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SUVANNABHUMI means “The Land of Gold” in Pali, which location implies Southeast Asia.

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Articles



**“And not just the men, but the women
and the children, too”:
Gendered Images of Violence in Indonesian,
Vietnamese, and Cambodian Cold War Museums**



Michael G. Vann*

[Abstract]

This article is a sub-section of a comparative analysis of depictions of violence in Jakarta’s Museum of the Indonesian Communist Party’s Treachery, Ho Chi Minh City’s War Remnants Museum, and Phnom Penh’s Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. In comparing these public history sites, I analyze how memories of mass violence were central to state formation in both Suharto’s anti-Communist New Order (1966-1998), the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976-present), and Cambodia since the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea (1979-present). While this comparison points out specific distinctions about the role of the military, the nature of revolution, and conceptions of gender, it argues for a central similarity in the use of a mythology of victimization in building these post-conflict nation-states. This article focuses on my gendered analysis of the use of images of women and children in each museum. Depending on context and political purpose, these museums cast women as tragic victim, revolutionary heroine, or threat to the social order. My analysis of gender places stereotypical images of violence against women (the trope of women and children as the

* Professor, California State University, USA. mikevann@csus.edu

ultimate victims) in conversation with dark fantasies of women as perpetrators of savage violence and heroic images of women liberated by participation in violence.

Keywords: Genocide, Cold War, Violence, Museums, Gender

I . Introduction

Some of the Cold War’s most horrific violence devastated parts of Southeast Asia. The region’s “hot battles” included murderous political purges, prolonged guerilla warfare, and genocide. With Communist and anti-Communist forces acting as both perpetrators and victims, millions of civilians were caught up in these ideological struggles. In the immediate aftermath of the violence, the victors sought to solidify their narrative of their nation’s role in the Cold War. Several museums created in the 1970s and 1980s, and which played prominent roles as sites of state sponsored education remain open today. Exhibits in Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, and Jakarta inform the public about specific acts of violence and murder during the ideological struggles of 1945 to 1989.

Paul Ricoeur (2004) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) offer models to explore the ways in which the official voice of the state constructed Cold War narratives of violence and victimization in Southeast Asian museums. Jakarta’s Monument to the Revolutionary Heroes (Monumen Pahlawan Revolusi) complex, Ho Chi Minh City’s War Remnants Museum (Bảo tàng Chứng tích chiến tranh), and Phnom Penh’s Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum (សារមន្តីរឧក្រិដ្ឋកម្ពុជាឃុំបឹងព្រួចសាសន៍ទូលស្ត្រ) demonstrate the essential processes of remembering, forgetting, and silencing. While these public history institutions display similarities in their emphasis on the violence and tragedy of the Cold War and as they use similar narrative structures, themes, and formats, the museums are dramatically different in their political perspectives. While the Indonesian and Vietnamese museums are directly at odds with each other, the Cambodian site attempts to transcend Cold War political dichotomies.

This essay should serve as an intervention in the fields of

Southeast Asian studies and Cold War history. For the former, despite the foundational work of scholars such as Anthony Reid (1988), far too many research projects are trapped within the nation-state or even old colonial framework.

As a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Indonesia in 2012-2013 and Cambodia in 2018-2019, I witnessed the American diplomatic push to get Southeast Asians to “Think ASEAN” and to develop a regional identity. However, working with Indonesian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese graduate students and university faculty, I observed that very few “thought ASEAN” and many lacked important knowledge about their neighboring countries’ history. To a certain extent this can be attributed to the ways that post-colonial and Cold War realities structured national education systems.

For example, Indonesian graduate students in history frequently study in the Netherlands or Australia and many Vietnamese scholars have connections with French institutions but very few Cambodian or Vietnamese study Indonesia and Indonesians rarely specialize in Cambodia or Vietnam. Furthermore, the field of Indonesian studies require some expertise in the Dutch language and research on Vietnam and Cambodia’s almost century-long colonial era requires French language skills.

While from a practical standpoint this all makes sense, the result is a lack of regional knowledge, expertise, and identity amongst many scholars in the ASEAN community (Singapore is the exception to this rule, but that island nation is exceptional in so many ways). To develop a regional identity that transcends the nation state-paradigm, we must further scholarship that takes an ASEAN perspective.

This comparative study of museums and memorials as public history institutions in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia is a contribution to this endeavor. While there are studies of each of these sites, none have done so within a comparative framework that links Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. It is essential to the success of Southeast Asian studies that there is a scholarly body of literature that provides a comparative analysis of its members’ national narratives.

I have selected Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia as case-studies for this piece for several reasons. First, all three nations endured some of the worst violence in Cold War Southeast Asia. From 1945 to 1975, the First and Second Indochina Wars in Vietnam left some 3,000,000 dead. In less than four years in power, the Khmer Rouge government killed, starved to death, or fatally neglected roughly a million and a half people (and this is not considering the civil war of 1970-1975 or the Third Indochina War of 1975-1991).

When General Suharto seized power in 1965, he oversaw the murder of at least 500,000 but possibly over a million Indonesians (and an equal number were jailed in horrific conditions for years). While all of these figures are the subject of intense academic and political debates, it is clear that these three nations paid a heavy toll in the middle years of the Cold War (1945-1991) and they are thus worthy of our attention. Only Laos and East Timor suffered similar levels of bloodshed and neither of these states have sufficient resources to create comparable museums.

Second, these three cases offer different forms of Cold War violence: warfare, political purges, and genocide. Third, all three museums were opened in roughly the same years, the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, and continue to operate to this day. Fourth, the governments of these three nation-states have placed tremendous importance on cultivating a specific historical narrative of this violence for contemporary political purposes. That is to say, these museums are an important part of the construction of official memory in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Finally, these museums represent the various sides of the Cold War conflicts, including not just the Communist/anti-Communist conflict but also the Sino-Soviet split.

Recently, Masuda Hajimu (2019) noted that beginning with the 2005 publication of Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, there has been a "Third World turn" in Cold War studies. Scholars have shifted their focus from the super-powers of the Global North to the various regional actors in Latin America, Africa, the greater Middle East, and

Southeast Asia (Jager and Mitters 2007; Um 2012).

In 2010, South Korean scholar Heonik Kwon coined the phrase “the Other Cold War” to refer to this correction and in 2018 American historian Paul Thomas Chamberlin called for a “rethinking of the long peace” in his *The Cold War’s Killing Fields*. This comparative analysis of the Indonesian Monument to the Revolutionary Heroes, the Vietnamese War Remnants Museum, and the Cambodian Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum adds to this conversation by including three dramatically different Southeast Asian perspectives on the experience of the Cold War.

When comparing these public history sites, we see how memories of Cold War era mass violence were central to state formation in Suharto’s anti-Communist New Order (1966-1998) and in the post-Suharto Reformasi era (1998-present), the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1976-present), and Cambodia since the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea (1979-present). While the Indonesian and Vietnamese museums stick to clear Cold War ideological positions, Cambodia’s museum reveals a noticeable ambiguity and even confusion.

The museums display telling similarities in their structure and format, including historical dioramas and collections of photographs and artifacts directly tied to acts of political violence, warfare, and genocide. They also demonstrate shrewd political choices about what to include and what to silence in the official narrative. While this comparison points out specific distinctions about the role of the military, the nature of revolution, and conceptions of gender, it argues for a central similarity in the use of a mythology of victimization in building these post-conflict nation-states (Gillis 1994; Winters and Sivan 1999). This essay calls attention to these museums’ discursive uses of images of women and children.

All three sites welcome thousands of visitors in what academic scholarship has theorized as “Dark Tourism” or “Death Tourism” (Sharpley and Stone 2009; Sion 2014; Williams 2007). This is the practice of visiting sites associated with traumatic historical events, ideally for edification but sometimes for titillation (the Netflix series *Dark Tourist* exemplifies the prurient aspect of the phenomenon).

The audience for these three museums is a strong point of contrast.

The museums in Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City have become major international tourist attractions but the Jakarta museum is little known outside of the country. Recently there was an effort by military intelligence to ban foreigners from entry; I personally ran afoul of this secret order in November 2017 and helped to bring it to international attention (Hasan 2018; Vann 2019). Thanks to the Indonesian state's propaganda machine, almost all Indonesians know about the Lubang Buaya museum and may have been there on a student field trip. Yet Vietnamese and Khmer make up a small minority of the crowds in their national museums. When I interviewed Chhay Visoth, the Director of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in March 2019, he spoke of various initiatives to bring local school children to the museum.

My analysis is based upon a series of site visits between 2006 and 2019. During this period, I have seen these museums evolve with changing geo-political context. My methodology adopts a classic world history approach and blends it with techniques from ethnography and public history. Comparative history is one of the standard genres in world history, used to illustrate the uniqueness of historically specific detail while also providing insights into larger theoretical models to build a global narrative (Frederickson 1981, 1995; Pommeranz 2000).

Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" offers an ethnographic tool for historians to describe not just historical behavior or acts but the larger cultural and political context of those acts (Geertz 1973). By using these two techniques, comparative history and thick description, I offer a model for approaching the history of the memory of mass violence in Cold War Southeast Asia in these three museums.

Museums, as a form of public history, serve as crucial sites for the articulation of memory, and were prioritized in both post-war Vietnam and Suharto's Indonesia. If Hun Sen's Cambodia, a regime struggling to rebuild after decades of civil war, foreign occupation, and genocide, has had difficulty in finding resources to spare for

luxuries like museums, it still recognizes their importance. Indeed, for all three regimes, the management of recent history has been essential to state legitimacy. It is in these museums that the governments educate citizens about what the regime stood for and, importantly, who the regime had defeated in the establishment of the state, characterized as a revolutionary struggle. Thick description allows us to tease out the Cold War context and form a history of this political culture. Comparative history allows us to put these two museums into conversation with each other and to draw some larger conclusions about the political culture of Cold War Southeast Asia.

An analysis of gender places stereotypical images of violence against women in conversation with dark fantasies of women as perpetrators of savage violence and heroic images of women liberated by participation in violence. In all three museums, the trope of women and children as the ultimate victims contends with images of female Communist fighters. In Jakarta these women are vilified and slandered; in Ho Chi Minh City they are hailed as heroines; and in Phnom Penh they serve as martyrs to an incomprehensible evil. The museums’ competing visions of women are structured by Cold War era ideological positions that survive three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

II . Jakarta: Dangerous Women and a Dead Little Girl

On the night of September 30/October 1, 1965, in a bungled coup plot, the attempted kidnapping of seven right-wing generals by disgruntled mid-level officers resulted in the deaths of six generals, a lieutenant, and the one surviving general’s young daughter (Robinson 2018; Roosa 2006). Their bodies were thrown into an abandoned well in Lubang Buaya (“The Crocodile Hole”) in an obscure corner of the Halim Airforce Base in south Jakarta.

A faction of rabidly anti-communist officers, led by General Suharto, immediately seized upon the murders as a pre-text to launch a campaign to destroy the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). Within six months, the Indonesian National Army (TNI),

working with allied religious organizations and criminal gangs, slaughtered upwards of a million PKI members and fellow travelers, the vast majority unarmed civilians. A larger number of party members, union organizers, feminists, intellectuals, and family members were detained for over a decade in brutal conditions in island prisons such as Pulau Buru. Even after release, they suffered legal and social discrimination as their identification cards were marked “EKS-TAPOL” (“former political prisoner”).

To justify the bloodshed and his insubordinate seizure power, Suharto promoted the myth that the People’s Republic of China was arming a massive PKI militia in preparation for a communist takeover. For the next generation, the New Order used this lie and the dark fantasy that an underground PKI might seek revenge to legitimize military rule and keeping the Suharto family’s kleptocracy in power. According to this Lubang Buaya narrative, only Suharto and the TNI could protect the nation from the ongoing threat (Djakababa 2009; McGregor 2007). In the context of the global Cold War, the destruction of the largest communist party outside of China and the Soviet Union and the establishment of a bitterly anti-communist regime in Indonesia was a tremendous triumph for the United States of America (which played a supporting role in the mass murder) (Easter 2005; Scott 1985).

Suharto’s regime quickly proved itself to be not only anti-communist but also anti-feminist. In the days after the failed coup, the army-controlled press spread false rumors that the generals were brutally tortured. In what Siskia Wieringa terms “sexual slander,” the propaganda machine promoted lurid tales of sexually licentious Gerwani members singing “Genjer Genjer” (a popular folk song frequently played at PKI rallies) and dancing the risqué “Dance of the Flowers” as they sliced the generals’ faces and genitals with razor blades.

In Bali, the newspapers reported that Gerwani women were posing as prostitutes in order to castrate men (Anderson 1987; Wieringa 2011). Rhetorical misogyny incited brutal patterns of violence against women in the coming months and years. Rape and sexual mutilation were common tactics in the subsequent mass

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■

murders. The thousands of women detained in the New Order’s prisons suffered through further violations from casual daily humiliations to sexual slavery (Budiarjo 1996; Pohlman 2015).

Outside of the make-shift detention centers and prison islands, institutionalized violence against women became a central feature of the New Order regime. Rachmi Diyah Larasati, herself from a Javanese family of performers deemed “politically unclean” during the New Order, has shown how female folk dancers were particularly vulnerable to state violence, incarceration, and surveillance (Larasati 2013).

While this gendercide and gendered violence occurred in the specific context of the New Order’s assault on Gerwani as a PKI allied organization, it should also be understood as part of the larger cultural reaction against Guided Democracy’s promises of liberation (Sullivan 2020). Even after Suharto’s fall from power, political rehabilitation of former Gerwani members has been difficult (McGregor and Hearman 2007).

In addition to Gerwani members, peasants associated with PKI land reform campaigns, politically engaged artists, and union activists on plantations and the railways faced death, imprisonment, or decades of state harassment (McVey 1990). Essentially any fellow traveler was at risk. Suharto even banned the singing of “Genjer Genjer.” Popular folk dances, some of which were ribald, were suppressed in favor of refined elite dances from the feudal courts of central Java (Larasati 2013; Tohari 2012).

During the 32 two years of the New Order an array of propaganda tools including annual ceremonies, required film viewings, and street naming repeated the story of the martyred generals and the alleged danger of the PKI plotting in the shadows. Suharto established the Pusat Sejarah TNI, the Army History Center.

Run by loyalists from the officer corps, the Pusat Sejarah TNI published official histories of the alleged coup and opened two major museums, Museum Pengkhianatan PKI (Komunis) (“the Museum of the Indonesian Communist Party’s Treachery”) in the Pancasila Sakti (Sacred National Ideology) monument complex at

Lubang Buaya and the Satriamandala Museum, dedicated to the general history of the armed forces.

Located on the site where the murdered generals' bodies were literally thrown down a well, the former presents the history of the PKI as a long-term threat to Indonesia. Dozens of miniature and life size dioramas depict conspiratorial PKI meetings and violent direct actions such as land seizures, attacks on mosques, and menacing demonstrations. A bilingual sign marked "clothing and traces of blood" directs visitors to the "Room for relics and other historical effects," which houses photographs of the victims, their personal effects (some marked "replica"), and the blood-stained clothing they were wearing when they were killed.

As the name suggests, the museum's ideological message is heavy handed. The graphic violence of the displays leaves little room for nuance. Importantly, the narrative stops with the funeral for the martyred officers on National Armed Forces Day, October 5, 1965. There is no discussion of the subsequent anti-communist slaughter and mass incarceration. Aside from Balinese activist I Gusti Ketut Agung's privately owned Taman 65, Indonesia has no memorials to the victims of one of twentieth century's greatest politicides and mass graves in Java and Bali remain unmarked (Vickers 2010). Rather, the emphasis falls entirely upon the murdered generals. Events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and of Suharto in 1998 did not lead to revisions of the museum. Suharto expanded the Museum of PKI Treachery in 1992 to include the dozens of miniature dioramas. In 2013, the museum added a new wing with life size depictions of the death of Ade Nasution.

The Lubang Buaya complex reveals the New Order's obsession with gender. The museum and the various memorials utilize three main tropes: the dangerous Communist woman, the good Javanese mother, and the innocent child martyr. Famous throughout Indonesia as a national symbol, the Sacred Pancasila monument is the most straight forward presentation of the New Order's gendering of politics. The imposing structure includes a white stone wall, some 17 meters high and decorated with a massive garuda symbolizing the Indonesian republic.

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■

In front of the wall is a two-meter-high platform with somewhat larger than life statues of the several murdered officers standing in a V formation. At the center General Ahmad Yani stands with legs apart, his left hand holds a martial baton and his right hand angrily points to the well in which their bodies were dumped. The statues' rigid postures and stern expressions are a call for revenge against the PKI. We can read their hyper-macho bearing as an attempt to reclaim their tarnished masculinity, they are demanding their masculinity back. In the New Order's mythology, their sexual torture at the hands of Gerwani women and their undignified burial in a well was emasculating. The statue is a call to action. Below the seven figures a long bas-relief wraps around the base of the platform.

Recalling the pedagogical carvings of Borobudur, the massive Buddhist stupa in central Java, the piece tells Suharto's version of Indonesia's post-colonial history. Starting on the left-hand side we see Sukarno, the leftist revolutionary leader and Indonesia's first president presiding over a nation falling into chaos. As he holds a book labeled “NASAKOM” for his ideology of “Nationalism, Religion, and Communism,” Indonesian men fight with each other as women and children cower in fear.

The social unrest reaches a crisis point on the night of the kidnapping. As armed PKI militants abuse, beat, and murder the officers, throwing their bodies into the well, Gerwani women dance and flirt with PKI men. These women's hair is down, loosely swinging over their low-cut tops which reveal their bosoms. At viewer's eye level, one woman's posterior provocatively projects from the piece. In the background, a woman with her top unbuttoned to the middle of her abdomen leans back on a tree in a state of clear sexual arousal as men are murdered in front of her.

With their sexuality on display, we see that Marxism has liberated these women but also turned them into dangerous monsters. The next image is an over-sized depiction of Suharto assuming control of the nation. Immediately behind his left arm, a group of Indonesian women dressed in traditional attire and with their hair tied up in a dignified Javanese style bun stand with their



<Fig. 1> “Bad women” from Gerwani dance seductively as the generals are tortured, Monumen Sakti Pancisila.



<Fig. 2> Gerwani women strikes a sensual pose in the midst of violence, Monumen Sakti Pancisila.



<Fig. 3> As Suharto restores order, “good women” show their submission to male authority, Monumen Sakti Pancasila.

eyes downcast in a submissive posture. One of them holds an infant in her arms. These three women personify the New Order’s anti-feminism, termed “state ibuisism” by Julia Suryakusuma and enacted in organizations such as Dharma Wanita, a state-controlled women’s group (Suryakusuma 2011). These good women of the Suharto era stand in sharp contrast to the bad women of the Sukarno years.

Throughout the museum, the most prevalent image of women is that of female PKI cadres, somewhat incorrectly referred to as Gerwani, as a threat to Indonesia’s peace and security. There are multiple dioramas that show women taking part in PKI protests but they play a relatively minor role. Yet in a display adjacent to the main museum, the savage Gerwani women steal the show.

The Veranda of Torture, a small house which is allegedly the original site of the events in question, contains a shocking life-size tableau. Mannequins of three officers are seated, their hands tied and visible sign of violence indicating that they have been beaten. They are surrounded by a group of rebel soldiers and women in

military fatigues. The women have their hair down, red kerchiefs tied around their necks to indicate their politics, and AK-47s slung over their shoulders. They seem to be cheering as the officers suffer.

The museum staff have installed a sound system that plays the frightening soundtrack from the film *G-30S/PKI*, a state commissioned propaganda docudrama from the early 1980s about the murder of the generals. Here we see the most dangerous consequence of the PKI's activity: the mobilization of rebel women.

Yet the museum offers two counter-images to the dangerous PKI woman: the good mother and the innocent child. In the sections of the museum devoted to the slain officers, there are a number of photos of them with their wives, conveying the appropriate heterosocial normative behavior and identity. But it was not just six generals and one lieutenant who were killed on that fateful night.

As he fled to safety in a neighbor's yard, General Nasution's five-year-old daughter Ade was shot. In 2013, the museum added a life-size recreation of Ibu Naustion holding her fatally wounded child as her husband climbs a wall behind them. In the room of relics and historical artifacts, there is a large display case with photographs of Ade and a number of her possessions. The display does more than demonstrate the alleged threat that the PKI posed to the families of Indonesia, it is designed to elicit an emotional response. The New Order utilized the gendered images of grieving mother and martyred daughter in its anti-Communist messaging.

