own legitimacy as the authentic representative of Cambodia.

Sophal Ear asks Hann So, “Is the crime of occupation larger than genocide?”¹⁰⁴ This quandary is also reflected in the title of Kassie Neou’s op-ed piece “Cambodia: Between Despotism and Colonialism,” published in the Washington Post in March 1990. The “impossible question” as Ear’s has been described, made it difficult for Cambodian diasporas to act. While the crime of occupation plays into the theme of extinction, there was some support for the Vietnamese: “Vietnamese occupation is keeping the Khmer Rouge armies unharmed to the Khmer people [...] It let the Phnom Penh government have peaceful time to rebuild the country

¹⁰² Hann So, “United, we shall succeed; Divided, we shall fail!” *Khmer Conscience* 2, no. 3 (1988), 1.

¹⁰³ “Cambodian Concerns,” n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

¹⁰⁴ Sophal Ear, Letter to Hann So.

destroyed by Khmer Rouge Maoism.”¹⁰⁵ While the Vietnamese were cultural imperialists, the Khmer Rouge had threatened the physical survival of the Khmer people through its genocidal rampage to see a Cambodia ruled by Cambodians, adhering to authentic Cambodian way of life, and recreating the glory of Angkor for the modern day. For some refugees, preventing another genocide by the Khmer Rouge was more important than ousting the Vietnamese occupiers, which did put an end to the mass killings. While the increasing fear of cultural extinction by the Vietnamese was imminent, negotiating how to support the CGDK and by extension the Khmer Rouge was difficult. As some refugees put it, “Our hopes for peace are tinged with fear because we do not believe that the tiger [the Khmer Rouge] has changed its stripes.”¹⁰⁶

Many disagreements arose among Cambodians in the United States. Even appeals to the federal government were marked by a constant ambivalence to the Khmer Rouge and Viet Nam. Cambodians Than Pok and Vora Huy Kanthoul expressed that it has been a mistake to support the CGDK because the Khmer Rouge’s capacity has increased, whereas the non-communist FUNCINPEC and KPNLF had been neglected by international aid.¹⁰⁷ Upon expressing anger towards the United States for arming the non-communists, Dith Pran and Haing Ngor, prominent Cambodian leaders, were asked to “re-evaluate their thinking on Cambodia.” Written in an open letter to all Cambodians in the United States, the author(s) also stated that with weapons, the non-communists could continue to oppose communism and prevent another Khmer Rouge

¹⁰⁵ Chhay Mao, “The Khmer Issue is on the Khmer Hand,” Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

¹⁰⁶ Open Letter from Cambodians to Cambodian political leaders, n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

¹⁰⁷ Than Pok and Vora Kanthoul, “Statement before subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs,” Committee on Foreign Affairs, US House of Representatives, 1 Mar 1989, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

genocide.¹⁰⁸ In an op-ed, Kanthoul lays out the fact that in the Cambodian conflict there are “no morally clean positions, there are only morally ambiguous choices.” In the course of saving the homeland, it is “not morally right to make non-communists ally with Hun Sen or make nationalists fight with Khmer Rouge.”¹⁰⁹ Having surveyed the tension among the Cambodian diaspora’s stance on the occupation, the CGDK, the object of the diaspora’s support, was itself a carefully managed effort at best. I will examine the relationships of FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF to the Khmer Rouge. As the most contentious player in this period, aside from the Vietnamese, the dynamics between the Khmer Rouge and the non-communist factions are worth understanding.

Sihanouk’s cooperation with the Khmer Rouge can hardly be seen as surprising. He had already allied with them earlier during the Lon Nol period as the National United Front of Kampuchea (FUNK). At this time he was quoted as being “100 percent with the Khmer Rouge” because of their common enemy. The situation in 1970 was very similar for Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge in 1982. Both were concerned with ousting the Vietnamese. Sihanouk had a positive international reputation and the Khmer Rouge had the military power to fight back. On a quite different dynamic is the relationship between the KPNLF and the Khmer Rouge. Representing a republican non-communist “third force,” the purpose of the KPNLF became compromised at the moment of the Vietnamese invasion, as it was not conceived as a resistance to foreign communist forces. The KPNLF was formed to stop the Khmer Rouge communists.