For the Suharto regime, the Cold War was more than a contest between the super-powers of the Global North. It was a struggle to save the women and children of Indonesia from a horrific fate. The New Order's utilization of a discourse of the dangerous woman versus the good woman had serious real-world implications. The army's initial lies about Gerwani women slashing the general's genitals with razor blades as they sang, danced, and performed sexual acts on the rebel troops fueled popular anger against the PKI.

Obviously, such rage fueled the violence against the party, which resulted in the deaths of at least 500,000 people (possibly many more) and the mass incarceration of at least twice as many

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■

political prisoners. But the specific misogynist messages directedly contributed to the gender specific violence which many accused women faced.

In Central and East Java there were widespread reports of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including publicly desecrating women’s bodies in 1965 and 1966. Such acts were revenge for the Gerwani’s alleged sexual mutilation of the generals. Later, female political prisoners were subjected to sexual violence and exploitation while in prison or during required weekly and monthly parole visits to the local police or army station. The ideological underpinnings of the New Order’s anti-feminism and its institutionalized violence against women are on display at the Lubang Buaya museum complex.

III. Ho Chi Minh City: Liberated Women and Martyred Innocents

In contrast to decades of intransigent anti-Communism in Indonesia, the Vietnamese Communist Party has taken its museum through several revisions and name changes in accordance with the new geo-political realities of the post-Cold War world.

Founded as the Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Regime Crimes (Nhà trưng bày tội ác Mỹ-ngụy) in 1975, and only to become the Exhibition House for Crimes of War and Aggression (Nhà trưng bày tội ác chiến tranh xâm lược) in 1990, since July 4, 1995, the site has been known as the War Remnants Museum (Gillen 2014).

Quickly opened after three decades of revolutionary warfare, the museum was an essential component of the Marxist party’s propaganda efforts to solidify Hanoi’s control over the newly-unified nation (Bleakney 2006; Laderman 2009; Nguyen 2016; Schwenkel 2009). By accusing both the Americans and the Republic of Vietnam of war crimes, the name reflected the Communist Party’s suspicious attitude towards the south, anti-imperialist diplomacy, and international posture as the heroic martyr of the Global South (Denton 2005). Hue-Tam Ho Tai (2001) and Heonik Kwon (2006,

2008) have addressed the significance placed upon the politics of memory in post-war Vietnam.

With the dramatic ideological and policy changes that followed Lê Duẩn's death in 1986 (he had been General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Vietnam since 1960), the impact of the *Đổi Mới* economic reforms, and the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Party rebranded the museum. The second name deleted references to the U.S.A and the so-called puppet regime but still stressed the war's brutality and the suffering of the Vietnamese people.

By the mid-1990s, Hanoi and the Clinton administration moved to normalize relations, instigating a final name change. The vague third name, "War Remnants," downplays the violence of the war, fails to capture the anger of the previous two decades, and implies a move towards international and domestic reconciliation. The museum's name change was part of a larger reorientation, an attempt to move beyond two difficult decades of post-war.

Over the course of these ideological shifts, the Communist Party's museum officials have shown great thoughtfulness and sophistication



<Fig. 4> Children's art and a logo with a dove covering up falling bombs decorate the exterior of the War Remnants Museum.

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■



<Fig. 5> Words of peace and cooperation greet international visitors at the War Remnants Museum.

in their evolving interpretation and curation of artifacts on display and have demonstrated a clear desire to make the museum something much more important than a typical war museum. Rather than just a collection of weapons and maps of battles, the War Remnants Museum now openly promotes pacifism and even engages environmental issues. Children figure prominently in this messaging.

If the shifting history of the Ho Chi Minh City museum’s name contrasts with the Jakarta complex’s rigid consistency of title, it is perhaps a window into the deep ideological conflicts at the heart of the two institutions. This is hardly surprising given that one museum represents Southeast Asia’s fiercest anti-Communist state and the other is the symbol of the most successful revolutionary war in the region.

Nevertheless, the two institutions show some fascinating similarities in the composition of their collections. Both build their experience from a similar combination of artifacts: military hardware,

personal effects, collections of photographs, and recreations with life-size mannequins and miniature dioramas of historic acts of violence.

Importantly, both emphasize human physical suffering in gruesome detail. The photographs of the war dead in Vietnam and the Indonesian general's decaying corpses are nothing short of nauseating. Yet, against the Vietnamese museum's massive permanent collection of physical artifacts puts the Indonesian displays seem paltry.

At the Museums of Communist Treachery in Jakarta, Suharto's jeep and General Yani's antique American car sit outside, and inside there is a display case containing a handful of quaint looking pistols and machine guns. In Ho Chi Minh City, the grounds of the museum are littered with the machines of war: tanks, aircraft, and artillery pieces. Inside there is an extensive collection of combat firearms. As in Jakarta, there are life size and miniature recreations, such as an American assault on a provincial hamlet, a village well from a civilian massacre, and a South Vietnamese prison. The model South Vietnamese prison contains a French guillotine, torture devices, the infamous "tiger cages," and an emaciated mannequin shackled to a hard wood frame and showing signs of brutal mistreatment.

Photographs dominate the museum, many stressing the horrific violence endured by Vietnamese civilians (Linfield 2010; Sontag 2003). The three-floor structure is home to permanent and rotating displays with hundreds of photographs of the war that serve as evidence of the war's violence, documenting the brutality of the anti-Communist Saigon government, the destructive collateral damage wrought by American counter-insurgency tactics, the devastating power of American bombs, and the heart-breaking impact of Agent Orange on generations of Vietnamese children.

Highlighted amongst the scores of photographs of American soldiers pointing guns at villagers, desecrated and decayed bodies, and atrocities such as My Lai, there is a display devoted to Nick Ut's Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of Phan Thị Kim Phúc, often known as "the Napalm Girl" in the West. The iconic image of the

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■

naked, burned, and crying nine-year-old girl fleeing in terror from a massive napalm strike captures the horrors that this war inflicted upon civilians, including children. While this photograph is emphasized, it is surrounded by further gruesome images of the suffering children experienced during the war and its aftermath.

The museum devotes significant space to depicting the lingering consequences of Agent Orange, including a collection of photographs of birth defects, an extensive and well-documented presentation on the effects of the defoliant, and a room where children with dioxin-induced birth defects play as their art is displayed on the walls behind them.

Possibly the most shocking display is a glass case with two dead infants preserved in formaldehyde. Both have horrible birth defects, and one child has two heads. Agent Orange’s contemporary impact on children serves as a constant reminder that the war continues to victimize the innocent. Many visitors describe viewing the photographic collection as emotionally powerful, even overwhelming. Some Americans have reacted defensively to the museum, claiming that it vilifies the American troops (Schwenkel 2009: 168-71). That



<Fig. 6> Documentary images of violence against civilians dominate the War Remnants Museum.



<Fig. 7> A special displays tells the story of Phan Thị Kim Phúc, the “Napalm Girl.”

said, it is impossible to dismiss the widespread suffering caused by the war. The War Remnants Museum’ emotional impact comes from its use of women and children as martyred victims of a criminal war.

Yet the War Remnants Museum also presents women as fighters, taking up arms against the enemy as part of the liberating force of communist revolutionary struggle. A famous photograph shows a diminutive Vietnamese woman holding a gun on a tall, heavy-set American pilot that she is taking as a prisoner. Her tiny frame and determined face contrast with his awkwardly large stature and dejected expression. The museum argues that Vietnamese women gained agency through the war, unleashing their potential power and strength.

While the actual transformation of women’s lives under communist rule is the subject of much debate, the museum’s message is clear and coincides with other Communist Party propaganda campaigns. For our purposes, we should note that Suharto’s

nightmarish vision of communist women as killers serves as a dark mirror image of the idealized revolutionary heroine of the War Remnants Museum. What is a figure of depravity and cruelty in Jakarta is a symbol of pride and agency in Ho Chi Minh City.

Yet the War Remnants Museum’s logo, a massive white dove covering up red tipped bombs on the outside of the building, hints at the important moments of optimism to be found within. These include the ground-floor display on the international anti-war movement and The Dove, a children’s peace center on the top floor.

For well over a decade, the museum’s exterior fence and the grounds have been decorated with children’s art or art that features children. Most of the pieces depict anti-war statements and calls for world peace, but environmental issues are represented more and more. As in Jakarta, the clear emphasis on children as victims of both the war’s physical violence and the war’s lingering ecological impact is designed to elicit a profound emotional response. In stark contrast to its first twenty years (and in contrast to the Indonesian museum’s stubborn calls for revenge), the Vietnamese museum currently promotes reconciliation.

IV. Phnom Penh: Staring Innocents in the Face

In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek “Killing Fields” have grown from sparse memorials to increasingly sophisticated museums with interpretive displays (Bickford 2009; Hughes 2008; Williams 2004). Unlike Lubang Buaya, both Cambodian locations have an international reputation and high levels of tourist traffic due to their associated with the Khmer Rouge’s unspeakable acts of violence (Chandler 1999; Hinton 2005; Kiernan 1996).

“Khmer Rouge” is a political epithet for the Communist Party of Kampuchea, coined in the 1960s by Prince Sihanouk. This revolutionary Marxist party overthrew the US-backed strongman Lon Nol and occupied Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, after a seven-year, nationwide guerilla insurgency. Traumatized and radicalized by years of devastating American bombing, hardened by the deprivations

of tropical jungle warfare, and disciplined by a brutal and secretive political leadership known only as Angkar (“The Organization”), the zealous Khmer Rouge cadres immediately forced the evacuation of Phnom Penh, a city straining to accommodate a massive internal refugee crisis (Becker 1986; Kiernan 1985; Shawcross 2002).

Using the ruse that American B-52s would soon bomb the city, Khmer Rouge evacuated Phnom Penh in just a few days. Clad in black uniforms and red scarves, cadres marched hundreds of thousands of Cambodians into the countryside with only what they could carry. The evacuation, however, was a carefully calculated ruse to seize and execute Lon Nol government officials, military officers, and rank-and-file soldiers (Bizot 2003). Emptying the capital was also key to the Khmer Rouge’s anti-urban vision of an agrarian socialist utopia with the forced creation of collective farms. Celebrating the Khmer peasantry as “base people,” these rural revolutionaries with totalitarian aspirations condemned educated urbanites as corrupted “new people” or “April 17th people.” In addition to thousands upon thousands of summary executions on political grounds, during the next three and a half years, over a million Cambodians would die from mistreatment, malnutrition, disease, and general economic mismanagement (Tyner 2017).

Children who survived the disastrous reign of the Khmer Rouge recount stories of hunger and an omnipresent fear. They also demonstrate the importance the regime placed on children, who were taught that loyalty to Angkar was more important than family ties. Many were trained to as child soldiers (Pran and DePaul 1977; Ung 2000).

First they Came for My Father, a recent feature film by Angelina Jolie, tells this history of the Khmer Rouge years from the perspective of a child. In contrast to these well-known children’s survivors’ tales, there has been relatively little research on the specifics of women’s experiences under the Khmer Rouge.

However, since 2012, Theresa de Langis, an American scholar resident in Phnom Penh, has been working with local students to collect oral histories of women who survived the Khmer Rouge. She explains her project as “understanding of the ways in which women

were uniquely impacted by the atrocity, including as victims of widespread sexual violence and gender-based abuse. This is a story that has been silenced and neglected for close to 40 years” (de Langis 2019). The shame and trauma experienced by many survivors of sexual abuse accounts for the lack of sources that specifically gender life under the Khmer Rouge (de Langis 2016).

By 1976, the Khmer Rouge turned Phnom Penh’s Tuol Sleng high school into an infamous prison, known as S-21, run by Santebal, the party’s security police. Classrooms at the secretive prison site became torture rooms or were divided into cells. Under the direction of party veteran Comrade Duch, the small S-21 staff compiled thousands of detailed dossiers on each prisoner, including mugshots, autobiographical confessions, and interrogation notes.

S-21 initially imprisoned a few hundred Lon Nol loyalists and other alleged enemies from the civil war, but as Pol Pot’s increasingly paranoid inner circle began to turn on itself, the site held thousands of Khmer Rouge party cadres suspected of counter-revolutionary activities or disloyal sentiments (Chandler 1999). These purges condemned an estimated 14,000 men, women, and children, including both ethnic Khmer and several hundred foreigners to imprisonment, torture, and interrogation, before being sent to their death. Only seven inmates survived.

Initially, executions took place at Tuol Sleng or nearby, but as the number of victims grew the condemned were taken to neighboring villages where they were beaten to death and thrown into shallow graves. Almost 9,000 victims (some estimates are much higher), many from S-21, were sent to Choeung Ek, the most infamous of the so-called “killing fields.” After several years of tension between Phnom Penh and Hanoi, increasing evidence of anti-Vietnamese massacres, and quixotic Khmer Rouge cross-border raids, Vietnam invaded Cambodia on December 25, 1978, starting the first war between Communist states. Pol Pot’s regime was quickly chased out of the eastern provinces. While the massive Vietnamese army bore the brunt of the fighting, a small contingent of Khmer Rouge defectors, including current prime minister Hun Sen, served in the campaign. In the ensuing political vacuum, the

Vietnamese Communist Party supported and supervised the creation of a new Marxist client state ready to take over from Pol Pot.

Faced with military collapse, the Khmer Rouge leadership once more evacuated the roughly 40,000 inhabitants of Phnom Penh, leaving the city deserted for a second time as party loyalists fled west. This set the stage for a decade of warfare between Vietnamese allied Khmer and a variety of groups who opposed the foreign occupation. Ironically, in an effort to punish the Vietnamese and to keep them from pushing into Thailand, the United States of America gave covert aid to the anti-Vietnamese coalition led by the Khmer Rouge.

The foreign invasion force entered the capital on January 7, 1979. The following day, two Vietnamese photojournalists made the stunning discovery of the urban torture center at Tuol Sleng (Chandler 1999: 2-3). Further horrors awaited the troops who later uncovered the suburban execution grounds. Recent violence was evident at both sites, including fresh blood on the floors of the former school buildings and a stench that lingered for months. While legitimately dismayed by the carnage of this revolution gone wrong, the Vietnamese occupiers and their Cambodian allies were quick to politicize and publicize their enemies' crimes against humanity as a buffer against international condemnation of the Vietnamese invasion of their neighbor and the introduction of punitive American sanctions against war-torn Vietnam.

Led by pro-Vietnamese former Khmer Rouge, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) set up Tuol Sleng as a museum to document the Pol Pot regime's horrific violence in 1980. As such, Brigitte Sion has described Tuol Sleng as "a promotional tool for post - Khmer Rouge government" (Sion 2011) The Vietnamese Communist Party played a major role in the establishment first of Tuol Sleng as a "genocide museum" and then of Choeng Ek as a memorial site. Vietnamese officials sent Colonel Mai Lam, who had previously worked on Ho Chi Minh City's Exhibition House for U.S. and Puppet Regime Crimes, to oversee the project (Chandler 2001).

Mai Lam worked with East German advisors and gathered inspiration from Holocaust museums and memorials in France, the

U.S.S.R., and Soviet bloc countries, leading to several fundamental decisions that set the tone of the Cambodian sites for decades. The museum organizers sought to communicate the horror of the Khmer Rouge years without tarnishing the image of Marxism.

Gerhard Scheumann, a propaganda film maker from the German Democratic Republic, was saddened that this violence was “carried out under the hammer and sickle” and held that the Khmer Rouge had “dragged the Communist Party in the dirt” (Maguire 2005: 94) The result was a series of aesthetic choices that linked S-21 to memories of Nazi concentration camps. For example, there is no Marxist or socialist realist iconography so typical of revolutionary regimes. Nor are there political slogans printed on red banners (by way of comparison, Angelina Jolie’s 2017 film *First They Killed my Father* includes traditional Marxist iconography in its depiction of the camps, including hammers and sickles and portraits of Marx and other leaders).

Rather, the museum is starkly reminiscent of Auschwitz, the ultimate scene of fascist violence. It contains a series of bare rooms with shackles on the floor and a framed photograph of the how the room was found on January 8, 1979. Serge Thion held that the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum invoked the “sinister charisma” of the infamous European death camp (Thion 1986: 86). Thion, who had taught in the high school during more peaceful times stressed the Vietnamese and Eastern European influence in the site, thus questioning its authenticity:

But the place was not as it was when Deuch [sic.] had left it. Vietnamese experts had been brought in, soon after the discovery. Since 1975, these North Vietnamese experts had created throughout Vietnam several political museums. Some of them had been trained in Auschwitz, Poland. Auschwitz itself had been closed for several years, in the 50's, to allow rebuilding and redesigning. In Tuol Sleng also, many things have changed over time (Thion 1993).

Tuol Sleng’s minimalism sets a very different tone from Mai Lam’s Ho Chi Minh City museum or Jakarta’s anti-Communist museum. The museum’s few displays directly resonated with Western memories of the Nazi death camps: piles of victims’

clothing and a map of Cambodia made of human skulls and bones with the Mekong and Tonle Sap rivers painted blood red. The map of skulls has since been taken down but as of April 2019, a large photograph of it is on display in Building D.

At the Choeung Ek “Killing Fields” memorial, the famous stupa filled with bones has raised questions regarding its cultural appropriateness. King Sihanouk himself asked “[w]hat Buddhist man or woman accepts that, instead of incinerating their dead relatives [...] one displays their skulls and their skeletons to please ‘voyeurs’?” (cited in Harris 2007: 233). The use of human remains to evoke an emotional reaction is indicative of the museum’s political purposes. Even the decision to include the contested term “genocide” in the museum’s name is a political act designed to invoke fascist - not Marxist - mass violence.

It took about a year to set up the school-cum-torture center as a museum. As early as March 1979, the new Democratic Republic



<Fig. 8> A classroom turned into a torture cell which Vietnamese soldiers discovered in January 1979.

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of Kampuchea organized tours for foreigners. Reports indicate that the buildings continued to have the horrible stench of death (Legerwood 1997). While Mai Lam and his team remained in Phnom Penh until 1988, Ung Pech became the director when it opened to the local population in July 1980. Importantly, he was not only Cambodian, but one of the very few survivors of the prison (that said, evidence indicates that the Vietnamese controlled the museum during this decade). Tens of thousands of Cambodians flocked to the prison in the first few weeks, and hundreds of thousands by year’s end (Chandler 1999: 8). During the subsequent civil war, United Nations occupation, and reestablishment of an independent government, the site became an internationally recognized symbol of the unfathomable violence of revolutionary excess.

Much like the Ho Chi Minh City museum, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum has grown and changed over the past fifteen years, now incorporating further documentation and displays. In contrast to its Spartan beginnings, today’s museum has a series of posters presenting a very brief history of the Khmer Rouge era. Elsewhere there is a collection of paintings by Vann Nath, one of seven survivors, that depict the various torture and execution practices (Nath 1998).

Starting in the early twenty-first century, a handful of S-21 survivors such as Vann Nath, Chum Mey, and Bou Meng have been present on the museum grounds. Vann Nath passed away in 2011, but the other two have become fixtures at the site. They sit at tables, selling their books, answering questions, and politely posing for photographs with visitors. Elsewhere there are various artifacts such as shackles and chains and cells have been reconstructed and water-boarding equipment has been put on display.

However, the museum’s iconic symbol is the collection of photographs of the former inmates. The Khmer Rouge staff at S-21 used colonial era police techniques and old French equipment to take thousands of mug shots of prisoners, often moments before certain torture and death (Benzaquen 2010; Caswell 2014; Riley and Niven 1995).

These photographs were part of the party’s surprisingly

elaborate system of intelligence files found by the Vietnamese. Several rooms at Tuol Sleng are filled with these haunting images. While the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is free of the heavy-handed ideology seen in Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh City, visitors do not get a clear sense of the historical context for the violence, nor its relationship to the Cold War.

Despite several signs that refer to “The Pol Pot Clique” and a few other ambiguous references, it is difficult to label the narrative either Communist or anti-Communist. Many visitors would be surprised to learn that the museum was created by an international team of Communists. Emotionally powerful, the sites emphasize Cambodia’s victimization at the hands of an incomprehensible evil but keeps the ideological component vague. The failure to present sufficient historical context is a consequence of the difficulties of acknowledging that many members of the current government are former Khmer Rouge cadres.

The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum’s weak historical narrative does not give a full account of the complicated revolution and decades of civil that preceded and followed the disastrous Khmer Rouge regime. In fact, the 14,000 victims of S-21 are not an accurate representation of the Khmer Rouge’s violence. The overwhelming majority of the deaths between April 17, 1975, and January 7, 1979, occurred on the regime’s utopian communal farms scattered throughout the countryside, not in the nearly abandoned city.

While there were hundreds of thousands of summary executions and fatal tortures, the regime’s disastrous and unhinged attempt at radical rural egalitarianism was the biggest killer. Of the roughly 1,700,000 deaths (~20% of the population), the majority were due to disease, malnutrition, and the gross mismanagement of essential infrastructure. Furthermore, after the initial purge of Lon Nol loyalists, most of those sent to S-21 were Khmer Rouge cadres, many of whom were high ranking party members. It is undeniable that unspeakable suffering was inflicted on these individuals, yet up to their arrest most had participated in the brutality of the Khmer Rouge revolution. Indeed, the surviving interrogation reports illustrate widespread confusion amongst the detainees as to why

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they were arrested. As in Stalin’s purges, the party was turning on itself (Tyner 2018).

While David Chandler’s seminal research shows that their arrest, interrogation, and forced confessions were the product of a merciless machine obediently following the orders of a paranoid leadership, many of the faces staring out of the mugshots belonged to those who had engaged in the very revolutionary excesses the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was established to condemn. In many ways, the Tuol Sleng narrative of violence is ahistorical, silencing discussions of more complicated histories (Tyner 2017). Considering that in the 1990s Prime Minister Hun Sen’s Win-Win Policy used a series of amnesties to convince Khmer Rouge fighters to join his government and no small number of current state workers have a Khmer Rouge past, such calculated vagueness is understandable (perhaps even essential).



<Fig. 9> Mugshots of women and children stare at visitors in the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

As with Lubang Buaya and the War Remnants Museum, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum highlights the Khmer Rouge's female and child victims. Several of the empty rooms in Building B are filled with bulletin boards displaying hundreds of the famous mugshots. Visitors might notice that the gender division is almost equal between women and men and there are several boards with only photographs of children.

There is now an air-conditioned room where twice a day two short videos are screened where Norng Chan Phal tells his story. After his father's arrest, his brother, mother, and him, were taken to S-21 when he was 8 or 9 years old. Immediately separated from his mother who was soon executed, Norng Chan Phal and several other children were detained in a pig pen. Fortunately, this was in late 1978 and the regime soon collapsed. In the ensuing chaos, he and three other children hid at S-21 until they were discovered by Vietnamese troops. Now a billboard sized photograph of the rescued children is on display on the museum grounds.

When I spoke with him in March 2018, he told me he needed to write a book in order to make "real money." When I visited the site in 2019, he also had a table set up to sell *Norng Chan Phal - the Mystery of the Boy at S-21 - Story of Family, Love and Struggle to Rebuild Life After the Khmer Rouge Genocide*, his memoir as told to Kok-Thay Eng. While it remains unclear how many children actually passed through S-21, the museum highlights his experience.

One Khmer woman, Huot Bophana, receives special attention in the museum. Bophana's life and death is presented as a tragic love story with the Khmer Rouge regime killing her and her husband after her love letters were discovered. Bophana has been the subject of a book by the journalist Elizabeth Becker and a 1996 film by acclaimed director Rithy Panh (Becker 2005). In the museum, there are multiple reproductions of her S-21 mugshot and a several minute segment of the audio tour is devoted to her tale. With the visible female presence, one may get the impression that the horrors of Tuol Sleng were equally visited upon men, women, and children.

Yet David Chandler's research holds that less than 7% of the

■ “And not just the men, but the women and the children, too” ■

estimated 14,000 people sent to Tuol Sleng were women, with children making up a far smaller number. Why then does the museum over-represent women and children in its displays? One answer may lie in the museum’s attempt to discuss the way in which the Khmer Rouge visited violence upon the country as a whole, sparing no one, not even women and children. Yet there is something else going on. In keeping with tactics of the Museum of Communist Treachery in Jakarta and the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh’s Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum uses the suffering of these women and children for emotional impact.



<Fig. 10> Huot Bophana receives special attention in the museum’s narrative.

V. Conclusion

Despite their profound ideological differences, these three museums dedicated to Cold War era mass violence in Southeast Asia show remarkable similarities in their use of images of women and children. These public history institutions all resort to emotional appeals that demand that we empathize with female and young

victims. Side-stepping complicated political issues in favor of simpler narratives, the museums exploit gender and age for their various political agendas. Crafted as personifications of innocence and as the universal victims, women and children serve as the ultimate argument for their righteousness of their cause.

Be it photographs of an innocent five-year old Ade Nasution weeks before her murder, Phan Thị Kim Phúc screaming in pain from her napalm seared flesh, or a bewildered child's enigmatic stare or artifacts such as a blood stained nightgown, a tank of formaldehyde containing babies with dioxin induced birth defects, or Huot Bophana's secret love letters to her husband, these museums strike at our hearts and demand that we hate those that committed such crimes. Faced with such evidence, how could we not cry for justice for these innocent victims?

If all three engage in a discourse of victimization, the Vietnamese War Remnants Museum stands out for also celebrating female fighters liberated by revolutionary struggle. In keeping with the state's Marxist ideology, the site hails women warriors for their strong and significant contributions to the defense of the nation against American aggression and in the campaign against the so-called puppet regime in Saigon.

Images of small Vietnamese peasant girls training with weapons support a narrative of national unity against foreign invaders, as well as the promise of gender equality after the war is over. Conversely, but very closely related, the greatest fear of the Suharto regime seems to have been the potential for violence from women liberated by Marxism.

In addition to its ham-fisted anti-communism, the Museum of the Treachery of the Indonesian Communist Party displays serious anxiety regarding women's rights. The Jakarta museum argues that Gerwani members were bloodthirsty and lusty witches, capable of terrible crimes. Their politics, like their sexuality, are out of control and thus a danger to the nation. Meanwhile, the ideal woman is a modest and religious mother.

At the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum, women are simply

victims. In an effort to avoid overly complicated politics, the museum dances around the issue of female Khmer Rouge cadre. Displays that address the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia—the genocide trials of five high ranking Khmer Rouge leaders—fail to discuss the gender issues raised by the presence of Ieng Thirith, the Minister of Social Affairs. There is also no discussion of sexual violence under the Khmer Rouge regime.

All three museums are important components of state projects to cultivate a specific memory of Cold War era violence. These memories form the basis of state supported political narratives. Yet there are telling differences between the coherence of each museum’s narratives. The Indonesian Museum of the Treachery of the Indonesian Communist Party has the clearest political position. In contrast, the Cambodian Toul Sleng Genocide Museum is intentionally ambiguous.

While one might assume that a museum run by the Vietnamese Communist Party and its famous propaganda machine might be the most didactic and inflexible of the three, the Jakarta site is by far the most rigid and the least accurate museum. The directors of Ho Chi Minh City’s War Remnants Museum have shown an impressive level of professionalism and willingness to revise its displays with changes in the global politics.

Meanwhile, the army run Jakarta museum clings to dated Cold War propaganda which comes off as increasingly anachronistic with each passing year, especially since the Suharto regime came tumbling down in a popular revolt well over two decades ago. The persistence of New Order ideology in democratic Indonesia is due to the continued presence of Suharto loyalist in the officer corps, state bureaucracy, and other positions of power in Indonesia.

When these museums are considered together, we can see how the public memory of Cold War era violence plays a crucial role in state-building in these three ASEAN member-states. Despite their ideological differences all three governments recognize the importance of these histories of violence in contemporary Southeast Asian politics. In each country museums serve an essential role in this project.

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The Politics of the Pot: Contemporary Cambodian Women Artists Negotiating Their Roles In and Out of the Kitchen*



Boreth Ly**

[*Abstract*]

Two utilitarian and symbolic objects associated with womanhood in Cambodian culture are the stove and the pot. The pot is a symbol of both the womb and female sexuality; the stove is a symbol of gendered feminine labor. This article argues that the sexist representations of the Khmer female body by modern Cambodian male artists demonstrate an inherited legacy of Orientalist stereotypes. These images were formed : under French colonialism and often depict Khmer women as erotic/exotic native Others. Starting in the 1970s, however, if not earlier, Cambodian women began to question the gendering of social roles that confined them to domestic space and labor. This form of social questioning was especially present in pop songs. In recent years, contemporary Cambodian woman artists such as Neak Sophal and Tith Kanitha have made use of rice pots and stoves in their art as freighted symbols of femininity. Neak created an installation of rice pots from different

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** Associate Professor of Southeast Asian Art History and Visual Culture, University of California, Santa Cruz, USA. bjly@ucsc.edu

households in their village, while Tith rebelled against this gendered role by destroying cooking stoves as an act of defiance against patriarchy in her performance art.

Keywords: Khmer women, stove, pot, patriarchy, colonialism

I . Introduction

In traditional Cambodian culture, a woman's role is confined to and revolves around the kitchen. Two utilitarian and symbolic objects associated with womanhood are the stove and the pot. The pot is a symbol of both the womb and female sexuality, and the stove is a symbol of feminine, domestic labor. Contemporary women artists in Cambodia have made use of these two utensils in their art to comment on gender inequality. This article comprises three parts that explore and analyze the pot and stove as potent cultural symbols. First, I look at the erotic depictions of the water pot and the Khmer female body in the paintings of the late father of modern art in Cambodia, Nhek Dim (1934-1975). These paintings capture the highly eroticized Khmer female body as a genre that prevails in the imagination of Khmer male artists; the erotic body is frequently rendered by male artists today. Second, I analyze popular music from the 1960s and 70s in Cambodia to explore the sexualized female body and its symbolic representations. Last, I address how this conception of the female body as a vessel confines women to the domestic space. I argue that sexist representations of the Khmer female body by modern Cambodian male artists borrow from an inherited colonial trope that depicts Khmer women as the erotic/exotic native Other.

Cambodian women, by contrast, began to question the gendering of roles that confined them to domestic space and labor, especially in pop songs. In recent years, moreover, contemporary Cambodian woman artists such as Neak Sophal and Tith Kanitha have made use of rice pots and stoves in their art as freighted symbols of femininity. Neak created an installation out of rice pots from different households in her village, while Tith rebelled against this gendered role by destroying cooking stoves as an act of defiance

against patriarchy in her performance art. The work of these women provides a much-needed counterpoint to existing ideas about Cambodian femininity.

II. The Conditioning of Gender Roles in Cambodian Society

Unedited and live video footage, filmed on January 3, 2012, and posted on YouTube by Article19Asia on January 18, 2012, shows residents of Borei Keila, a slum area in Phnom Penh city, in the process of being evicted by Phanimex, a local real estate development company. Phanimex is funded by foreign investors and supported by the Cambodian government (Article19Asia 2012). The video captures Cambodian police officers dressed in full riot gear moving into Borei Keila. A bulldozer moves slowly to knock down humble houses. The camera zooms in to reveal a family of three: two women and a man sobbing as they witness their home being reduced to a pile of rubble. One particular moment in this video powerfully captures the gendered roles and division of labor in a Cambodian family and society.



<Fig. 1> Cambodian woman salvaging a cooking pot from her bulldozed home. Sources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2aEhD-bClc>. (Accessed May 19, 2019)



<Fig. 2> Cambodian woman salvaging a cooking pot from her bulldozed home. Sources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2aEhD-bClc>. (Accessed May 19, 2019)

We see these three devastated family members returning to the pile of rubble in search of what is left of their possessions. One of the women finds her cooking pot and a tiffin box; the other woman picks up a reclining chair or day bed. The man does not find anything of value to rescue. In terms of gender roles in Cambodian society, this scene demonstrates how women are associated with domestic space as home, and how the women’s space is destroyed by a neoliberal global capitalism. It is arguable here that Khmer women are so conditioned culturally to think and thus “instinctively” play domestic roles in society. In a moment of crisis, the two Khmer women chose to salvage respectively a cooking pot and a makeshift bed. There is a Khmer proverb that speaks to this: “Women revolve around the kitchen.” Indeed, Khmer mothers teach their daughters at a young age to excel in domestic chores, especially cooking; it is thus not surprising that the woman in the video is so emotionally attached to her cooking pot.

Likewise, two Cambodian-American women writers, Vaddey Ratner, a novelist, and Vicheara Houn, a memoirist, both carried their rice pots from the homeland to the United States. Ratner who wrote a poignant novel, *Under The Shadow of The Bayan Tree*,

shares in an interview that one of her most cherished objects is her bronze rice pot (Ratner 2012).



<Fig. 3> A rice pot, made of bronze that is similar to the one mentioned by Vaddey Ratner (The author's collection). Photo: The author

According to the novelist:

The bronze rice pot kept us alive through our escape from Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge fell. We carried it with us through the jungle, to Thailand and the Philippines, and to America. Until a couple of years ago it was much more blackened with soot and burn marks. Now it's been transformed by its good *karma*, so to speak, by its role in our survival, into this beautiful golden hue, as if granted nobler rebirth (Ratner 2019).

Likewise, Vicheara Houn, in her memoir, wrote poignantly how she longed to be reunited with the Le Creuset pot, which she called “my memory pot”, that her father had bought for her:

After 36 years of difficult journeys my pot was returned to my hand. My papa bought this pot from a French store in Phnom Penh in 1967. In 1975, when the Khmer Rouge took over power in Cambodia and tortured Khmer people including us to leave the city, Papa refused to bring it with us, as he believed we would return home in three ways. But, my stepmother refused to listen to him. The pot stayed but my family members were gone. The pot stayed with my cousin when I escaped the country (Houn 2012).

Consistently, it is the woman who guards and is attached to her rice pot. In Houn's case, her stepmother saved the pot and subsequently brought it to Houn in her new home in the United States.

III. Nhek Dim and His Representations of the Modern Khmer Female Body

Cambodian women's attachment to their pots goes beyond the pot's function as a cooking vessel; the pot is also a symbol of the female womb and sexuality in Khmer visual culture. In fact, visual representations and eroticization of the Khmer female body as a "sex pot" harkens back to paintings created by one of the founding fathers of modern art in Cambodia, Nhek Dim (February 12, 1934-December 16, 1978). A painting, titled *A Famous Star Song* (dated 1974) by Nhek depicts a Khmer family taking a break from tilling the rice field. We see a man wearing a hat rendered in the forefront of the painting while four women are engaged in the preparation of food. More relevant to my discussion of the pot as symbol of the Khmer female body and gender role is the depiction of two clay pots in the picture, a cooking pot covered with a lid sits on a burning stove, next to a mother who is shown breastfeeding her baby. In addition, the artist places a water pot next to the seated man. The location of these two pots in the painting clearly indicates gender roles and the division of labor within a Khmer household: women perform domestic chores while men till the land.



<Fig. 4> Nhek Dim, *A Famous Star Song* (1974)

Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001: 120).

According to Seng Dara, an expert on the history of Khmer popular music, Nhek was not only a visual artist but also a novelist and composer. He was born in Reap village, located in Prey Veng province. Both of his parents—his father, Nhek Pidaou, and his mother, Prom Pol—were farmers. The couple had seven children, four girls and three boys; Nhek Dim was the eldest. According to neighbors in Reap village, the first sign of Nhek’s artistic talent was when they saw the child creating drawings of a bull, dog and cat when he urinated on the ground. He also made drawings of houses and landscapes on blackboard and paper when he was in elementary school. Nhek’s father recognized his artistic talent and took his teenage son to Phnom Penh to enroll him at the Royal University of Fine Arts in 1949. Nhek stayed at Wat Saravaon Monastery while attending art school in Phnom Penh; a monk named Sok mentored him. Initially, Nhek studied traditional Khmer painting with Professor Kong Sar and then oil painting under an art teacher from Japan named Suzuki (Muan 1992: 191-200). He graduated from The Royal University of Fine Arts in 1954. He worked subsequently for the US Information Service (USIS) at the American Embassy in Phnom Penh. Nhek’s first major exhibition comprised forty artworks, including watercolor on paper and oil painting on canvas, and was held at *Le Centre Sportif* (The Sport’s Club) in Phnom Penh from November 23 to 31, 1961. The paintings included in the exhibition depict ancient Khmer temples, the Royal

Palace, rice paddies and the quotidian lives of villagers (Lors 2001: 14-24). The exhibition's audience was mostly local Khmers from Phnom Penh, and tourists; importantly, it was through this exhibition that many middle class Khmers gained an appreciation and understanding of Nhek's paintings and thus local modern art.

Another watershed moment for the young artist occurred in 1964, when he was awarded a scholarship to attend the University of California, Berkeley. After Berkeley, he went to study cartoon filmmaking with Walt Disney.¹ It is probable that studio and exhibition opportunity was linked to his working for USIS. While working with Disney, he created a cartoon film called *The Wise Rabbit* that he submitted to a competition organized by Walt Disney.



<Fig. 5> Nhek Dim with Walt Disney, 1964.

Source: https://www.picluc.com/media/875580089720240071_1542212940.

(Accessed October 22, 2019)

He won first place in the competition. Nhek returned to Cambodia in 1967 and then went to study art making in the

¹ I would like to thank Mr. Vandy Nhek for sharing his memories of his late father with me on Facebook messenger on May 15, 2019. Vandy Nhek was born in Phnom Penh in 1951 and is Nhek Dim's oldest son. He, along with his two male siblings and mother Mao Saman, immigrated as refugees to the United States in 1987. According to Nhek, the Khmer Rouge took his father away in 1977.

Philippines for six months. Upon returning to Cambodia, Nhek presented *The Wise Rabbit* to the former King Norodom Sihanouk (1922-2012). According to Nhek's oldest son, Nhek Vandy, this film was in His Majesty's collection and disappeared under the Khmer Rouge regime. The late King Sihanouk loved Nhek's art so much that he asked him to help create a series of illustrations, watercolors, and oil paintings for a book of songs that His Majesty had composed (Saphan 2013: 4-5). For example, this painting accompanies one of King Sihanouk's well-known songs, *Bopha Vientiane*, "The Flowers of Vientiane." Nhek chose to render the flowers of Laos in national dress standing in front of the That Luang, a monumental Buddhist stupa that symbolizes Laos (Lors 2001: 13).



<Fig. 6> Nhek Dim, illustration for the late King Norodom Sihanouk's song, *Bopha Vientiane* (1964)

Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001: 4)

Unlike modern and contemporary art in the West, where there is a tendency to compartmentalize the different media of arts and

areas of specialization, artists in the Cambodian context were often well versed in all the arts (visual arts, music, literature, dance, acting, film, and more). Moreover, Khmer visual artists belonged to a wider circle of writers and musicians. It is worth noting here that Khmer popular songs were composed for dances such as the *ramvong* (circle dance), *ram kbach* (slow dance), and *saravan* were reinvented in post-independence Cambodia. In the 1960s and 1970s, Latin dances such as the *mambo* and *cha cha cha*, as well as the American Madison dance, were imported to Cambodia. These dances were popular during festive occasions such as weddings, New Year's, and other celebrations. We also know of two dance clubs in Phnom Penh that were popular among the urbanites, The Tonle Sap, a floating club situated on the river near Phsar Chas (the old market), and La Lune, located near the Royal Palace.² Popular songs played on the radio were accessible to people of all social classes, especially in the countryside. In brief, these songs provided Cambodians with an imagined community (Anderson 1982: 3).

In 1950, the sixteen-year-old Nhek fell in love with a girl named Chhem Maly and he asked his parents permission to marry her, but they refused. His parents subsequently arranged for him to marry a sixteen-year girl named Mao Samaon (1936-July 20, 2016) in 1954. Together the couple had six children, three boys and three girls. Despite his marriage, memories of his first love still haunted him. He longed for Chhem Maly and he transformed his unrequited first love into a novel titled *A Single Rose*. In 1970, he turned his novel into a screenplay for a television show. He also collaborated with musicians, writing the lyrics of two songs for the screenplay. The first one, *A Single Rose*, derives from the title of his novel; the second song is titled, *Who Gives You Permission to Paint Me?* Kim Sam Ell wrote the melodies and arranged both songs. *A Single Rose* was a slow song, made popular by Sin Sisamouth (1957-1975), and the second, a song for *ramvong* (circle dance and a duet), was performed by Sin Sisamouth and Pen Ron (1963-1975). These songs were subsequently recorded by Heng Heng Record as part of an LP (long playing) album (Seng 2019).

² Interview with Sylvain Sreng Lim on June 21, 2019.