¹⁰⁸ Open letter to Cambodians in the United States, Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

¹⁰⁹ Vora Huy Kanthoul, “No Moral Course for Cambodia,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1989.

The CGDK was more of an outcome due to pressure from outside actors rather than as something the factions wanted to do for themselves.¹¹⁰

According to Justin Corfield, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) pressured the factions to form a coalition.¹¹¹ Additionally, aid from the United States and Europe could be facilitated more easily if cooperating with a government-in-exile rather than a loosely organized coalition. Son Sann, head of the KPNLF, could not work with Pol Pot, so it was essential to have Khieu Samphan as the “acceptable” face of the Khmer Rouge. However, Son Sann opposed the alliance but was outnumbered within the KPNLF. On 22 June 1982, in Kuala Lumpur, an agreement establishing the CGDK was signed. The coalition government benefited from having Sihanouk as president with his international good standing and the continued use of the Khmer Rouge seat at the United Nations.

Internationally, while the United States, ASEAN, and the United States recognized the CGDK, other countries saw the PRK as the Cambodian state. The Soviet Union recognized the PRK at the beginning of its administration. Other countries in the Soviet bloc followed suit. Viet Nam further attempted to gain legitimacy for the PRK by appointing Heng Samrin as head of the state at the outset. The PRK quickly re-structured Cambodia to once again begin providing for its citizens. According to Michael Vickery, “The problem faced by the PRK was thus to create from scratch a non-productive administrative and service sector, reactivate and restore a small essential industrial sector, and persuade the majority of the food producing sector to support administration and industry with minimal return for the immediate future.”¹¹² An army separate from the Vietnamese troops stationed in Cambodia was created to exercise authority within the

¹¹⁰ Justin Corfield, “A history of the Cambodian non-communist resistance, 1975-1983,” (Working paper 72. Monash University: 1991), 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Vickery quoted in Margaret Slocomb, *The People’s Republic of Kampuchea* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 51.

country. Additionally, in July 1979, the PRK moved to expand the central committee of the party, which resulted in representation from among dignitaries, intellectuals, monks, Cham, youth, women, trade unions, and farmers.¹¹³ Through diversifying the central committee to be more representative of the population, the PRK hoped a policy of inclusion would help quell the refugee flows and maintain internal stability.

However, given a national rhetoric in which anti-Vietnamese discourse is a part, the façade of the PRK could not hold. According to Margaret Slocomb, “carefully nurtured grudges against Viet Nam and xenophobic conviction that alien elements seek constantly to destroy Khmer culture and language have shaped their national identity...how could Cambodians identify with a state, however benign, that derived its authority from Viet Nam?”¹¹⁴ In contrast, each of the CGDK factions each claimed to represent a pure, conceptual Cambodian nation. They were thus saving an imagined notion of the authentic Cambodia from Vietnamese-controlled “puppets” aiding the destruction of Cambodia.¹¹⁵

For the Cambodian diaspora, how to navigate the morally ambiguous choice-laden path to achieve national sovereignty becomes more difficult given multiple parties with competing interests influencing the course of events. Mong Heng of the CNC provides one way out of the “impossible question” of supporting the Khmer Rouge or the Vietnamese, “The only way to get rid of the Khmer Rouge is to get rid of the Vietnamese and give the Cambodian people the right to self-determination and the chance to choose our own form of democratic government. Only through the ballot box can the Khmer Rouge be defeated. We want neither the genocidal Khmer

¹¹³ Ibid., 162.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 269.

¹¹⁵ Penny Edwards, “Imaging the Other in Cambodian Nationalist Discourse Before and During the UNTAC Period,” in *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia*, eds. Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood (London: ME Sharpe, 1996), 58.