The following English translations of the Khmer lyrics of Nhek's two songs mentioned above demonstrates and sets the stage for my discussion of two points: First, it cautions us not to single out one medium of artistic expression above others because historically and culturally, Cambodian artists, especially from the post-independence period (1954-1970) were multi-talented and expressed themselves through multiple media. Moreover, they often collaborated with one another. Second, one sees the emergence of a local Khmer male gaze and assertion of masculinity; I argue below this can be explained in part by Khmer men's reaction to the infantilization, effeminization, and emasculation imposed upon them by colonial powers during the French Protectorate period (1860-1945). Let us examine the lyrics of the following song:

Kolap Muoy Tong (A Single Rose)

A rose so fresh and beautiful is flourishing in the forest.
 I saw you taking a bath.
 You have stirred my conscience and ever since, I secretly love you.
 I secretly love you and sincerely love you.
 You sat alone, bathing under the waterfall.
 I want to know your name; it must sound melodious.
 Oh, single rose, I want to love you.
 Please, dear rose, have pity on me
 Please, dear rose, have pity on me.³

It is a common trope in Cambodian arts and culture to compare women to flowers or to have flowers symbolize women. In this case, a male voyeur recalls seeing a single rose that grows in the forest, alluding to her unmarried status and thus her availability. Moreover, the male writer confesses that he peeped at her while she was bathing under a waterfall. Nhek painted an oil painting that rendered single rose bathing, close to how he describes her in the lyrics of his song. We see her rendered in a seductive pose wearing a translucent bathing suit that shows her left nipple while she attempts to hold onto her wet sarong as it is about to fall off. Moreover, the flowing water is gushing through her thighs and

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GzXt9F3_iI. (Accessed May 12, 2019). *Kolap Muoy Tong* (A Single Rose). The above translation from the Khmer lyrics is mine.

creates a mirror like reflection.



<Fig. 7> Nhek Dim, Untitled (1974)

Source: Lors Chinda, Nhek Dim (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001: 105)

Before the installation of modern baths and toilets, Cambodians and Southeast Asians in general bathed in lakes, rivers or water drawn from a well. These public places were physically revealing; both men and women saw one another thinly covered by a sarong or *krama*, a multi-purpose checkered scarf wore by Khmer men to

bathe. In a socially gendered and rigid society, bathing sites provided one of very few socially acceptable public opportunities when both men and women had the opportunity to look erotically at one another.



<Fig. 8> Nhek Dim, *Untitled* (1973)

Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publishers, 2001: 128).

Nhek arguably invented a genre of modern erotic painting that depicts Khmer women scantily clothed, bathing in a body of water, or holding a water pot made of clay. Traditionally, Khmer women in villages used clay pots to carry water home after they bathed for cooking and drinking. To this end, Nhek painted an image for a popular song album showing a Khmer woman wearing a sarong with exposed shoulders, clutching a water pot on her right hip with a pond

behind her, filled with lush vegetation. A water pot made of clay is called *kaom* in Khmer, a word with a double meaning: literally, it is a clay pot for carrying water, but it can also serve as symbol of the uterus/female genitalia. In fact, there is a Khmer saying: “she laughed so hard that she broke her pot,” meaning that she laughed so hard that she urinated in her skirt. The pot is also euphemism for a girl’s virginity. Moreover, there is a Khmer pop song from 1974 written by Voy Ho, “Baek Kaom Oun Heuy” (literally meaning, “My water pot is broken!”) and the late Ros Sereysothea (1948-1977), a well-known performer who perished during the Khmer Rouge genocide (1975-1979), made the song famous (Ly 2020: 22-23).⁴

Nhek was an artist active in multiple genres and media; he was both writer and a visual artist. As a visual artist, he was known among Khmers in the 1960s and 1970s for his portraits, especially among middle class families in Phnom Penh, who commissioned him to paint portraits (Pich 2013: 23). The following song captured not only his love for portraiture, but also a modern Khmer male artist’s representation of the ideal Khmer female beauty, which subsequently shaped images of women in Cambodian visual culture.

Neak Na Oy Kou (Who Gives You Permission to Paint Me?)
A duet sung by Pen Ron and Sin Samouth

Male singer: Hello, where are you heading to, please wait.
If you marry me you will be rewarded with a precious gift.
Here is a portrait of you, are you pleased with it?
I spent three days and nights without sleep painting your portrait.

Female singer: Who gives you me permission to paint me?

Male: Why are you so furious?
Why you do you have no pity on me?
I worked so hard to create a gift for you in exchange for your love.
Not only are you apathetic, you don’t even thank me.

Female: You are lucky that I didn’t bawl you out.⁵

⁴ *Bak Kaom Oun Hey*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnRN_34aMcU. (Accessed May 14, 2019).

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1l5UOGouyv0>. (Accessed May 12, 2019). The above translation from the Khmer lyrics is mine.

Again, we see here the male artist did not believe he required permission to paint the woman's portrait or to look at her. The gaze is gendered male; he observed her while she is bathing or walking. The male gaze then shaped the representation of the Khmer female body in modern art of Cambodia. Indeed, the history of modern art in post-independence Cambodia is arguably a male-centric enterprise, while the Khmer female body is subjected to voyeurism. Curiously, there were Khmer women poets and novelists such as Sithi Sou Seth (1881-1963) and Huy Sieng (1929-?). In addition, there are also living Cambodian women novelists, Oum Sophany, Pal Vannarirak, Pech Sangavan, Mao Samnang, and Pol Pisey (Khing 2007: 216-217, Lim 1970: 1353). Moreover, there were Khmer women pop song writers and composers from the 1960s and 1970s, namely Tang Sivleng, Mok Chanmaly, Tang Sinn, Neak Moneang Sisowath Neariroth, Sim Chanya and Kangna Eng Keryiak.⁶ It can be said that women arguably excelled in and dominated Khmer court dance. However, modern visual artists in Cambodia were predominantly male. The lack of woman artists might have to do with the tendency to celebrate the male genius and creativity in Khmer culture. A case in point is found in Nhek's biography that I mentioned earlier. First, the strength of the boy's lung (i.e. vitality) is measured by the distance he is able to spray his urine and his control of it. Second, in terms of gender and artistic creativity, the artist's virility and prowess points to a phallogocentric understanding of the male artist as a genius. Hence, Nhek's first pencil or paintbrush was literally his penis and the ground was his canvas. Last, this story suggests that he marked his territory ever since he was a child.

IV. Nhek Dim's Legacy: The Prevailing Objectification of the Khmer Female Body

There were other Khmer artists among Nhek's contemporaries such as Sam Yuan (1933-1970) who also studied under Suzuki. After he studied painting with Suzuki, Yuan went to study printmaking in

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAhHQYTwrDU>
Seng Dara, "History of Mok Chanmaly" (Accessed May 18, 2019).

France and then in East Germany in the 1960s. It was Nhek, however, who became the most successful. In part this had to do with Nhek's ability to show his works and those of his brother, Nhek Doeun, at his own art gallery in Phnom Penh. In addition, he also exhibited the art of his brother-in-law, Houy Kong (Muan 1992: 221-233).

Unsurprisingly, Nhek left behind a lasting artistic legacy. In fact, his songs are still sung today by newer generations of Khmer pop singers. His paintings are well-known among the older generation of Cambodians living at home and in the diaspora of Europe, North America, and Australia. Moreover, his works are known among the educated Cambodians of the current generation. Nhek's genre of erotic painting depicting the Khmer female body and landscape has been widely copied and imitated by contemporary Cambodian artists. One sees oil paintings and sometimes photocopies of oil paintings that depict almost half-naked Khmer women with ample breasts and round hips for sale in the market in Phnom Penh and at shops in Siem Reap.



<Fig. 9> Paintings in the style of Nhek Dim, Siem Reap 2015
Photo: The Author



<Fig. 10> A Painting in the style of Nhek Dim, Siem Reap, 2015
Photo: The author

Erotic paintings in the style of Nhek Dem are conspicuously displayed in shop fronts along the roads leading to the park of Angkor. I would argue here that these artists have objectified the Khmer female body further than Nhek by moving beyond the erotic to “soft porn.” Here I subscribe to Lynn Hunt’s definition of pornography, “the explicit depiction of sexual organs and sexual practices with the aim of arousing sexual feelings” (Hunt 1995: 10). We see in these paintings the same idealized Khmer female beauty—long black hair, dark eyes, and light skin wearing a diaphanous one-piece swimsuit (more like sexy lingerie)—enabling viewers access to view her large breasts. Each woman in the paintings poses

differently with a water pot in her hands. Moreover, the water pots are shown placed strategically close to her genitalia, and some women are shown seductively caressing the lips of their pots. One particular painting echoes Nhek's painting of *Single Rose* bathing underneath a waterfall. She seems self-absorbed or shy, and does not meet the viewer's gaze. The viewer's eyes are immediately drawn to her conspicuously large breasts beneath her translucent swimsuit; the crystal-clear water serves as a mirror that reflects and refracts her smooth thighs.

According to the staff working at these shops, there were at least five to ten artists working for one of these shops. Paintings depicting Khmer women holding a water pot prove popular among both male and female Khmer tourists. One store said they sell the most number of these paintings (approximately 20 to 30 paintings) during the Khmer New Year, an important annual event in mid-April. Each one of these paintings sells for \$45 US to \$55 US dollars for Khmer tourists and \$75 dollars for foreign tourists.⁷

Khmer tourists buy them to hang on the walls in their homes. In addition, some Khmer hotel owners decorate their "no-tell motels" with these "soft porn" paintings to create a romantic ambiance for their guests.⁸ Perhaps Fredric Jameson is right when he said, "the visual is essentially pornographic (Jameson 1992: 1)."

There are several possible explanations that account for this masculinist eroticization of the Khmer female body in the visual arts and pop songs. First, this male objection of the female body concurs with what Laura Mulvey critiques in 1974 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that the female body is the object of the male gaze in the viewing of cinema (Mulvey 1999: 833-844). Second, while I agree with Mulvey's feminist critique and the need to acknowledge the role of gender and power in the act of viewing and looking at the female body in Euro-American visual culture, the Cambodian historical and cultural context is different. There is a general agreement among historians of colonial Southeast Asia that

⁷ I would like to thank Mr. Seng Song for his help with interviewing the staff at the shop on February 9, 2015.

⁸ My interview with the staff at the shop on July 9, 2015.

native men in Southeast Asia in general were racially and symbolically castrated under the respective colonial regimes. Admittedly, this colonial emasculation of local men is evidently more visually blatant in Indonesia in the form of ritual weddings between male rulers (brides) and colonial powers (Gouda 1992: 236-254); I would like to suggest here that likewise, on an ideological level, the colonial rhetoric in Indochina seems to imply that native men (and women) were uncivilized orphans who needed the protection of and parenting from their colonizers. Rithy Panh's 2015 film, *La France est notre Patrie* (*France is Our Mother Land*), involved stitching together different film footage found in the colonial archives of Indochina. This footage was produced by French filmmakers in Indochina; one particular scene in Panh's film that reinforces my argument about the ideological inculcation of the parent and children relationship between France and the natives of Indochina is a scene capturing a Catholic school in session. In it, we see a close-up shot of a small blackboard with the phrase "*La France est notre Patrie*" written on it. This French colonial motto is also the title of Panh's film because it is about denigrating the values of one's birth parents and native land for the colonial



<Fig. 11> A film still from Rithy Panh's 2015 film, *La France est notre Patrie*
 Film Still: Courtesy of Rithy Panh

ideological parents: in this case, the French father.⁹

Colonial education and inculcation provided children with the French colonial ideology of not trespassing the rules of the master and remaining submissive and docile; these are feminine qualities that contributed to the emasculation of native men. Furthermore, in her insightful article, “Womanizing Indochina: Colonial Cambodia,” Penny Edwards accounts for how the rise of the emancipation of women in France contributed to a great anxiety among French male colonizers in Indochina. In turn, they wanted to see and to portray Cambodia as docile, submissive, and feminine. Native masculinity, however, had not always been that way there, especially outside the metropolitan area. As Edwards writes: “The gentle, serene, and feminine façade of colonial literature and iconography belied decades of banditry in the vast Cambodian hinterland beyond the narrow frontiers of European enclaves” (Edwards 1998: 129).

Similar to the rise of local masculinization in post-colonial and independence Southeast Asia, Nhek’s eroticization of the Khmer female body can be seen as a reaction to the colonial infantilization and emasculation of the local sovereignty and its men (Gouda 1998: 236-254; Iletto 2017: 245-265).

Last, this objectification of the Khmer female body is a visual trope inherited from French colonial artists and photographers. French artists and especially photographers frequently depicted native Khmer women as erotic and exotic Others. A case in point is this nineteenth-century postcard created by French journalist and photographer, Victor Fiévet (1810-1880), reinforcing this Orientalist trope. We see two bare-breasted Khmer women posed in front of a garden setting. The French caption appears on top reads: *Femmes Cambodgiennes au bain* (“Cambodian Women in a Bath”). Before the import of bras into Southeast Asia, and in keeping with the warm tropical climate, native women were bare breasted; when the temperature was not agreeable, they wrapped a piece of long cotton or silk cloth around their upper body. In traditional Cambodian

⁹ I would like to thank Rithy Panh for sharing his unreleased film with me. Likewise, one sees similar colonial film footages portraying the uncivilized natives in the Dutch East Indies in Vincent Monnikendam’s 1995 film, *Mother Dao, The Turtlelike*.

culture, moreover, breasts were seen as for feeding babies and were thus not sexualized. In brief, the image of the bare-breasted Khmer women as the primitive, exotic and erotic others is a French and European invention. These highly sexualized images of native women were circulated as postcards in Indochina (1887-1954) as well as the metropolises of Europe (Montague 2010: 32).



<Fig. 12> Victor Fiévet (1810-1880), *Femme Cambodgiennes au bain*
Source: Philip J. Coggan, "Victor Fiévet's Cambodia." <https://picoggan.wordpress.com/2016/02/11/victor-fievets-cambodia/>. (Accessed January 3, 2020)

Interestingly, contesting voices started to emerge in Khmer pop songs in mid 1970s. For example, a 1972 song "If You Desire Me, Do You Know How To Cook?" Touch Seang Kana wrote the lyrics, and Ouk Sam-At took care of the music and arrangement; it was performed by the late Pen Ron (1946-1975).¹⁰

Ber Jong Ban Aune (If You Desire Me, Do You Know How To Cook?)

If you desire me, do you know how to cook?

I am different from other girls because I always want to be served by my husband.

No matter what I ask you to do, you have to do it for me unconditionally.

If you want me, please learn how to accept all my demands before you can become my husband.

Many men have come and gone. They really irritated me because they failed to please me. I asked them to do this, but they did that. They were helpless. As a result, they lost their opportunity to marry me.

Oh, my dear! Please do not come to complain to me because I don't like to be cajoled.

If you want me, please learn how to accept all my demands before you can become my husband.¹¹

Although a male writer wrote the lyrics, the song advocates for a reversal of gender roles in the Khmer household. In this case, the singer wants a husband who can cook because she is modern girl who does not want to conform to traditional roles in the kitchen. Clearly, this is a reaction to a popular Khmer saying, "If you want to know whether a woman is good, examine the kitchen in her home." In other words, a clean, organized kitchen reveals a good wife. Possible explanations for this rupture in the reversal of gender roles in this particular song from 1972 might have to do with changes gender politics in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in France and in the United States. In addition, the Vietnam-American War affected both Laos and Cambodia. These global gender conflicts and Cold War politics shaped the popular music in the West during

¹⁰ I would like to thank San Phalla and Seng Dara for sharing this information with me.

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY8I_1cp5ls. (Accessed December 12, 2018). Pen Ron, *Bea Chang Ban Oun*. The above translation of the Khmer lyrics is mine.

those two political turbulent decades. Likewise, Cambodian popular music was cosmopolitan in 1950s to 1975, so the women's liberation movement in the West may well have influenced gender roles in Cambodia during this period.

As I mentioned earlier, Nhek Dim was killed under the Khmer Rouge regime in 1977; because he was an artist, he was considered an advocate of a capitalist regime that went against the Maoist communist ideology of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979). One is inclined to ask: did the communist regime under Pol Pot change the sexist representations of Khmer women, especially of the Khmer female body? Unfortunately, not much in terms of visual arts was produced under Democratic Kampuchea. Propaganda films featured both women and men dressed in the mandatory black uniforms engaged in physical labor such as building dams, farming, and participating in communal song and dance (Ly 2020: 111). In the post-Democratic Kampuchea period, these masculinist visual representations of Khmer female body as "sex pots" created by Nhek Dim prevailed, as evident in paintings produced by many Khmer male artists that I have discussed earlier.

Contemporary Khmer women artists in Cambodia and from the diaspora have created art challenging this phallogocentric representation of the Khmer female body. Here I wish to discuss two contemporary Khmer women artists, Neak Sophal and Tith Kanitha, whose works address these sexist representations and interrogate the gender roles that they are expected to play in Cambodian culture and society.

V. Neak Sophal

Neak Sophal is a conceptual photographer and installation artist; she was born in 1989 in Takeo Province, Cambodia. She has a degree in graphic design from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh (Neak 2019: 1). Her works have been exhibited in Europe, Asia, and North America. She is well known for her digital print color photographs of ordinary Cambodians with their faces covered with leaves and thus their identities hidden. In addition, she

has photographed her models with objects that are most meaningful and valuable to them. Neak is one of few contemporary Cambodian artists whose works responds to the sexist images and representations of Khmer women invented by male artists and prevalingly sexist images of Khmer women in Cambodia visual culture and society. In 2017, for example, she exhibited a series of digital color print photographs titled *Flowers* at Java Café Gallery in Phnom Penh. In these photographs we see Khmer women wearing strapless white tops with their faces and shoulders surrounded by flowers. These



<Fig. 13> Neak Sophal, *Flower 5* (2018). Photo: Courtesy of the artist.
Source: Ben Valentine, “Confronting Cambodian Sexism Through Portraiture”:
<https://hyperallergic.com/382158/confronting-cambodian-sexism-through-portraiture/>.
(Accessed May 15, 2019)

images respond to a Khmer proverb: “Men are like gold, women are like white cloth.” One of the photographs from the series, titled *Flower 5*, reveals that the red flowers surrounding the woman’s face are digitally photoshopped to bleed like menstrual blood, staining her white sheet. The stained white cloth echoes the fragility of a woman’s purity, comparing to the easily stained white sheet referenced in the Khmer proverb mentioned earlier (Valentine 2019).

Moreover, in Khmer pop songs, women are often compared to flowers as we saw in Nhek Dim’s painting *Bopha Vientiane (The Flower of Vientiane)*.

Neak addresses issues related to Khmer women, culture, and society because she has been working very closely with women through a different lens. Many of her sitters are her relatives from her own village, located in Takeo province. In her 2011 series of photographs and installation titled *No Rice For Pot*, Neak engages with the link between rice pots and Khmer women.

Neak’s exhibition and installation focused on the artist’s village called Bam located in Takeo province. The conceptual genealogy of *No Rice For Pot* originated in a series of photographs that she contributed to a group show for SurVivArt, an exhibition in Berlin in 2010. Neak photographed Khmer women posing with their respective rice pots.



<Fig. 14> Neak Sophal, *No Rice For Pot* (2010) digital color prints. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

However, the second iteration of *No Rice For Pot* was a specific installation at her own home village of Bam. The artist grew up there, and thus knew many of the women in the village well. A documentary video showing behind-the-scenes preparation captures Neak with women from different households. She interviewed a few of them while they were cooking their rice. For this art project, the artist bought fifty high-quality rice pots from Orussey Market in Phnom Penh and had them transported to her village. There, she asked all women in the village to bring their respective old rice pots to the center of the village so they could exchange their old pots for new ones.¹² They were given paint to decorate their respective old rice pots according to their own design. Subsequently, the painted pots were hung on a triangle rack to create a piece of installation sculpture. She pinned the color photographs that she took of each woman posing with her beloved rice pot on the wall behind the installation to reference her individual relationships with her pot,



<Fig. 15> Neak Sopha, *No Rice For Pot* (installation, Bam Village, Takeo province, Cambodia, 2011). Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

¹² My interview with the artist on July 31, 2019.

while the installation demonstrated a collective and communal gender role and survival as embodied by the rice pots. When asked why she wanted these women to paint their rice pots, Neak informed us:

I want to show the relationship between a woman and her pot. Since she was very young, like six years old, she started to cook with her pot everyday until she is old. Three times per day, they touched the pot to make food so she is very close to the pot.”¹³

While Neak’s art is about the rice pot, women’s identity and gender roles in Khmer culture, Tith Kanitha’s art takes on the kitchen, particularly the stove, as a symbol of traditional constraint in confining women to gendered domestic space.

VI. Tith Kanitha

Gender roles involve space as well as objects; Tith Kanitha’s work explores these gender dynamics. Tith Kanitha was born in 1987 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Cambodia in 2008 (Gleeson 2013: 189). She is a multimedia artist, actress, and filmmaker, represented by Sa Sa Bassac Gallery in Phnom Penh. In addition, her works have been exhibited in Asia, Europe, and North America. She was awarded a two-year artist residency (2018-2021) at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kusten in Amsterdam. In 2010 Tith created an installation and performance titled *Women Can Move Away From the Stove* for a group exhibition curated by Lydia Parasol: *Hey Sister, Where Are You Going?!* The exhibition was sponsored by the Heinrich Boell Foundation, and was located in a space at the Sovanna Shopping Mall in Phnom Penh (October 22 to November 3, 2010).¹⁴ Tith’s installation comprised seven traditional wood and charcoal stoves made of clay and metal sheets. A net

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8xF_fw4SJo. (Accessed February 8, 2019). Neak Sophal, “No Rice For Pot”

¹⁴ <http://www.sangsalapak.org.kh/2010/10/20/hey-sister-exhibition-by-female-khmer-artists.html>. (Accessed May 15, 2019). Hey Sister! An Exhibition by Khmer Female Artists.

made of meticulously woven metal wires covered the seven stoves. It was conceptually created in response to a well-known Khmer proverb: “Women revolve around the kitchen.” In other words, due to their gender roles, women are tied to the stove. Tith’s performance included smashing one of the seven stoves to pieces with a hammer. Speaking in Khmer, the artist provides us with the following explanation of her intention:

We have an old Khmer proverb: “Women cannot move away from the kitchen.” I am not criticizing our proverb, but what is important to me is that I believe strongly that we can move away from the kitchen. Speaking for myself, I have been observing [these gender roles] ever since I was a young girl and I noticed that if you have a clear goal of what you want to do, then you will have the courage to move away from the kitchen. Of course, it is important for all [Khmer] women to understand this proverb and how it reflects the gender values in our culture and society. However, I encourage you to look around and see what other alternative opportunities and professions are available. This is not to say that any [Khmer] women can just move away from the kitchen immediately; it requires one to educate oneself and this can be done incrementally, step by step (Jinja 2010).¹⁵



<Fig. 16> Tith Kanitha, *Women Can Move Away From The Stove* (installation and performance, 2010, Sovanna Mall, Phnom Penh, Cambodia). Photo: Courtesy of Anders Jiras and Tith Kanitha.

¹⁵ The above translation of the artist’s speech in Khmer is mine.

She added that the reason why she smashed only one of the seven stoves is because she can only speak for herself and does not presume to represent all Khmer women's perspectives on this issue. Moreover, Tith measured the effectiveness of her performance as: "A woman working at the mall saw me smash one of the stoves at the opening of the exhibition...She later came up to me to talk about it. That was a success for me" (Lindstrom 2010: 32).

VII. Meanings of Destruction

So far, I have discussed two types of pot as symbols of the Khmer female body: the water pot that symbolizes fertility and the wild and untamed female sexuality; and the rice pot that represents Khmer women as the mother who nurtures her children, family, and nation. Interestingly, by the 1970s, a Khmer pop song emerged titled "Chhang Chas Bay Chhanganh" (Old Pot Still Cooks Good Rice) sung by Ros Sereysothea that clearly merges these two symbolic pots and their meanings.

Chhang Chas Bay Chhanganh (Old Pot Still Cooks Good Rice)

What am I to do now?

I can't figure out what I've done wrong

I've tried to keep you pleased every night

Is there someone new, now you're forgetting me?

If you come back, I would welcome you

We'll start a new chapter of our lives

The old pot still cooks rice you once enjoyed.

Eaten day or night, the rice is always warm (Saphan 2017: 11).

The above lyrics describe a suspicious lover who compares herself to both a rice/sex pot. Euphemistically, she is discouraging her male lover from eating out, but reminding him that her rice is ready to be eaten anytime and it will always be warm.

Clearly, there is a conceptual and symbolic link between the pot, the kitchen (the stove), gender role, and space. Amazingly, while the two contemporary Khmer women artists were willing to

destroy the cooking stoves and critique the sexist representations of their bodies, the rice pot remains sacred to them. More important, let us ask: in practical or theoretical terms, what impact does this destruction of gender symbols of patriarchal oppression by contemporary Cambodian women artists have on liberating women from the rigid gender roles in Cambodian culture and society?

In 2010, Neak Sophal created a poignant series of color digital photographs for the same group exhibition curated by Lydia Parusol, *Hey Sister, Where Are You Going?!* (SangSalapak 2010).¹⁶ Neak contributed a series of three colored digital print photographs to the exhibition. These three photographs show three women from the



<Fig. 17> Neak Sophal, *Hey Sister Where Are you Going?!* (Digital color photographs, 2010). Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

¹⁶ Hey Sister! An Exhibition by Khmer Female Artists. <http://www.sangsalapak.org.kh/2010/10/20/hey-sister-exhibition-by-female-khmer-artists.html>. (Accessed May 15, 2019).

artist's home village, Bam. The first photograph captures a young Khmer woman wearing a floral-patterned sarong that is tied around her neck and covers her upper body (including her arms and hands). She is shown sitting in front of a burning clay stove with a rice pot next to her. The second image shows a woman walking in her village wearing the same sarong with her arms and hands locked inside this tube skirt. Finally, we see a woman posing in front of a wall wearing the same constraining sarong in the last photograph. In the artist's own words: "The idea was to tell the limit of women's freedom. In fact, it is difficult for her to reach what she wants because of the strong cultural norms of confining women to domestic space. The sarong covers her arm and the whole body, and if she wants to do what she wants she has to break the sarong."¹⁷

In her 2009 book, *Khmer Women on the Move: Exploring Life and Work in Urban Cambodia*, Annuska Derk points out that global investment and exploitation of cheap labor in Cambodia in the past decade have led Khmer women to move to the city to work in factories. Women are rice winners who send money back to their respective villages to support their families (Derk 2009:13). I asked Neak Sophal in an interview, "How does this urban labor migration change the role Khmer women play in the kitchen and other domestic spaces today?" The artist replied that the opportunity to work in factories is not one of liberation from gendered roles; now Khmer women have to be both rice winners and housewives. In brief, changes in gender roles in some ways have doubled the labor for many women in Cambodia.¹⁸

VIII. Conclusion

Both Neak Sophal and Tith Kanitha are well familiar with the Khmer proverb, "women cannot move away from the kitchen," and have created art that is not about iconoclasm, destroying symbols of patriarchy such as the skirt (*sarong* or *sampot*), or the stove, but is more in keeping with contemporary goals of political activism and

¹⁷ E-mail exchange with the artist, November 6, 2018.

¹⁸ Interview with the artist, July 31, 2019.

social protest; that is, they interrupt the spaces and ideology of patriarchy, especially under the current totalitarian political regime in Cambodia, increasingly a society of spectacle and competition in staging wealth and ostentatiousness. To this end, one sees extra-large size phallic objects, visual markers of military prowess and masculinity, continuing to emerge in recent years. For example in 2016, Hun Many, the son of Prime Minister Hun Sen encouraged the creation of the largest and longest *ansom chrouk* (sticky-rice cake with pork and mung bean filling) that weighed 8,900 pounds. It was paraded on the street of Siem Reap as part of the Khmer New Year celebration.



<Fig. 18> A sticky rice cake weights 4 tons was made for the Celebration of Khmer New Year in 2015

Source: <https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/cambodia-claims-guinness-world-record-for-sticky-rice-cake-81990/>. (Accessed October 22, 2019)

However, this phallic cake was by no means a recent invention, arguably harkening back to earlier visual representations of fertility in the animist religion of Southeast Asia in which stone megaliths are believed to be symbolically impregnating the earth. Subsequently, the Sanskrit terms, *linga*, a phallus and *yoni*, the female counterpart, were imported from India when Hindu religion

entered Southeast Asia (Sassoon and Taing 2017). According to Paul Mus, the *linga* and *yoni* supplanted the indigenous symbols of fertility (Mus 1933: 378). Moreover, the lyrics of the following Khmer pop song, *Nom Kom Snol Daung* (triangle-shape sticky rice cake with coconut filling), from the 1970's with lyrics written by Voy Ho further reinforce the erotic symbolism of rice cakes in Cambodian culture.

Nom Kom Snol Daung (Triangle-Shaped Cake with Coconut Filling)
Sung by Meas Samon and Pen Ron¹⁹

Cake Seller (female): *Nom kom snol daon* (triangle-shaped cake with coconut filling)!

Sweet and aromatic cakes, please buy some to taste!

Buyer (male): Really Miss? Miss, please come over here. May I taste it?

Cake Seller: Yes, please taste to your heart's content. If you like it, how many would you like to buy?

Buyer: Miss, I have a big *ansom chrouk* (stick-rice cake with pork and mung bean filling). Do you want to exchange yours with mine?

Cake Seller: I don't believe you. No, I am not interested in exchanging my cakes with you. Please go find someone else. Hey, bad boy, I am warning you, don't you try to trick me again.

Buyer: Miss, my *ansom chrouk* is big.

Cake Seller: How big is it?

Clearly, the above lyrics suggest that the cake-seller was duped by the potential male buyer who tasted her cake, but did not buy. A triangular-shaped cake wrapped in banana leaves, stuffed with sweet coconut filling can also be a symbol of the female genitalia in Khmer culture. Moreover, the white meat and pure juice inside

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCFnxfnbkZ0>. (Accessed October 17, 2019). Meas Somuon and Pen Ron: Note Ron and Rong. *Nom Kom Snol Doan*. The above translation of the Khmer lyrics is mine.

the coconut stands for virginity. Not surprisingly, coconuts are used as offerings in both Buddhist and Hindu rituals because the contents of this fruit are considered the purest because they are enveloped by the thick husks. In brief, she warns him not to repeat his dirty trick. At any rate, her curiosity is clearly piqued by his bragging.

Another example of this desire to be the biggest in the world is the creation of the longest hand-carved wooden boat, a project that was spearheaded by Samdech Kralahom Sar Kheng, the Minister of Interior and his extended powerful family clan. In 2018, Cambodia won the Guinness World Record for the world's longest wooden dragon boat, measuring 286 feet long and requiring 179 men to row it (Wallace 2019). Last but not least, Cambodia also won Guinness World Record for the longest hand-woven *krama* (a multipurpose, checkered scarf made of cotton) in 2018 that measured 1,149.8 meters long (Chakraya 2019). All these masculine monstrosities and spectacles are meant to compensate for an aging and impotent regime. Hidden behind this regime of spectacle is a nation in which a majority of the population is poor and struggles to survive on a daily basis. Thus it is not surprising that Khmer women hold on tenaciously to their rice pots because they and the pots are embodiments of spiritual and material sustenance of the nation. To this end, I would like to conclude by introducing an installation and performance art by Indian artist Subodh Gupta in the hope that it provides a contrast to the Cambodian case. Gupta is a well-known global contemporary artist from India whose installation arts are made of many different kinds of cooking utensils. According Fernando Frances who authored a catalog on Gupta's works:

Gupta rediscovered from his childhood the attraction that cooking held for him and his interest in kitchen equipment. The utensils and crockery used in the kitchen particularly fascinated him. Steel containers for storing food and for cooking were not only a sign of progress among India's emerging new middle class, but also a symbol of the display of that progress....over time the metal kitchen items have become not just the elements that constitute a complete and complex body of work, the pieces that complete the vision of a whole, but also the very primary material with which Subodh Gupta

defines symbolism, the material and the message (Frances 2014: 116).

In 2017, Gupta created a large installation titled *Cooking For The World* for Art Basel, an international annual art fair, held in Hong Kong that year. The installation comprises disused cooking pots strung together by fishing wire; they are hung from rafters and installed in the middle of large open room. The installation is shaped like a house; more precisely, to look like a kitchen. The artist and his staff cooked and serve free Indian meals to participants and visitors from all over the world who paid more than \$50 dollars for tickets. Gupta's performance was to challenge xenophobia and the increasing intolerance of the "Other" in the age of migration and displacement (Russette 2018).



<Fig. 19> Subodh Gupta, *Cooking the World* (installation, Art Basel Hong Kong 2017)
Source: <http://www.artnews.com/2017/06/16/whats-cooking-at-basel-an-indian-feast-by-subodh-gupta-with-political-ambitions/>. (Accessed May 19, 2019)

By contrast Neak Sopha's installation, *No Rice For Pot*, demonstrates that humble Khmer women do not have the economic means to serve a local Khmer meal to privileged participants of global contemporary art; they are still struggling to survive. Thus, for these Khmer women and the artist herself, life in Cambodia is still

about survival; women are concerned about keeping themselves and their families alive. Of course, this by no means undermines the value and importance of Gupta's installation and intention, but the extreme contrast and juxtaposition of these two events and art projects calls our attention to and deepens our understanding of the Cambodian context. We see why the Khmer woman in the YouTube video I discussed in the opening of my article was desperately trying to salvage and then hold onto to her rice pot. Indeed, Cambodians often refers to one's means and ways of making a living as "the need to guard one's rice pot." I am reminded of an older Khmer singer, Sacrava, who in her youth, had a powerful and melodic voice that could easily rise above the *pinpeat* (Khmer classical ensemble); at the sunset of her career, however, the audience could barely hear her voice (even with the aid of a microphone).²⁰ Rather than telling her to retire, the Khmers in the audience would say, "Forgive her, it is her rice pot." In other words, singing was her skill and means to make a living; it was how she kept her family and herself afloat, surviving.

I would like to conclude by returning to the question I raised earlier: What impact has this destruction of patriarchal symbols of gender oppression by contemporary Cambodian women artists had on the liberation of women from rigid gender roles in Cambodian culture and society? On a symbolic level, we see Khmer women artists inventing their own much-needed visual language to critique sexist representations of the female body. Furthermore, political dissonance amplifies their demands for changes in gender roles. Last, these women artists' performances in both the village and urban areas not only intrude upon male-controlled public spaces and commercial institutions, but also interrupt the daily operations of the nation state. In brief, the end goal of art and political activism is not about achieving an immediate effect, but to voice an individual or a group's political discontent. To echo Tith Kanitha's speech, "This is not to say that any [Khmer] women can just move away from the kitchen immediately; it requires one to educate oneself and this can be done incrementally, step by step."

²⁰ The names of my participants are changed to protect their identities.

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And The State Will Prevail: The Elder Caregiver Sector in Singapore and Thailand



Theresa W. Devasahayam and Rossarin Gray*

[*Abstract*]

Singapore and Thailand have been rapidly ageing. There has been a growing demand for eldercarers in the home-setting for which migrant domestic workers have filled the role. This paper examines the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Consensus governing women migrant workers entering the eldercare sector. It argues that because the ASEAN Consensus is not legally binding, it only serves to reinforce the sovereignty of states in the treatment of migrant workers instead of member states acting in unison to ensure labour protections for this group; as a result, Singapore and Thailand do not feel the need to step up protections for this group of workers according to national labor laws and hence low-skilled women migrant workers entering the eldercare sector continue to be vulnerable to labour abuses. Thus as with globalization, the ASEAN Economic Community manifests the paradox of borders: that while states are economically interconnected and interdependent, they are simultaneously disconnected and independent from each other.

Keywords: ageing, migrant domestic workers, ASEAN Consensus, Singapore, Thailand.

* Foreign Expert, Institute of Population and Social Research (IPSR), Mahidol University, Thailand. theresa.dev@mahidol.ac.th; Director, Institute of Population and Social Research (IPSR), Mahidol University, Thailand. rossarin.gra@mahidol.ac.th

I . Introduction

Globalization has swept the world, rendering varying economic, political, social, and environmental effects at the individual, community, national, regional and global levels. In the economic domain, globalization has accelerated flows of goods and services across national borders, international capital flows, immigration, the reduction in tariffs and trade barriers, the spread of technology, and knowledge beyond national political entities. In a way, we can now talk about a “global triumph of capitalism” (Youngs 2008: 5). Assertions have been made that the formation of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a “highly integrated regional economy” is an outcome of the globalization process at the regional level (Suci, Asmara and Mulatsih 2015: 80).

Having undergone immense changes in recent decades, economic growth levels in the ASEAN region have been at an all high of 5.9 percent, over and above the global economic growth rate of 3.8 percent (Das 2018). With a total population of 642 million people, its contribution to the global economy has reached 3.8 percent. In 2018, the gross domestic product (GDP) for the region’s five major economies, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand was 4.8 percent (Iwamoto 2019). The massive expansion of trade, investment, and human mobility have been factors contributing to the region’s economic growth, coupled with the inflow of foreign direct investment. Along with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) formed in 2015, member states are expected to benefit from the “free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labour, and freer flow of capital” in the region (Huelser and Heal 2014: 1).

What is most revealing about the region in the last 50 years is that member states of the ASEAN have become increasingly intertwined with each other through migratory flows. In the ASEAN region, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are the main migration worker destinations, with 6.5 million migrants constituting 95 percent of the total number of migrant workers, majority of which are low-skilled and undocumented workers in the construction, plantation, and domestic services sectors (Thuzar 2017).

Research on labor migration in the ASEAN has covered a range of areas, a subset of which constitutes a sizable corpus of literature focusing on women migrant workers in and from the region. Of that literature are studies on women migrants engaged in domestic work. The bulk of that literature has revolved around labor abuses and exploitation (Yeoh, Huang and Devasahayam 2004; Huang and Yeoh 2007; Piper and Iredale 2003); women's work (Chin 2003); civic activism (Sim 2003); migrant remittances and development (Aguilar 2009; Devasahayam 2013, 2018; Piper 2008); national labor migrant policies (Koh et al. 2017); migration policies in the region (Devasahayam 2010; Hugo 2012; Kaur 2010a,b); much less is known about the existing ASEAN frameworks, standards, and mechanisms governing the labor migration of low-skilled/unskilled workers in the region.

This paper examines Singapore and Thailand and how they have responded to the various regional mechanisms, principally the ASEAN Consensus, governing women migrant workers entering the eldercare sector. The paper argues that while an integrated economy, such as the AEC characterized by human flows, is marked by interconnectedness and interdependence, the ASEAN Consensus is not legally binding and thus serves to reinforce the sovereignty of states in the treatment of migrant workers. As a result, the states of Singapore and Thailand do not feel they need to step up their protections for this group of workers according to national labor laws although both countries are highly dependent on their neighboring countries in the ASEAN region for workers to meet the demands of their fast ageing society. This indicates that national political entities are seen to triumph over collective mechanisms. Thus, as with globalization, the AEC highlights the paradox of borders: while states are economically interconnected and interdependent, they are simultaneously disconnected and independent from each other.

II. Singapore's and Thailand's Ageing Profile

Singapore and Thailand are home to a growing elderly population accompanied by declining fertility rates, declining births, and a

decline in mortality rates (Krishnakumar et al. 2015). Both countries are the fastest ageing populations in the ASEAN region. In 2017, 19.5 percent of Singapore's population is 60 and above, while Thailand's population of above 60 years of age constitutes 17.1 percent of the country's overall population (Situation of the Thai Elderly 2017). Population ageing in these countries, as in others in the world, has multiple effects at different levels. Policymakers are aware of the economic and social implications of population ageing, generally construing ageing as a burden on government resources. The common fears are that an ageing population adds pressure on the healthcare system and has the potential to stymie the country's economic development because of a shrinking labor force (Gavrilov and Heuveline 2003). Challenges to health policy in terms of the adequacy of public provision and financial sustainability to meet the needs of a growing older population have also presented themselves as common anxieties among states (Devasahayam 2014). Pressures on the younger generation to provide for the growing elderly are inevitable as the old-age dependency ratio rises.

Importing labor is not a new phenomenon in Singapore. Until the late 1970s, "unskilled/semi-skilled" workers were sourced mainly from their neighbor to the north, Malaysia, because of geographic proximity, cultural commonalities, and a shared history and common values (Chia 2011). However with Malaysia's own economic development, workers from Malaysia have become increasingly scarce, forcing Singapore to turn to what it terms "non-traditional sources" of labor in the ASEAN region, as well as North Asia and South Asia. In contrast to the unskilled/semi-skilled workers from Malaysia who are free to work in all sectors, workers from non-traditional sources are permitted to work only in the construction and maritime sectors (for men) and the domestic work sector (for women). As early as 1978, Singapore allowed foreign women to be employed as domestic workers (Freire 2013). In terms of recruitment, the preference has been for women from countries in the ASEAN region and South Asia. For that matter, the bulk of domestic workers in Singapore are women from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Myanmar, with smaller numbers coming from Sri Lanka and India. While majority undertake child rearing and

housework, increasingly a growing number are becoming eldercarers because of the growing demand for such workers who are able to provide home care for the elderly.