Rouge of Pol Pot nor Hanoi's installed former Khmer Rouge."¹¹⁶ Heng thus declares a solution through according the Cambodian people independence through a democratic electoral process, requiring first the ouster of a foreign government. Following that, Cambodian citizens will have the power to elect a ruler other than the Khmer Rouge. Opposing the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese become tied together, rather than two separate choices. Hann So fiercely articulates, "When I denounce the Khmer Rouge and their genocidal policy, does that mean I play the Vietnamese game? I accuse both the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese for being responsible for the death, starvation, and suffering of the Khmer people."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Mong Heng, Letter to Peter Jennings, n.d., Hann So Collection, University of California, Berkeley (archival files).

¹¹⁷ Hann So, "The Dilemma." *Khmer Conscience* 2, no. 3 (November 1987): 7.

“Why Khmer Conscience?”

To further discussion on the construction and character of the Cambodian diaspora, I will analyze *Khmer Conscience* as a specific piece of diasporic media that I argue was essential in shaping the resistance movement among Cambodians in the United States. In print from 1987 to 1993, *Khmer Conscience* takes its name from the non-profit organization founded by Hann So based in San Jose, California. As an open forum for non-partisan discussion on the conflict in Cambodia and domestic issues in host countries, I want to examine the diasporic narrative forged between the printed lines of this newsletter.

In the search for an identity to hold onto and a community to belong in, diasporic media can “effectively provide the raw material for, and facilitate the construction of common experiential frames among their audiences thus being in a position to play a crucial role in processes of social group integration and identification.”¹¹⁸ Diasporic media therefore facilitates ways of belonging, attaching itself to the transnational social field proposed by Levitt and Schiller. In the case of *Khmer Conscience*, the newsletter provides a forum for people to reflect on their identity and the actions resulting from that identity as it heavily documented events during the occupation period leading up to the peace agreements. I will examine newsletter introductions, language, and type of articles to discern the diasporic narrative constructed.

In the first three issues—September to November 1987—the newsletter opens with a section titled “Why Khmer Conscience?” Most likely written by Hann So, these prologues utilize very intimate, patriotic rhetoric to express its mission. In the premier issue, the reader is told that *Khmer Conscience* “would like to be the eyes, ears and conscience of all Khmers who want to speak out and share their ideas with their compatriots...would like to be the voice of all

¹¹⁸ Tsagarousianou, 109.

concerned Khmers.”¹¹⁹ This invites the reader to join a body of Cambodian expatriates interested in expressing their concerns and hopes for Cambodia. Although Cambodians live in various states and continents, *Khmer Conscience* promises to “be the think tank for all Khmers of different intellect and background.”¹²⁰ The newsletter thus envisions itself as a vehicle and representative of the Cambodian diaspora. By receiving and disseminating submissions, *Khmer Conscience* is one node through which identities pass through and are constructed. By being a printed publication that is itself distributed and read, the newsletter also becomes a tangible representation of the diaspora.

“We do not fear to speak the truth
We do not want to wait and see
We do not want to witness the extinction of the Khmer Race
We want to contribute to the search for peace and freedom
for our homeland”¹²¹

The above introduction to the second issue further develops the identity beginning to be articulated in issue one. Whereas the first issue links Cambodian refugees and views them as one body and attempts to claim to want to be that body for the Khmer people, the second issue now makes claims about the personalities of the refugees: Fearless. Immediate. Proactive. These characterize the diaspora *Khmer Conscience* represents. Through acting in urgency, *Khmer Conscience* is a vehicle for expressing political change

In the third issue, a higher level of response is given to the question, “Why Khmer Conscience?”:

“To prevent history from repeating itself...invites all Khmers living abroad to propose their plan of reconstruction...to be able to rebuild Cambodia...to unite all Khmer nationalists...hopes that all Khmers will be involved in the process of liberating Cambodia from the Vietnamese yoke”¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Khmer Conscience* (September 1987).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Khmer Conscience* (October 1987).

¹²² *Khmer Conscience* (November 1987).