Providing care to an elderly in the home tends to be the norm because of the persistence of values linked to filial piety—a fact reinscribed by government policies which have had an influence in shaping how the elderly are cared for and for reinforcing the family as the main site for eldercare. Alternative models of the organization of care for the elderly have not taken off unlike in the West. Institutional care, community, and friendship networks have been far less popular in Singapore, although voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs) run by charities with some government support have stepped up in some instances to replace such forms of eldercare especially to the destitute and the elderly who live alone and have no family to rely on. By and large, however, the option for middle-class families is for a “market-based yet family-centered option as a solution to the eldercare crisis” (Yeoh and Huang 2010: 71), in the person of the migrant domestic worker.

It is estimated that there are around 253,800 foreign domestic workers employed in Singapore, residing in one of five households (Ministry of Manpower 2019). They form part of the “revolving door” temporary labor migration regime as these women work on two-year contracts in the city-state (Koh et al. 2017: 191). That they are barred from putting down roots in the country is exemplified in the fact that migrant domestic workers are excluded from Singapore’s main labor law, the Employment Act (Devasahayam 2010). This legislation, which regulates working hours, access to leave, among other work conditions, covers all other categories of workers save for domestic workers. Instead, they are governed by the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA).

In contrast, Thailand’s elderly population has been growing at a faster rate than all other Southeast Asian countries; in fact, the country is the third most rapidly ageing population in the world (HelpAge n.d.). Unlike Singapore, Thailand joined the ranks of countries considered aged in 2005, when the country hit the 10 percent mark of its population turning 60 years and older (Situation

of the Thai Elderly 2017). In 2017, the country drew closer to being a “complete-aged society” (Situation of the Thai Elderly 2017: 32). By 2030, the elderly population is expected to hit 26.9 percent and by 2050, 37.1 percent (HelpAge 2015). As in Singapore, the need for providing care towards a growing elderly population is a reality among an increasing number of Thai households.

In Thailand, as in Singapore, the family traditionally continues to be the main source of care for the elderly and the gap produced by the local population of eldercarers is also filled by migrant women workers, mostly from Myanmar (Caouette et al. 2006). Thailand’s comparatively higher income, robust economy, and job opportunities in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) have been the country’s selling points to potential labor migrants in the subregion. To some extent, Thailand protects the rights of domestic workers—both local as well as foreign—through the Ministerial Regulation No. 14 (B.E. 2555) of 2012 issued under the Labor Protection Act. The Regulation outlines the minimum age for domestic workers (15 years) as well as guarantees their rights to a weekly rest day, official public holidays, sick leave, and payment for unused leave. However, the Regulation does not address working hours, overtime compensation, minimum wage coverage, social security protection, and maternity leave (UN Women 2017). According to the Alien Working Act B.E. 2551 (2008), low-skilled migrant workers come from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar and are allowed to work only as laborers or domestic workers (Rattanapan 2015). Furthermore, Section 54 of the Alien Working Act fines employers for each undocumented worker. According to the Foreign Worker Administration Office of the Ministry of Labor, there were a total of 50,000 migrant domestic workers employed in Thailand based on figures from February 2019, with majority coming from Myanmar (Lephilipbert and Chengphuenpaw 2019). Under the Nationality Verification (NV) scheme (which allows employers to apply for migrant employee work permits), 21,821 domestic workers from Myanmar had taken up employment in Thailand in 2016; while the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) scheme confirms 1,308 that same year (UN Women 2017). The Myanmar government, however, has estimated a much higher figure at 28,000 entering via

undocumented channels.

Over the years, Thailand has seen a change in status from a net domestic worker labor exporting to a domestic worker labor importing country owing to the growing scale of demand for this category of workers and the inability of the country to find local women to fill this labor sector. The country's impressive economic prosperity led to an expansion of the middle classes with whom the demand for domestic workers swelled (Toyota 2005). In the past, Thai women from the northern and northeastern reaches of the country worked for affluent families living in the cities as domestic workers. But because this "class" of domestic workers began to dwindle with the surge in demand, the country had to open its doors to women migrant workers to fill this labor need. Having a domestic worker today has become a symbol of a middle-class lifestyle. The new lifestyle of the single family household means that the need to outsource housework activities to non-family members is greater than in the past, when older parents might have stepped into the caregiver role when needed (Rattanapan 2015).

While there are no figures of migrant women employed as eldercarers in Thailand, those who do sign an employment contract have their welfare protected under the care of the employer. However, the contract has been described as being "open-ended and up to negotiation between employe[r] and employee" (Rattanapan 2015: 42). As in migrant women workers in Singapore, migrant women working in the domestic care sector in Thailand have access to some protection. The Migrant Health Insurance Scheme under the Social Security Contributions Act (SSC) allows for contributions to be made over three months. In this case, a five percent deduction is made from the domestic workers' monthly salary (International Labour Organization 2014) and it is not the responsibility of their employers to ensure that they are protected in this regard. If a migrant domestic worker is injured while on the job, healthcare treatment is covered by law. Labor abuses are not uncommon, however, because this kind of waged work occurs behind closed doors and in the privacy of homes. Hence, the protections for these women tend to be largely uneven.

III. Labor Migration in the ASEAN Region: Decades of Seesaw Negotiation

The interconnectedness of the ASEAN economies is an undeniable feature of the relationship among the ten member states of ASEAN. It was on August 8, 1967 that the Bangkok Declaration gave birth to ASEAN; the impetus for the formation of this association was numerous although economic cooperation was on the cards (Khomani 2012). As the economies in the region become increasingly globalized, ASEAN countries began “moving towards closer economic integration where greater intra-ASEAN economic cooperation and a free flow of people, goods and services” are common features (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2012a).

It was as early as the Fifth ASEAN Summit in 1995 in Bangkok that immigration was identified as an area where cooperation could be strengthened to support ASEAN’s mandate with respect to economic cooperation, followed by ASEAN Vision 2020 adopted by the ASEAN Heads of Government and States at their Second ASEAN Informal Summit in Malaysia in 1997 (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2012a). Since then, there have been several meetings aside from the launch of the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) and the Sixth ASEAN Summit in 1998 in Vietnam to address the financial crisis of 1997. In 1999, the Third Meeting of the ASEAN Directors-General of Immigration Departments and Heads of Consular Affairs Divisions of the ASEAN Ministries of Foreign Affairs (DGICM) met in Yangon to establish a High Level Ad-hoc Experts Group Meeting on Immigration Matters (EGIM). It was at that meeting that discussions revolved around (a) establishing an institutional framework for ASEAN cooperation on immigration matters in order that immigration authorities are able to respond effectively to the needs and aspirations of ASEAN member states; (b) developing a Plan of Action for Cooperation on Immigration Matters “to maximize the benefits of regional cooperation on immigration matters” and to assist in supporting ASEAN endeavors detailed in the ASEAN Vision 2020 and the Ha Noi Plan of Action (ASEAN 2012a); and (c) launching an ASEAN Directory of Immigration Focal Points to facilitate networking among the immigration authorities, particularly

in terms of enforcement.

One such attempt to create a framework of cooperation to help protect the rights of migrant workers among the ASEAN countries is encapsulated in the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. In the years leading up to 2007, not much had been achieved. In January of that year, however, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope when the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers was adopted by member states (Human Rights in ASEAN 2020). The Declaration commits ASEAN member states to promoting, “decent, humane, productive, dignified and remunerative employment for migrant workers” and the development of an ASEAN Instrument on Migrant Worker Rights (ASEAN 2012b). In spite of the Declaration being pushed through, the instrument proved to be futile in achieving its objectives of having member states to work together to ensure safe labor migration channels for potential migrant workers, including migrant women workers. This may be gleaned from the preamble of the Declaration which states that: “the sovereignty of states in determining their own migration policy relating to migrant workers, including determining entry into their territory and under which conditions migrant workers may remain” (ASEAN 2012b); this statement in effect negates the potential of a regional approach on the part of member states to manage migration and migrant workers so as to fulfil the region’s commitments to promoting safe migration and protecting the rights of migrant workers.

In July of that same year, the ASEAN Committee to Implement the Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW) was established by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers. Comprising representatives from all ten member states, the Committee aimed to organize an annual forum on migrant workers; develop an ASEAN instrument on migrant worker rights; produce pre-departure information for ASEAN migrant workers; and partner with relevant international organizations to highlight safe migration campaigns and pre-departure literature to distribute to potential migrants (Kneebone 2017). From that meeting, ACMW agreed to convene a drafting team (ACMW-DT) to outline the rights

to be covered by the instrument. The drafting team comprised representatives from the labor receiving countries (Malaysia and Singapore) as well as labor sending countries (Philippines and Indonesia). Later on, in 2009, the Declaration on Migrant Worker Rights was reaffirmed in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint that listed the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers as one of ASEAN's strategic objectives (section C.2).

It was also in April 2009 that the first ACMW-DT meeting was held in Thailand. Differences, however, arose between member states over the scope and nature of the instrument. In contrast the second meeting saw some progress made and an ACMW-DT work plan was developed (Human Rights in ASEAN 2020). As in the first meeting, the third meeting held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2009 saw discussions within the drafting team come to a standstill. Disagreements emerged between sending and receiving states over whether the instrument should be legally binding; cover undocumented or irregular migrant workers; and cover members of migrant workers' families, and migrant workers coming from countries outside the ASEAN region (Human Rights in ASEAN 2020; see also Santoso 2017). In 2010, all ten ASEAN member states became included in the ACMW-DT with the aim of opening discussions and "break[ing] the negotiation deadlock" (Human Rights in ASEAN 2020). In 2012, a "Zero Draft" of the instrument on migrant worker rights was adopted; and since then, negotiations tended to focus on building consensus among the ASEAN member states on each article of the draft (Human Rights in ASEAN 2020). Subsequent meetings were conducted in Brunei Darussalam in January 2013 and another in October of that same year. The tenth meeting was held on May 2014 in Siem Reap, Cambodia during which all the senior members of the member states expressed their commitment to implementing the Declaration and building consensus on the proposed draft.

In 2015, the AEC Blueprint was launched. The aim of the Blueprint was to (a) eliminate tariffs and facilitate trade; advance the services trade liberalization agenda; (b) liberalize and facilitate investment; (c) streamline and harmonize capital market regulatory

frameworks and platforms; (d) facilitate skilled labor mobility; (e) promote the development of regional frameworks in competition policy, consumer protection, and intellectual property rights; (f) promote connectivity; (g) narrow the development gap; and (h) strengthen ASEAN’s relationship with its external parties (Association of Southeast Asian Nations 2015: 1). In a nutshell, the Blueprint “envisions a single market and single production base, [with the aim of] accelerating regional integration in the priority sectors, including facilitating movement of business persons, skilled labour, and talents” (ASEAN, 2008, para. 33, as cited in Olivier 2018: 5). In particular, the AEC facilitates the free flow of ASEAN professionals and skilled labor, allowing for “managed mobility or facilitated entry for the movement of natural persons engaged in trade in goods, services, and investments, according to the prevailing regulations of the receiving country” (ASEAN, 2008, para. 33, as cited in Olivier 2018: 5). However, it is “restrictive” since it covers the free/facilitated movement of professionals and skilled labor, emphasizing certain priority labor sectors while dismissing other employment categories, including low-skilled workers such as those employed in the domestic work sector. In short, only a small sub-group of migrants are covered in the AEC Blueprint in spite of the fact that unskilled or low-skilled workers form the majority of workers crossing transnational boundaries in search of waged work.

The most significant development for the unskilled or low-skilled labour category since then has been the ASEAN Consensus on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers, a document aimed at giving effect to the commitments of the Declaration and signed ten years after the adoption of the Declaration on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers in ASEAN in February 2007. The Consensus might be seen as an achievement in the dialogue among member states because it “delivers on the 2007 Declaration’s paragraph 22 which called for the development of an ASEAN instrument to advance the principles of the Declaration” (Thuzar 2017). The Consensus is also significant for demanding that the ASEAN Secretary-General submit an annual report on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Declaration’s commitments to the Summit through the ASEAN

Foreign Ministers. That the ASEAN Consensus differentiates a migrant worker from an undocumented worker is critical since member states are expected under the Consensus to extend social protection and other services such as legal, medical, and housing to migrant workers. The most striking downside of the Consensus, however, is that it is not legally binding and member states are not required to ratify the document for implementation, although Chapter 7 underscores the commitment of ASEAN member states to the Consensus to be “in accordance with national laws, regulations and policies” (Thuzar 2017). That aside, the Consensus may be said to be a step forward since member states are expected to agree on some protections for migrant workers, although “the major areas of disagreement between countries of origin and destination could not be satisfactorily resolved and that the final product is better described as a “compromise” rather than a “consensus”” (Harkins 2019: 4).

Of note are other regional attempts at discussing migrant worker issues at the ASEAN level: the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML), a regional tripartite platform to discuss issues faced by migrant workers from and within ASEAN, has provided another venue to facilitate the review, discussion, and exchange of good practices among governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations, and civil society stakeholders (International Labour Organization 1996-2020). The AFML, established under the framework of the ASEAN Senior Labour Officials, is a forerunner in the area of regional cooperation on migrant worker issues, allowing stakeholders to discuss progress in national-level implementation of the principles of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and to develop recommendations. There have been eleven AFML meetings thus far with the first held in Manila in 2008 and the most recent held in Singapore in October 2018, where member states discussed how digital technologies might facilitate fair migration to improve labor management systems and use digital services to help migrant workers (International Labour Organization 2018).

IV. Member State Responses to the ASEAN Consensus

Labor receiving countries like Singapore and Thailand readily admit that they cannot do without the deployment of migrant workers. Yet both countries have been resistant to fully agreeing to all the clauses of the Declaration, citing that they prefer the option of non-legal binding guidelines (Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies 2014). This is not surprising since being legally bound to the clauses of the Declaration would not be in their favor despite their being heavily reliant on foreign labor to keep their economies going. Conversely, labor-sending countries in the ASEAN region have sent a strong message that they desire for a legally binding “agreement” among all member states to protect their citizenry from labor exploitation and abuses.

Despite Singapore’s heavy reliance on foreign domestic workers for their aged, migrant women continue to be “susceptible to being victims of forced labour, despite them being documented workers with legal rights such as paid medical insurance and a rest day each week” (Kok 2019). This group of workers continue to be governed by the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act which the Ministry of Manpower maintains to be a “comprehensive” legislation and, thereby explaining the satisfaction levels among 97 percent of the 1,000 migrant workers working in Singapore (Kok 2019). While the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act regulates the hiring of foreign workers and lists the obligations of employers, it does not set out other work conditions such as number of work hours. If there are attempts at regulating migration processes related to the legality of the status of these workers, most tend to be procedural, reinforcing the temporary nature of the sojourn of these women migrant workers in the country and the refusal on the part of the state to guarantee their rights (Devasahayam 2010).

Thailand’s approach to managing migration has been significantly different, especially since a sizable proportion of its migrant workers include undocumented migrants. Since the 1990s, Thailand’s government has been absorbed with managing migrant streams from neighboring Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar. Periodically, the Thai government requires employers to register illegal migrants

working for them. There have been nationality verification (NV) exercises such as the one carried out registering up to one million migrants between 2009 to 2010 (Migration News 2010). Notwithstanding criticism from advocates, the Thai government has continued its registry and verification policy of the nationalities of migrant workers, only to eventually replace them with legal migrants coming in under the terms of the MOU. Unfortunately, in September 2010, the Thai government announced a re-opening of registration for a million migrants because of a labor shortage. The verification process has also proved to be confusing to employers and migrant workers alike. Agents and brokers were also found to have charged exorbitant fees to facilitate registration (UN Women 2017). Moreover, it has been stipulated that domestic workers should only be working for the employers registered in their documents. If information is incorrect, the domestic worker is at risk of imprisonment or even deportation while the employer faces a fine. In 2018, Thailand faced the daunting task of registering all 3.8 million illegal migrant workers. Anusari Thapsuwan from the Ministry of Labor of Thailand requested everyone to participate as the Ministry did not want to “mak[e] troubles for employers and migrants workers. [Instead they claim that it is] making it easy for employers to employ legal workers, who can also work at any place in Thailand according to Thai laws” (Zhou 22 March 2018). In this case, the Thai government has been encouraging the registration of undocumented workers with the view to legalize them and place them “under the protection of Thai laws” (Zhou 22 March 2018).

To date, the ASEAN Consensus is the only regional approach with some promise for future negotiations among member states for a more binding agreement governing the migration of workers in the region. Prior to the Consensus, members states relied on bilateral labor agreements (BLAs), which are binding; and MOUs, which are nonbinding and less formal (Bacalla 2012). Both had fallen short of their promises since they do not necessarily protect migrant workers. A case may be seen from Indonesia’s 2006 MOU with Malaysia, which did not prevent the abuse of several domestic workers, and prompted the Indonesian government to halt the deployment of Indonesian domestic helpers to Malaysia in 2009. The

fact that it has taken years for some level of consensus to be reached reflects deeper political currents in the region that the “partnership spirit [of the ASEAN member states] is not fully developed” in all areas (Khoman 2012). That member states under the Consensus have chosen to adopt restrictive provisions in the way of being subjected to the laws of the labor destination countries as captured in Chapter 3 (ASEAN 2018: 11): “subject to national laws, regulations and policies of the Receiving states, migrant workers have the rights no less favourable than those applied to nationals of the Receiving States when they are committed to prison or placed in custody pending trial or while detained for any other reason,” suggests that ASEAN is at a stalemate with regards to labor migration. The lack of a palpable shift towards a firm protection of the rights of migrant workers in the region means that addressing the existing “protection gaps” may be the only recourse.

Since the adoption of the ASEAN Consensus, Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), a non-governmental organization in Singapore working on migrant worker issues, maintained that regardless of the Consensus, migrant labor abuses would persist because of the gaps between the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor and Singapore’s national laws, especially since the Consensus is not legally binding. Instead, the organization has proposed an action plan to bridge the laws of the state and the clauses laid out in the Consensus to ensure worker rights are guarded within Singapore (Transient Workers Count Too 2018). Thailand, unlike Singapore, admits hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers. While the ASEAN Consensus might be said to be a vast improvement from previous negotiations on the protection of migrant workers, the Consensus fails to extend rights to a “sizeable population of undocumented migrant workers” in the country, leaving them vulnerable to a wide array of labor abuses in spite of the critical role they play in the Thai economy (Harkins 2019: 4).

V. Conclusion

Migration flows across the ASEAN countries are only expected to persist with the AEC desiring a constant supply of cheap disposable labor in both Singapore and Thailand. Under the ASEAN Consensus, a renegotiation of the relationship between polities, territorial scale, and the regional economy has resulted in states insisting on separation because of the pressure to take responsibility for the rights and entitlements of other nationals apart from their own. In this sense, we can speak of “borders ... in motion” (Konrad 2015: 1) as the laws and policies of one nation begin to be applied to citizens of another marked by movements and flows between national boundaries, lending to a contestation of borders as political entities make compromises (cf. Madsen 2011). As rightly pointed out by Konrad, citing various other scholars, borders in their own right may be “conceptualized as shifting..., actively re-ordering space... and relocating political, economic and social relations” (2015: 4).

As the paper has demonstrated, the decisions made by the respective governments of Singapore and Thailand with regard to their migration policy in receiving low-skilled workers to fill the eldercare sector are reflective of a broader trend “in this increasingly mobile world [where] constant motion occurs above, below, through and beyond the lines that separate polities, states, cultures and societies” (Konrad 2016: 18). In light of the ASEAN as an economic community, it may be said that member states are “spaces of places [which] have [turned into] spaces of flows,” whether be it capital, labor, technology, or knowledge (Castells 1996, as cited in Konrad 2015: 4). Following the argument of Hirst and Thompson (1999), that in a globalized world the primary movers in the international economy are clearly still national economies, the same may be said of an integrated regional economy as encapsulated in the AEC and its attempts to protect migrant workers. The ASEAN Consensus, which obliges labor receiving states to extend their own labor laws to migrant workers, spells a miniscule change in the landscape of the relationships between national and regional (political) entities. In fact, the national political entity is seen to triumph over the collective in spite of

labor-receiving states finding themselves being pulled in the directions of accommodation and resistance when it comes to providing migrant worker protections. Probing deeper, given that migrant policies at the national level will continue to hold more weight than they did in the past, and with very few constraints imposed by international or regional binding agreements, it is more likely that there will not be significant changes in terms of protections received by migrant workers.