Finally, the reader gets to the point of realization that he is called to rebuild the nation and free it from foreign occupation. Within three issues, the reader is presented with a very specific narrative of what the Cambodian diaspora is and how *Khmer Conscience* will cultivate that narrative. Through positioning itself as a representative, as a vessel, for the “eyes, ears and conscience” of all Cambodians, *Khmer Conscience* invites, yet also expects, readers to take part in the resistance. The newsletter cannot fulfill its purpose if none contribute. *Khmer Conscience* is both a forum for those who already want to do something about the occupation while beckoning more people to do so.

Linguistically, *Khmer Conscience* contains articles in French, English, and Khmer. The editorial board is composed of Cambodians in the United States and France. No translations are provided. Such a printing choice either renders the reader disabled from reading entire issues, pushes him to learn the languages he does not know, or affirms his trilingual upbringing and encounters with colonial powers. The linguistic representation acknowledges Cambodia’s colonial period and the growing influence of the United States, while holding the Khmer language on an equal level. Another expectation is presented through the lack of translation as the reader is potentially assumed to be a multilingual diasporic individual. Hann So, for instance, was educated in Cambodia, France, and the United States. *Khmer Conscience* would not have been a challenge for someone like him to read.

In addition to linguistic diversity, *Khmer Conscience* presents a variety of articles and informational pieces. Through editorials, personal views were distributed en masse to Cambodian communities. An overwhelming majority is authored by Hann So, and displays his breadth of knowledge regarding the occupation. As Levitt and Schiller mentioned, someone with a high level of engagement in the transnational social field affects others with a lower level of

participation through allowing them the opportunity to access information and act if they choose. Journalists and scholars writing after recent trips to Cambodia, such as Ben Kiernan, demonstrate the openness of the newsletter as a forum for any and all those interested in Cambodia and contributing to its well-being. Minutes from United Nations and United States congressional meetings provide analysis at the level of the international system and host government. As a non-partisan forum, writers such as Chhay Mao, who objects to supporting the CGDK, and Bunroeun Thach, who desires to see the Vietnamese leave Cambodia, are side by side, expressing their views. Both views are equal and allow readers to take what they wish. The variety of information equips readers through preparing them with a wide command of knowledge to make informed, action-oriented decisions.

The condition of diaspora is one in which the complexity of identity and community is a key dynamic. *Khmer Conscience* represents on one hand, the heterogeneity within the Cambodian diaspora community, and on the other, depicts a specific multi-faceted diasporic identity. Through its pages, many Cambodians' dreams and fears were articulated through their essays and plans for Cambodia, drafts of the United Nations peace plan, statements of increased Vietnamese troops, assessments of the CGDK, report-backs from visits to Cambodia, and all else *Khmer Conscience* offered its readership. The newsletter reveals through the shifting subjectivity of Cambodian writers and the constantly changing situation on the ground and within the international community how participation in the resistance was a morally ambiguous undertaking extremely far from being a clear-cut path. However, even with the messy set of decisions Cambodian diasporas had before them during the occupation, they remained compelled to search for a way to save Cambodia and, I believe, eventually return.

On exile and home

For close to ten years, Cambodian refugees supported the CGDK in its quest to remove the Vietnamese from Cambodia. Rather than just an auxiliary to the government-in-exile, the refugees' actions served their own purposes as something more than patriotic leanings fueled the sustained effort abroad. I have discussed how elements of national expression continued to operate as significant symbols among the diaspora, especially the possibility of imminent extinction. Additionally, the refugee's participation in the resistance also functioned to assert their continued membership to the Cambodian nation-state whose fate would have serious implications for the diaspora. In this section, I will discuss scholarly works describing the experience of exile. Prominent in diaspora theorizing is the idea of returning to the homeland. Home, especially in the case of the refugees, is not simply a pure concept, and return is not necessarily a natural conclusion to a clean linear progression in the diasporic experience. In considering the return attempts from the Cambodia diaspora following the 1991 peace agreements, resisting the Vietnamese occupation thus can also be seen as a means to mitigate the pains of displacement. I argue here that for the refugees engaging in the transnational arena to oppose the PRK, surviving the losses and trauma incurred during displacement was linked to the survival of the Cambodian nation-state.