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Mapping Philippine Studies in North East Asia: A SWOT Analysis of Southeast Asian Studies Programs from China, Japan, and Korea



Ronel O. Laranjo*

[*Abstract*]

This paper introduces the different Southeast Asian Studies academic programs of three universities in northeast Asia namely: Peking University (China); Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan); and Busan University of Foreign Studies (Korea). This study mainly focuses on the Philippines as part of Southeast Asian studies program in the said universities. The researcher utilized archival work related to the Southeast Asian studies programs of each university. The study also examined the curriculum of the program, background of faculty, and motivations of students in studying Southeast Asian studies by conducting interviews and surveys. Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis was employed by the researcher in analyzing the data from the different universities. Finally, in mapping out the teaching of Filipino language and Philippine-related subjects, this paper argued that Northeast Asian universities established a Southeast Asian Studies focused on Philippines because of various socio-economic-political factors, and not only because of the Filipino diaspora in the region.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Studies, Global Filipino, Filipino language and culture

* Assistant Professor, University of the Philippines, Diliman, rolaranjo@up.edu.ph

I . Introduction

China, Japan, and Korea are associated in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the ASEAN Plus 3 Cooperation which began in 1997 and formally adopted by ASEAN in 1999. Through this cooperation, ties between the northeast and southeast Asian nations strengthened and deepened at various levels and areas, particularly in economy, society, and politics.

In the academe, northeast Asian universities have established programs focusing on Southeast Asian studies. As early as 1900s, northeast Asian nations have been studying and doing research on Southeast Asian nations for different purposes. In China, the origin of modern Southeast Asian Studies owed much to the initiatives of overseas Chinese nationalists who established “South Seas [Nanyang] Studies” at Jinan School [later University] (1906) and Xiamen University (1921) and focused on the history of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and China’s relations with them (Park et al. 2013: 29).

The Southeast Asian studies program of Japan was established in Taiwan during the Japanese occupation of the island at Taipei Imperial University in 1928. The Taiwan Governor at the time reported that Taipei Imperial University established the College of Letters and Politics in order to disseminate Imperial Japan’s culture into the South Seas. The Department of Nanyo History was a crucial link in implementing this plan (Yu 2013: 81).

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Korea started to teach Southeast Asian languages and literatures (specifically Malay, Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese) during the early 1960s, right after Republic of Korea has established its diplomatic relations with Thailand and Malaysia, a starting point of Southeast Asian studies in the country.

There have been researchers on Southeast Asian studies trends in terms of historical background, type of researches, methodology, and institutional linkages in different universities in Europe, United States of America, Australia (King 2015), and even in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia (Pamungkas 2015), Malaysia and

mainland Southeast Asia (Sathian 2015) and the Philippines (Mendoza 2017).

However, researchers on Southeast Asian Studies in China, Korea, and Japan focused more on the historical development (Park and King 2013) of the field in the academe in general. To contribute to this existing literature on Southeast Asian Studies development in China, Korea, and Japan, this paper introduces and maps out the Southeast Asian Studies academic programs of three universities in northeast Asia namely: Peking University (China); Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan); and Busan University of Foreign Studies (Korea).

The researcher engaged in archival work related to the Southeast Asian studies program's history of each university. The study also examined the curriculum of the program, background of the faculty, and motivations of the students in studying Southeast Asian studies as collected from interviews and surveys.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis was employed by the researcher in analyzing the data from the different universities. Finally, in mapping out the teaching of Filipino language and Philippine-related subjects, this paper argues that Northeast Asian universities established Southeast Asian Studies focusing on the Philippines because of various socio-economic-political factors, and not only because of the Filipino diaspora in the region.

II. Historical development of Southeast Asian Studies courses in the Northeast Asian Academe

The Chinese were the first among the northeast Asians to establish Southeast Asian Studies programs in the academe. As previously mentioned, overseas Chinese nationalists established the South Seas or Nanyang Studies at Jinan University in 1906. The initial subjects focused on the history of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and China's relations with the region.

According to Zhang (2007), after the Sino-Japanese war (1937-

1945), the Kuomintang government founded a school called National Oriental Language School in Nanjing for Southeast Asian language training. It later on merged with Peking University in 1952 after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949.

In the 1950s, China's new government paid great attention to Southeast Asian Studies and teaching programs. The first group of academic institutions was set up in Southern China (Zhang 2007: 77). In 1956, an institute of Southeast Asian studies was founded in Xiamen University. Zhongshan University also developed the Institute of Studies of Southeast Asian History in 1959. Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences also established Yunnan Institute of History in 1963, which became the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. In 1966, when the Cultural Revolution broke out, all academic researchers stopped engaging in research, including Southeast Asian teaching and studies, until the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 (Zhang 2007: 78).

Institutions closed down during the Cultural Revolution were re-opened and new institutions related to Southeast Asian studies were established. Guangzi Academy of Social Sciences established the Institute of Indo-China's Studies in 1979, and was developed into Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in 1989. Zhengzhou University opened a section of Vietnamese studies in 1981, which was later developed into the Institute of Vietnamese Studies. During this time, Southeast Asian teaching programs developed at different levels with an increase of institutions of Southeast Asian Studies. In all the Southeast Asian university institutes, there were usually Southeast Asian teaching programs as well as Master's and Ph.D. programs (Zhang 2007: 78).

From 1980s to 1990s, more Chinese universities opened courses related to Southeast Asian studies. According to Zhang (2007), the greatest progress was made in teaching Southeast Asian indigenous languages. At present, there are ten major universities offering indigenous language specialties: Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), Shanghai Foreign Language University, Guangxi Nationality College, Communication University of China, Guangdong Foreign Language and Trade University, Yunnan Minzu

University (YMU), University of International Business and Economics, People Liberation Army (PLA) Nanjing International Relations College, and PLA Luoyang Foreign Language College.

Tagalog¹ language and Philippine-related subjects were first offered in Peking University in 1985, followed by the Communication University of China. Yunnan Minzu University (YMU) and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) started to offer Filipino language and Philippine-related classes in 2017, in line with the *One Belt, One Road Initiative* of the government lead by Xi Jinping.

Southeast Asian studies in Japan started in Taiwan, a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945. As mentioned above, Taipei Imperial University became the first Japanese university to establish a Department of Nanyo History in 1928. Recognizing his significant contribution to academia, the Taipei Imperial University invited Fujita Toyohachi of the Tokyo Imperial University to be Dean of the College of Letters and Politics at Taipei Imperial University in 1928 (Yu 2013: 81).

Japan's main reason in establishing a Southeast Asian studies program is to promulgate Japanese culture to Southeast Asian region. A year after Fujita assumed the position, he passed away. He was succeeded by Iwao Seiichi, who kept the post for eighteen years, from 1929 to 1946.

During this period, Taipei became the center of teaching and research of Southeast Asian studies in Japan. In 1945, The Taipei Imperial University was handed over to the Nationalist Government of China, and its staff returned to Japan to fill in various university posts (Nagazumi 1975: 8). Southeast Asian History course was offered at University of Tokyo by Tatsuro Yamamoto in the Department of Asian History, and Iwao, Japanese History. He also occasionally gave lectures on the history of Japanese trade with

¹ Tagalog is one of the 180+ languages in the Philippines and is mainly spoken in Manila, the capital city. It is the basis of the National Language in the 1935 Constitution and called *Pilipino* by the Department of Education in 1959. The national language's name was changed to *Filipino* in 1987 Constitution and it is based on the native languages spoken in the country such as Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano and others, as well as Spanish, English and Arabic.

China, the West and Southeast Asia.

In 1949, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) and Osaka University of Foreign Studies, now Osaka University, were reorganized and started teaching Southeast Asian languages. Osaka University taught language courses in Indonesian, Thai, and Burmese. It started teaching Filipino in 1983, the first in Japan, which eventually grew into a full Philippine Studies Program.

TUFS taught Indonesian, Thai, and Vietnamese, and also started offering Filipino and Philippine-related courses in 1992. University of Shizuoka also started offering Tagalog classes as early as 1987.

In 1963, Kyoto University founded its multi-disciplinary Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS). It is mainly focused on conducting researches about the region using interdisciplinary approach, including the natural sciences. In 1964, the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa was established to teach non-Western languages. Towards the end of its first decade, the Institute grew to include twelve departments, three of which devoted study to Southeast Asia (Nagazumi 1975: 14).

In 1976, CSEAS started a seminar that offered intensive lectures by center staff on the nature, culture, society, economy, and other aspects of Southeast Asia to graduate students of Kyoto University, as well as students from other Japanese universities. This seminar has become an annual affair, and still runs at present.

In 1991, Kyoto University established the Graduate School of Human Environmental Studies. One of its departments became the Department of Southeast Asian Studies. After 7 years, CSEAS also established the Graduate School of Asian and African Studies (ASAFAS) in Kyoto University, offering classes and researchers with interdisciplinary and integrated approaches to area studies.

At present, courses related to Southeast Asian Studies are offered in The University of Tokyo, Kyushu University, Sophia University, and Temple University. In 2000s, Takushoku University also started offering Tagalog language and Philippine-related courses under its International Studies program.

Southeast Asian Studies in Korea was a much more recent phenomenon. As previously mentioned, it started in 1964 when Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) taught Malay-Indonesian language and literature courses to undergraduate students. HUFS also included Thai in its teaching in 1966 and Vietnamese in 1967.

Busan University of Foreign Studies (BUFS) also offered Southeast Asian languages in undergraduate programs starting 1982. It first held lectures on Thai and Malay-Indonesian languages in 1982, Vietnamese in 1991, and Myanmar languages in 1992.

The Institute for East Asian Studies at Sogang University (SIEAS), established in 1981, eventually expanded its East Asian Studies to also cover Southeast Asian studies.

Another development for Southeast Asian Studies in Korea is the establishment of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) at HUFS in November 1990. Comprised mostly of the faculty members and former students of HUFS College of Oriental Languages, CSEAS has continued to play an important role in the development of Southeast Asian Studies in Korea (Park 2013: 121-122).

Other universities which offer courses related to Southeast Asian Studies are Seoul National University, Korea University, Kangwon National University, Pusan National University, Yeungnam University, Busan National University of Education, and the Catholic University of Daegu.

With the advent of multiculturalism in Korea and stronger ties of Korea with ASEAN, HUFS and Sogang University, in partnership with ASEAN-Korea Center, started offering separate classes in their respective universities for Filipino language in 2010. In 2015, BUFS introduced a Filipino track for its Southeast Asian Studies undergraduate program.

From the above discussions, it may be seen that Filipino language and Philippine-related courses were introduced to the northeast Asian academe around the 80s. Osaka University started it in 1983. Peking University followed suit in 1985, and then by University of Shizuoka in Japan in 1987.

Two other Japanese universities, TUFs and Takushoku University, also started to offer Philippine Studies courses, in 1992 and the 2000s, respectively. Korean universities started to be interested in Filipino language and culture by 2010s when in HUFs and Sogang University began offering courses. The latest university to institutionalize Filipino language and Philippine-related subject in Korea is BUFS in 2015. In the next sections, the researcher will discuss in detail the Philippine Studies programs of Peking University, TUFs, and BUFS as part of Southeast Asian Studies.

III. Philippine Studies in China, Japan, and Korea

3.1. Peking University Philippine Language and Culture Studies Program

The Philippine Language and Culture Studies Program in Peking University (PKU) started in 1985. It is under the College of Humanities, School of Foreign Languages, Department of Oriental Languages. PKU is the first university to offer Filipino language and Philippine-related academic subjects in China, with the aim of training students for diplomacy, foreign trade, foreign-related enterprise management, news media, teaching, research, and translation.

Students under the Philippine Language and Culture Studies Program take the following subjects: Basic Filipino, Audio-Visual-Oral Filipino, Filipino Grammar, Filipino Writing, History of Filipino Language, Practical Filipino Writing, General Introduction to the Philippines, History of Philippine Literature, History of Sino-Philippine Communication, History of the Philippines, Philippine Contemporary History, Philippine Culture, Philippine Folk Literature, Philippine Politics & Economy, Philippine Religions, Selected Readings from Philippine Newspapers & Journals, Selected Readings from Philippine Short Stories, Selected Readings in Philippine Literature, Philippine Folklore, and Survey of Ethnic Chinese in the Philippines.

The above-mentioned subjects encompass different aspects of Philippines from language, culture, literature, history and China-Philippine relations. There are three Chinese faculty teaching Philippine-related subjects. The current professors are also alumni of

the program holding doctorate degrees. They have done researches related to the Philippines. There is a Filipino visiting professor every three to four years from Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU), tasked to teach Filipino language-related subjects for one year.

PKU accepts 10 to 12 students to study under the Philippine Language and Culture Studies Program. Unlike other majors in PKU, there is no entrance exam for students who want to study Philippine Language and Culture Studies. The Foreign Language School recruits students from foreign language high schools and screen them according to their language of interest. Once they get into the program, they will study for four years and may shift out to other majors if they want.

However, transferring from another program to Philippine Language and Culture Studies is not possible because there is just one batch of students every four years, meaning there are no other subjects being offered for those who may want to shift in the program. Currently, the program has nine majors, and in an informal interview with some of them, there is a positive perception about the Philippines before and while taking the course.

The students have various reasons in taking up Philippine Culture and Language/Studies. Some have Filipino friends back home and this got interested in studying Filipino language and culture. Some were recommended by their high school teachers to study under the program. There were also students who got curious about the Philippines after hearing and reading about Philippine-Chinese relations in the media. After graduation, students believe they can use what they learned about the Philippines when they work in research institutes, study in graduate school, do international business in China and Philippines, or even move to the Philippines.

As of 2018, around 60 to 70 majors graduated from the program. Alumni usually work in universities, media companies, research centers and institutes, non-governmental organizations (NGO), and private companies in China and in the Philippines. Current professors handling the program were graduates of the Philippine Language and Culture Studies Program. Current students may study in the Philippines for one semester during their sixth

semester or third year of study.

Peking University sends Chinese students majoring in the program to ADMU to study for one semester. They take regular Filipino language and Philippine literature subjects in ADMU and earn credits. Chinese students also participate in summer school, a cultural immersion program designed by ADMU for PKU, through a memorandum of agreement, for students from May to June.

In 2017, Peking University Press published three textbooks on Filipino language, *Wikang Filipino I, II, III* / 基础菲律宾语第一,二,三册 / *Filipino Language I,II,III*. There is also a plan of publishing a fourth book soon. Before the publication of the textbooks, professors have been using teaching materials published in the Philippines.

Despite being published recently, one of the problems observed from these teaching materials is that the language is outdated because these were based on textbooks published in the Philippines in the 90s. When PKU students go to ADMU for study, they noted difficulty in understanding the language. The Filipino they learned is quite different from what currently being used in Manila. This shows that even while intensively studying Filipino language at PKU, they lack practice and have limited interactions with Filipinos in Beijing.

Another problem the program is facing is the limited number of professors teaching the subjects in the curriculum. The limited number of students who can study in the program is also an issue. Budgetary constraints also exacerbate the problems.

In spite of these, the program continues to have a bright future ahead. What was started by PKU was also undertaken in 2015 by BFSU and YMU. PKU has been supporting the said universities by recommending some of their alumni to develop different Philippine Studies programs. In fact, the professors heading Philippine Studies and Filipino programs in BFSU and YMU are alumni of the PKU Philippine Culture and Language/Studies program.

3.2. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies Philippine Studies Program

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) started its Philippine Studies Program in 1992. TUFS is the oldest institution in Japan specializing in international studies. Currently, the Philippine Studies Program can be chosen by students under the School of Language and Culture Studies and School of International and Area Studies.

In the School of Language and Culture Studies, students may choose one from 28 languages they can major in. The four-year program also lets students decide on their own fields of specialization through introductory and survey subjects.

Students also choose an area to major on in the School of International and Area Studies program. Students studying multilingual areas choose a focus language, and study this in the first two years of the program. Philippine Studies is under Southeast Asia Studies.

TUFS offers the following Philippine-related subjects: Basic grammar, reading and writing; grammar and reading; Advanced Tagalog/Filipino, Tagalog Linguistics, Conversation, Filipino in different contexts (film, advertisement, literature, pop culture, media), Tagalog for academic purposes and Introduction to Philippine Studies.

Three Japanese professors teach basic Filipino grammar and content subjects while two Filipino native speakers handle classes for conversational Filipino. One Japanese professor is a graduate of PhD Linguistics specializing in Filipino, while the other two professors hold master's degrees studying Philippine topics or concerns. The two Filipino professors were Linguistics major in the Philippines and are also holders of master's degrees. In 2018, TUFS published the textbook *Komprehensibong Tekstbuk ng Filipino/ 大学のフィリピン語 / Comprehensive Filipino Textbook*, used by Japanese and Filipino professors to teach basic Filipino grammar.

Some of the problems identified by one of the Filipino professors were the lack of teaching materials and the need for better course design. The textbook was published in 2018 only focused on grammar. Each professor had to make their own teaching materials.

For the first and second year language courses, professors only used one textbook, with lessons divided among them. Sometimes, there were overlapping or repetitive lessons. All of the Japanese and Filipino professors need to teach language courses aside from their specialized courses. Unfortunately, only one professor has a background in language teaching. This affects the level of skills of the students. Most students are skilled in analyzing grammar but are not that competent in communication. Also contributing to this is the lack of interaction with Filipino speakers outside the classroom.

Every year, 10 to 15 students choose Filipino to major in, and the Philippines as an area of study. Approximately 40 students are now taking Philippine-related classes from School of Language and Cultures and School of International Studies under the new curriculum implemented in 2012. In their junior year, students may cross enroll at the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD) or ADMU.

Each year, 10 students go to the said universities as exchange students, though they do not earn credits. Despite a year's delay in graduation, students still take advantage of this opportunity to experience first-hand Philippines life and culture. They also avail of a short-term program at De La Salle University which provide a month-long Philippine culture immersion.

Some 30 students finished in the old curriculum. Alumni are currently working in different universities, international organizations, government agencies in Japan, and mass media outlets. Some are now working in the Philippines.

The researcher conducted an online survey to determine the perception of current students about the Philippines before and while studying under the program; their reasons for choosing the course; the Philippine Studies topics they found most interesting and the importance of the program in their personal lives or careers after graduation. Twenty-seven students majoring in Philippine Studies, from first to fourth year, participated in the survey.

56% of the majors had a neutral perception of the Philippines before taking Filipino related courses; 34% had a positive opinion,

and only 11% had a negative perception about the country. While studying Philippine Studies, 93% yielded a positive outlook; 7%, a neutral opinion.

Students have different reasons for choosing Philippine Studies. Most or 30% are interested in Southeast Asia in general while 19% are particularly interested with the Philippines. Some 14% choose the major because they had Filipino friends or encountered Filipinos in Japan. Some 0.7% interacted with Filipinos host families in their United States and Australia visits. A student (0.3%) pursued the major because he studied high school in the Philippines. 11% ended up taking Philippine Studies due to the recommendation of high school teachers while another 11% opted to join the program because of the low competition rate. A student (0.3%) joined the program to eventually work in the Philippines.

The most interesting topics in Philippine studies for these students are language and food (26% each), economy and tourism (19% each), tourism and the Filipino people (11% each), and religion (0.7%). The students were also interested with topics related to politics, society, and English language in the Philippines (0.3% each).

Students were also asked about the importance of Filipino language and culture in their personal lives or careers after graduating. 30% maintained that the course provided a better understanding of Philippine culture and gave them a deeper sense of values and a broader perspective. A Japanese-Filipino student also responded more personally: "Learning Filipino language and culture is beyond important for me even after graduating because I believe that it will give me the identity I've been yearning for a long time." 26% said they intend to find work related to their major in Japan or in the Philippines. Another 26% wanted to interact and help Filipinos living in Japan. Five students, mostly freshmen, are yet to figure out the importance of their major in their lives.

3.3. Busan University of Foreign Studies Southeast Asian Studies Philippine Track

The Philippine track under the School of Southeast Asian Studies

(SSEAS) was opened in 2015. The track, along with Cambodian, was opened by means of funding from the Korean government under the Creative Korea 1 Project. It aims to support and strengthen Southeast Asian Studies programs in the country. As a result, BUFS became the first Korean university to offer an academic degree on the Philippines.

Southeast Asian Studies Philippine track majors take ten subjects about Southeast Asia and sixteen classes related to the Philippines. The subjects about the Philippines are categorized into two—Filipino language and content subjects (specific topics) about the Philippines. Filipino language classes are composed of Filipino Basic and Advanced Speaking and Listening (Basic Filipino 1-2); Filipino Basic and Advanced Reading and Speaking; Basic and Advanced Filipino Conversation (Conversation 1-4). These subjects are being taught by a Filipino native speaker, a visiting professor from the University of the Philippines Diliman (UPD).