Diasporas are marked by a collective trauma dispersing a people to two or more countries. The diasporic experience has also been viewed as a banishment, hence individuals identifying as exiles. Edward Said describe exile as an “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.”¹²³ For the Cambodian refugees, this disruption heightened the cultural fear of extinction as their traumatic experiences with

¹²³ Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Altogether Elsewhere*, ed. Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 137.

violence and sudden flight were sustained through their “discontinuous state of being.”¹²⁴ 17th-century cleric Jacques Bénigne Bossuet highlights the profound attachment to one’s local soil as “human beings find themselves powerfully connected together by whatever mother-terrain has nourished them, and in whose bosom...they will attain their final rest.”¹²⁵ What makes a place a “true home” then is finding community with those who share a life path attached to a particular geographic location. Similarly, in Cambodian culture there has also been a traditionally deep attachment to the soil. Understanding the Cambodian nation is linked to its territory. Cultural meanings of what constituted a “real” Cambodian, or *kmae-sot*, emphasized the territorialization of the concept of a Khmer nation as an area demarcated by Cambodge’s colonial borders, implying that “real” Khmers must be born and acculturated within these new borders.”¹²⁶ What were the implications of this rendering of *kmae-sot* in displacement?

In her own reflection on the Cambodian diaspora Um writes, “for the older generation, nation and identity are territorially rooted, and there can be no wholeness without the reconnection between place and being.”¹²⁷ She adds, “the ‘home-land’ for many Cambodians becomes a hyphenated notion, problematized by physical and psychical dislocation, by memories too painful to relive and even more painful to let go.”¹²⁸ For one refugee, despite having been in the United States for a number of years, he still feels homeless and remarks, “I dream in Khmer and talk in English.”¹²⁹ The tension of being in one place and thinking about another is a key

¹²⁴ Ibid., 140.

¹²⁵ Anderson, LDN

¹²⁶ Edwards, *Cambodge*, 225.

¹²⁷ Um, “Refractions of Home,” 94.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 90.

¹²⁹ Tenhula, 30.

element in the diasporic experience. Um provides way out arguing, “the nature and extent of *disconnection* accounts for the *reconnection* that is sought.”¹³⁰

The resistance movement and diasporic media such as *Khmer Conscience* provided ways for Cambodian refugees to remain connected to the homeland. In viewing their experiences in the lens of the transnational social field, living outside of Cambodia’s national boundaries did not have to mean total exclusion. From the perspective of the refugees’ however, the Cambodian people were quickly becoming extinct as Cambodia came under Vietnamese control. In calling his compatriots to action, Hann So claims, “Time is against us and we have to run very fast if we want to have a home for our children.”¹³¹ As many children were born in refugee camps and countries of third-resettlement, how could they then be truly Cambodian, *kmae-sot*? Through saving Cambodia from Viet Nam, Cambodian diasporas could ensure its continued existence for their children to call home. This linkage between Cambodians in exile and the occupation exemplifies Øvind Fuglerund’s claim that for the diaspora, “life on the outside is inseparable from events at home.”¹³² Fuglerund is further justified through the many national conferences in the United States in which domestic and homeland issues were addressed together. Many Western-educated Cambodians also ran mutual aid associations (MAAs) and were leaders for refugee communities in the United States. Upon the end of the PRK and the beginning of the transitional period under the United Nations, many professionals working in MAAs returned to Cambodia as consultants or staff in new government offices and nongovernmental organizations.¹³³

¹³⁰ Um, “Diasporic nationalism,” 9.

¹³¹ So, “Why Do We Have to Unite?”

¹³² Øvind Fuglerund, *Life on the Outside* (London: Sterling Press, 1999), 14.

¹³³ Chan, 245.

According to Judith Shuval, return is a “natural right” for diasporas, and operates as an “eschatological concept to make life easier.”¹³⁴ In contrast, Tsagarousianou argues diasporas cannot just be backward looking, and that “home” is not such an easy place to return to. Given the violence and destruction many Cambodians witnessed, Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese became a distorted image of home. According to one refugee, “I would like to be able to return to Cambodia someday, but I know that would not be possible. I think that the Khmer Rouge destroyed it completely.”¹³⁵ Having been pushed out of Cambodia and excluded as “Others” by the PRK, how did the diaspora stake its claim to Cambodia? The 1991 Peace Accords specified, “Cambodian refugees and displaced persons shall have the right to return to Cambodia.” Those in the United States also secured the right to vote in the elections held in 1994. Many in fact returned to run for office, with Cambodian Americans leading eight out of the twenty-one political parties vying for elected positions. As I mentioned, professionals returned to assist in reconstruction and development. The Cambodian Network Council also sponsored the creation of the Cambodian American National Development Organization (CANDO), which sent young volunteers to the homeland. Over 300,000 refugees in various Asian countries were also repatriated. Said comments, “exiles feel an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives.”¹³⁶ Through engaging in a transnational political movement, catalyzing the peace negotiations, asserting themselves as political actors in the homeland, and returning to contribute their skills and talents, the Cambodian diaspora expressed their nationalism and belonging to Cambodia.

¹³⁴ Judith Shuval, “Diaspora Migration,” in *Sociology of Diaspora*, 35.

¹³⁵ Tenhula, 115.

¹³⁶ Said, 141.

Conclusion

23 October 1991 marked the signing of the Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict (or Paris Agreements). The Third Indochina War raged throughout the Cambodian countryside for twelve years. The CGDK directed troops from the Thai-Cambodian border as Viet Nam amassed more and more of its soldiers on Cambodian territory. Cambodian refugees in the West banded together to support the government-in-exile and supplied money, resources, man power, and leadership to the border camps. Globally, the Cambodian diaspora raised international awareness sparking intervention that resulted in the signing of the peace agreements.

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to discern why were Cambodian diasporas interested in the occupation and how were they enabled to affect change? Cultural artifacts, such as fear of extinction and disappearance, constituted national memory and destiny. These national myths continued to hold significance in the minds of refugees in flight. Finding themselves in positions more privileged than those in border camps, Cambodian diasporas remained strongly identified to the homeland and called on each other to support the CGDK with their resources. At the same time, Cambodian diasporas were opposed to the state represented by the PRK, and thus were positioned as “Others” rather than allies.

However, the majority of refugees found common ground and united their actions to save Cambodia from foreign occupation. Although support became questionable due to the involvement of the Khmer Rouge in the coalition government, the fact remained that Viet Nam was colonizing the homeland from the refugees’ perspective. Their difficult choices in a morally ambiguous landscape were expressed in the publication *Khmer Conscience*. As an open forum for anyone interested in Cambodia, the newsletter charts the articulation and development of a

diasporic narrative. The information and rhetoric of *Khmer Conscience* converges with the ways in which the Cambodian diaspora saw itself as an ally and integral component to the resistance against Viet Nam.

A significant aspect of the diasporic narrative is the ideal moment of return. The years of organizing with their local communities, networking within their host countries and transnationally, and lobbying their host states and the United Nations I believe helped to mitigate the pains of displacement because of the strongly desired opportunity to return to Cambodia once the occupation and violence ended. Working to save Cambodia from falling under Viet Nam's colonial ambitions was linked to recuperating from the marginal status of refugee. The patriotic fervor of Cambodian diasporas symbolized their determination "to reconstitute, anchoring [themselves] to that insistent call of the home/land."¹³⁷ Through the highly publicized repatriation of refugees from transit camps and the marked return of Cambodian Americans to become involved in politics and national development, the Cambodian diaspora its survival and the nation-state's in order to find a way home.

¹³⁷ Um, "Refractions of Home," 87.

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