On the other hand, the content subjects are Introduction to the Philippines (Seminar), Philippine History and Culture, Understanding Philippine Politics, Understanding Philippine Economy, Research on Philippine Society, and two Philippine Seminar classes. All subjects, except for the seminar classes, are being handled by a Korean professor who studied in UPD for his masters and doctoral degree in political science. He is also a researcher at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, which engage in research, seminars, colloquia, and conferences, as well as publishing books and a journal.

Majors taking the Philippine track may opt to study for four years (4+0 model) or three years plus one or two semesters (3+1 model) in UPD as an exchange student. The university has an existing Memorandum of Agreement with the UPD, enabling Korean students to cross-enroll and take creditable Filipino language and Philippine content subjects.

Aside from the cross-enrollment arrangement, from 2016 to 2019, BUFS also sent students to UPD every winter break in January, to study in a three-week Intensive Filipino Language program, which includes cultural field trips.

In the summer break of July 2018, BUFS also sent students for a five-day Philippine Cultural Program in UPD. The participants came from the Philippine and another track under SSEAS. These programs attract more students to major in the Philippine track program. Since the track was introduced, more than 100 students had already taken subjects related to the Philippines. However, as of writing, only two students have graduated under the Southeast Asian Studies Philippine track. Before they graduate, they must pass at least the intermediate level of the Test of Proficiency in Filipino conducted by the college.

According to the Filipino professor, one of the problems he has encountered is the unevenness of student competence in his language classes. The university is not strict on prerequisite subjects and students may take advanced classes without passing basic classes of Filipino language. The professor addressed this problem by adjusting his pedagogy inside the classroom.

In 2016, BUFS has published an application/app type textbook *Panimulang Pag-aaral ng Wikang Filipino 필리핀어 (초급)/ Basic Filipino Language*, used as a textbook for Basic to Advanced Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing. The professor said the textbook is still not enough, which compelled him to develop modules for Intermediate to Advanced Filipino Conversation.

Another problem identified is attitude of Korean students towards Filipino. The presence and use of English in the Philippines makes Korean students think that they can survive in the Philippines without learning Filipino. The Filipino professor addresses this by explaining the importance of studying the Filipino language, especially in having a deeper understanding of Philippine culture and society. Despite all these challenges, the Southeast Asian Studies Philippine track is relatively stable as students continue to take Filipino language and content subjects every semester.

The same survey used to Japanese students was administered to fifteen freshmen to senior BUFS students taking different classes in Filipino. Most of the students or 67% have a positive perception about the Philippines before taking classes related to the Philippines while only 13% of them perceived the country negatively; 20% were

neutral. While taking Philippine-related subjects, 93% yielded positive perception about the country, with 7% maintaining a neutral perception.

Students' motivation for studying Filipino language classes and content-subjects vary. 27% chose the subjects in Philippine track to fill in their lack of units; another 27% selected the said subjects because of the Filipino professor's good reputation. Three Korean students or 20% were swayed by their friends to take up the subjects; 13% meanwhile decided to study Filipino language and culture because they travelled to the Philippines. A handful at 13% wanted to improve their foreign language skills.

What interested them most are the following: language (33%), tourism (26%), food (20%) politics (20%), and economy (1%).

They were also asked about the importance of Filipino language and culture in their personal lives or careers after graduating. Some students think they may use it in their future jobs (27%), while others will use it when they travel to the country (13%). Some 13% said it will enable them interact and help Filipinos living or working in Korea. Two students have yet to figure out its importance in their personal lives, though it definitely broadened their knowledge about the world.

IV. SWOT Analysis

In this section, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis will be used to examine the aforementioned Philippine-related academic programs in China, Japan, and Korea.

One of the strengths of these academic programs is curriculum. All three universities have holistic language courses (grammar, reading, writing, speaking, and conversation) and content subjects (introduction to the Philippines, history, literature and culture). Another strength is the composition of faculty, usually northeast Asian professors specializing in the Philippines and native Filipino teachers, who teach the language components of the programs.

Two weaknesses were identified: the lack of teaching materials, and lack of opportunities for northeast Asian students to practice Filipino language outside the academe. While all three universities have published textbooks about Filipino grammar, all are yet to put out textbooks concerning content subjects. Japan has the highest number of Filipino immigrants (workers, students, spouses) among the three nations, but this has yet to be tapped by our Japanese subjects.

Opportunities identified are the linkages of Northeast Asian universities with Southeast Asian counterparts and the positive attitude of the students majoring in Philippine-related courses. All three universities have linkages with Philippine universities which enable students to go on exchange arrangements from one to two semesters. Students can earn credits for the subjects they will take in UP or ADMU. This is true for Peking University and BUFS, but is not the case for TUFs.

Students from the subject universities generally have a positive perception about the Philippines before and while studying Philippine-related courses. Some common factors shaping this are their interaction with Filipinos in their countries; travels to the Philippines; and teacher recommendation. Students also have high hopes in the usefulness of their knowledge about the Philippines in the future.

The main threat to the said programs is the financial support from the government. Peking University and TUFs are state-run. PKU only accepts 10 to 12 students every four years and there is no chance of taking in transferees. It is highly dependent on budget from the central government. BUFS, on the other hand, is a private university and opened a Philippine track mainly because of funding from the Korean government. When funding from the government ends, the future of the program is uncertain and will greatly depend on student enrollment.

V. Beyond Northeast Asia: Mapping Out the Teaching of Filipino around the Globe

Filipino language and Philippine-related subjects are also taught in more than 10 other countries, and is also dubbed as Global Filipino. Global Filipino was introduced at the 1st International Conference on Filipino as a Global Language held on March 17-19, 2008 at the University of Hawaii-Manoa (Yap 2012: 57).

Global Filipino pertains to Filipino as a global or international language being spoken to different countries around the world. What inspired this are the ten million Overseas Filipino Workers who use Filipino as lingua franca. As a result, Filipino is used and taught in elementary, secondary schools, colleges, universities, language institutes and language learning centers. According to Yap (2012: 72):

The Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) has listed more than 22 Filipino schools established in America, Norway, United Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, etc. that are teaching Filipino language, culture and history.

In the United States of America, Filipino language and Philippine-related subjects are also being offered in more than 10 universities. According to Ramos and Mabanglo (2012: 3):

A growing number of American universities regularly offer courses in Filipino. The expansion of the field can be illustrated by the following facts: in the 1960s, the University of Hawaii and the University of California at Los Angeles were offering regularly listed courses in Tagalog. Today, Filipino courses are offered every year at the University of California, Berkeley; the University of California, Los Angeles; Cornell University, the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Loyola Marymount University; the University of Pennsylvania; Northern Illinois University, the University of Pittsburg, and San Francisco State University, all of which are now part of a nationwide consortium to promote the teaching of Filipino.

Based on the aforementioned facts (Ramos and Mabanglo 2012; Yap 2012), it could be observed that in the US, Europe, and

Middle East, the teaching of Filipino language and Philippine-related subjects is mainly driven by the Filipino diaspora.

This researcher's mapping and analysis of Southeast Asian studies Philippine track programs show another facet of it—at least in China, Japan, and Korea. A survey of program history, and also of student perception from our subject universities, attest that various socio-political-economic factors have also given rise to the establishment of Filipino language and culture programs.

In the modern context, there is more active people-to-people exchange and dynamic socio-economic, political, and cultural ties between the southeast and northeast Asian countries. As a result, continuous interest in Southeast Asian Studies, with focus in Philippine Studies, in China, Japan, and Korea, is also expected to grow.

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**New Calendar, Old Social Class,
and Buddhist Tradition:
A Case Study of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt
and His Family Members**



Myo Oo*

[*Abstract*]

This article explored how the introduction of the Gregorian calendar transformed the Buddhist traditional practices of a noble class family who lost power in the royal court during the emergence of the British in Upper Myanmar. It examined in micro-level, the said changes by way of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's diary, which recorded the social and economic conditions of Mandalay, then the capital of the Myanmar kingdom, from 1886 to 1898. When Burmese kings reigned in Mandalay, the court closed on Sabbath day, when the Buddhist Burmese went to monasteries to fulfill religious obligations. The introduction of the Gregorian calendar turned Sunday into a regular day off, which left Sabbath day to be used for more work. This prevented the then noblemen to attend to monastic duties as they had to use the day, for example to go to the bank to draw their pension. This research reveals that the Gregorian calendar has transformed the day off from "holy day" to "holiday."

Keywords: Gregorian calendar, holy day, holiday, noblemen, Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt

* Assistant Professor, Busan University of Foreign Studies, South Korea. myooo14@gmail.com

I . Introduction

This article explored how the introduction of the Gregorian calendar transformed the Buddhist traditional practices of a noble class family who were lost power in the royal court during the emergence of the British to Upper Myanmar. This was carried out with the reading and analysis of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's diary, which recorded the social and economic conditions of Mandalay, then the capital of the Myanmar kingdom, from 1886 to 1898.

Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt (November 29, 1845-August 10, 1930), head of Wekmasuk town, was a high ranking official in the Myanmar royal court and a famous nobleman during the colonial period. Having faithfully recorded in his diary the changing socio-economic environment in Mandalay immediately after the British annexation, he is considered a primary and valuable historical recorder of his period in Burmese language. His diary written from 1886 to 1898 chronicled Mandalay's transition to British colonial rule was published by the Myanmar Historical Commission and Historical Research Department in three volumes (2005, 2006, 2007).

There are a few studies that utilized the aforementioned diaries. Ohn Kyi (1998) used it to look at the socio-economic conditions of Mandalay during the early colonial period, focusing on how the relatives of the Burmese king and other noblemen coped with the coming of the British. In two separate articles, Myo Oo (2018, 2019) studied the printing history of the last Myanmar kings in Mandalay and the photography of monarchs and noblemen during the said period.

This article expands the said literatures by dealing with the concept of day off in the experience of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt and his family, as it looks at the effect of the introduction of the Gregorian calendar to their lives, most specifically their Buddhist practices. It takes off from an earlier exploration of the effect of the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in several other contexts (see Menh, et al. 2015: 23).

On the formation of the Myanmar state during the colonial period, Robert Taylor (2009) used the word "rationalization" to

describe the British colonial administration of Myanmar into modernity. The introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the colony may be regarded as a part of rationalizing administration. It certainly transformed community life, from its simplicity and traditionality to a complexity characteristic of heterogenous, urban, and modern societies. Its uniting factors have been displaced, as German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1987[1887]) would have it.

II. The Composition of Traditional Burmese Calendar and Gregorian Calendar

2.1 Traditional Burmese Calendar

Irwin's "The Burmese Calendar" (1901) and Chatterjee's "Traditional Calendar of the Burmese" (1998) explain the system of the traditional Burmese Calendar used since the seventh century. It is attributed to Indian brahmins, astrologists with a good knowledge of the calendar, and most of whom were from Varanasi, who settled in Myanmar. They took charge of astrological calculations and adopted the Indian calendar system. The calendar has two cycles during in the time of the Burmese kings—religious and civil. The Burmese Calendar was allowed to be circulated when Myanmar was put under British India by way of the Burma (Myanmar) Gazette every year (Chatterjee 1998: 144; Irwin 1901: Para 1).

The civil cycle follows a luni-solar calendar, with an intercalary lunar month (Chatterjee 1998: 146). The year has twelve months, with each assigned with a 29 or 30 day-duration, alternately. The intercalary lunar month is added in some years to adjust the length of the year. The seven days are also named after the Sun, Mon, and the other five planets, as common in all countries. The month is divided into two periods, waxing and waning. The 15th of the waxing period is pegged at the full moon day, *Labyi-ne*, and the day of the new moon lands in the last day of the month, usually the day 14 or 15 of the waning period, *Lagwe-ne* (Chatterjee 1998: 154).

2.2 The Gregorian Calendar and New Holidays in British Myanmar

The Gregorian calendar introduced new holidays British Myanmar,

with some mandated to be regular: Sunday, New Year's Day, Christmas Day, Vocational Holiday, Thadingyut and Thingyan Water Festival holidays. Some were instituted as special holidays commemorating significant episodes: Prince Albert's Funeral Day and the Honorable Holiday of Lieutenant Governor Frederick William Richards Fryer's administration.

Sunday has been assigned as a day off since the early colonial period, which is really not the case in the time of the Burmese kings. Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt, though no longer a government staff after the third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) recorded that in some Sundays, he had to go to the bank to receive his pension from the British government. Pensions were given every first day of the month starting May 1886. Clearly, the institution of Sunday as rest day in 1886 (Than Tun 2005: 170, 235, 304, 329, 353 and so on) changed the lives of the people of Myanmar.

Though Sunday was turned into a rest day, offices did not close on Saturdays. Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt recorded having received his pension in some Saturdays: September 1, 1888 (Than Tun 2005: 369), January 1, 1887 (Than Tun 2005: 206), September 1, 1888 (Than Tun 2005: 369); December 1, 1888 (Than Tun 2005: 390), among others.

The New Year's Day was an additional celebration to the Burmese New Year Thingyan Festival. Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt first recorded a New Year Holiday in January 1, 1887 (Than Tun 2005: 206). He also noted it in the years 1889 (Than Tun 2006: 31), 1891 (Than Tun 2006: 218), 1895 (Than Tun 2007: 132), and 1897 (Than Tun 2007: 416).

Christmas Day was first recorded by Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt in 1886, a year after the Third Anglo-Burmese War. He recorded it twice in his diary, in 1886 (Than Tun 2005: 204) and 1889 (Than Tun 2006: 115). It is believed that government offices were officially closed in during Christmas Day.

The day Commissioner Fryer assumed the post of lieutenant governor was also proclaimed into a special holiday, as recorded by Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt in May 1, 1897 (Than Tun 2007: 472). Another special holiday was Prince Albert's Funeral Day on January 20, 1892 (Than Tun 2006: 326).

In Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's entries mentioning the claiming of his pension, some holidays were also mentioned but were left unexplained. March 1 and 2, 1893 were holidays, a Wednesday and a Thursday, respectively (Than Tun 2006: 456-7). In November 1, 1893, he recorded that offices and the bank were closed, with no reason mentioned (Than Tun 2006: 541). He was only able to receive his pension only on November 2, 1893 (Than Tun 2006: 541). Around the same time, in October 31 and November 1, 1895, he also recorded not going to the bank (Than Tun 2007: 248), only to receive his pension on November 2 (Than Tun 2007: 248).

On the other hand, there were two records of Queen Elizabeth's birthday in Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's diary, containing the following entries: "today was the British Queen's birthday and 15 or 30 shots of cannon were fired" (Than Tun 2005: 152) and "today was British Queen's 70th birthday celebration birth day and some shots of cannon were fired" (Than Tun 2005: 342). He does not mention whether they were proclaimed holidays.

In addition to gazette holidays, the colonial government initiated summer and winter vacations in British Myanmar. According to Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt, some of them, Burmese noblemen and their wives, were invited to the house of the Deputy Commissioner of the Jurisdiction for some tea and snacks on October 9, 1886.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Commissioner identified two holiday months in a year, October and January, according to British tradition. 11 holidays were slated in October, including October 8, 1886 (Than Tun 2005: 188).

2.3 Counting Systems and Sabbath Day Overlaps with Weekdays

The Gregorian calendar generally determines holidays based on the days of the week, e. g. Sunday.¹ In this, there are generally four Sundays in a month. On the other hand, in the case of traditional Burmese holidays, the considered Sabbath Day, is counted by date.

Based on lunar system and there are four Sabbath Days in a

¹ Although British authorities initiated some holidays, like Christmas and New Year's Days, Summer and Winter vacations were not regular holidays.

month: the first falls on the day of the waxing moon, the eighth day; the second falls on the full moon, the fifteenth day; the third is on the waning moon, the eighth or the twenty-third day; and the last on, on the new moon, the twenty-ninth or thirtieth of the month.² Both Gregorian and Burmese calendars may be similar in those but the manner of counting differentiates them.

Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt’s diary show the many instances that Sunday overlapped with Sabbath Days. His diary is a good material for statistical analysis as he was pious to have recorded the Sabbath Days of the period, from 1886 to 1898. The entries also give us a glimpse at ho his household coped with the transition. My statistical analysis will follow the historical period used to publish his three-volume diary to count the number of Sabbath Days in the years mentioned.

As the concept of the holiday was transformed by the additional holidays mentioned, it may be inferred that Sabbath Days were not days off, and holidays may not have necessarily coincided with Sabbath Days. Significant religious days were however recognized as holidays by the colonial government. The table below show the said overlaps:

<Table 1> Sabbath Days from 1886 to 1898

Year	Total	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1886	37	6	5	4	6	5	5	6
1887	49	8	8	7	8	6	5	7
1888	49	6	8	6	5	7	9	8
1889	49	6	5	7	8	8	8	7
1890	48	8	8	8	8	5	5	6
1891	50	7	7	8	6	7	7	8
1892	45	7	6	3	6	8	7	8
1893	50	6	7	9	8	6	7	7
1894	49	8	8	8	6	6	6	7
1895	51	8	7	6	6	8	7	9
1896	48	6	6	7	8	7	7	7
1897	50	7	8	8	8	7	6	6
1898	3	0	0	0	0	1	2	1

² According to the traditional calendar, some months contained 29 days e.g. Dagu, Wagaung. and Thidingyut etc. Some contained 30 days, e.g. Kahson, Waso, and Tawthalin, etc.

From this table, one may see that Sabbath Days fell less and less on Sundays during the early colonial period. 16.21% of Sabbath Days fell on a Sunday in 1886; 16.32 % in 1887 and 1894; 12.24% in 1888 and 1889; 16.66% in 1890; 14 % in 1891 and 1897; 15.55 in 1892; 12% in 1893; 15.68% in 1895; and 12.5% in 1896.

2.4 From Holy Day to Holiday

Holiday essentially means a day's official closure of offices and schools. In the reign of Burmese kings, the court closed on Sabbath Days that fell on the eighth, fifteenth (full moon), eighth (twenty-third), or the fourteenth or fifteenth (new moon fell on twenty-ninth or thirtieth of a month). On these days, officials went to monasteries to take the precepts according to Buddhist tradition.

This was totally changed after the introduction of the Gregorian calendar. Sundays may have become a regular day off but work on Saturdays often prevented many Burmese Buddhists to attend to monastic duties. Some Sabbath Days also overlapped weekdays and people were mostly working. The colonial period transformed day off from "holy days" into "holidays."

The British recognized the Buddhist Thingyan and Thadingyut holidays. Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt records the ten Thingyan holidays starting April 11, 1892 (Than Tun 2006: 349). He also noted that in one Thadingyut, on October 2, 1887, the seventh month of the Burmese year, he was not able to get his pension (Than Tun 2005: 276). He only received his pension on September 3, 1887, as the bank was closed on the full moon day of Thadingyut. (Than Tun 2005: 276).

III. The Effect of the Gregorian Calendar to Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt and His Family

3.1 The Observation of U Latt

Table 2 shows that in 1886, Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt was able to observe 51.35% of the Sabbath Days which constitute 35.13% of the total number. In 1887, he recorded 42.85% and observed 32.65%;

in 1888 44.89% and 40.81 %; in 1889, 38.77% and 18.36%; in 1890, 51.93% and 25%; in 1891, 72% and 20%; in 1892, 73.91% and 47.82%; in 1893, 73.46% and 26.53%; in 1894, 84.61% and 34.61%; in 1895, 74% and 40%; in 1896, 68% and 30%; and in 1897, 68.08% and 44.68%.

<Table 2> Observation of Sabbath by Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt

Year	Total	Not Recorded	Recorded	Observed	Not Observed
1886	37	18	19	13	6
1887	49	28	21	16	5
1888	49	27	22	20	2
1889	49	30	19	9	10
1890	52 (48+4)	21	27	13	4
1891	50	14	36	10	26
1892	46	12	34	22	12
1893	49	13	36	13	23
1894	52 (49+3)	8	44 (41+3)	18	26 (23+3)
1895	50	13	37	20	17
1896	50	16	34	15	19
1897	47	15	32	21	11
1898	4	2	2	0	2

The year which garnered the most number of Sabbath Days was 1894, and the least, 1897 [excluding 1898]. On average across twelve years, he observed 32.95% of Sabbath Days. On days he could not fulfill his obligations, he was on official business or claiming his pension.

<Table 3> Observance of Sabbath by Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's Wife

Year	Total	Not Recorded	Recorded	Not Observed
1886	37	2	2	0
1887	49	3	3	0
1888	49	1	1	0
1889	49	2	0	2
1890	52 (48+4)	7	5	2
1891	50	3	1	2
1892	46	5	4	1
1893	49	14	14	0
1894	49	14 (13+1)	11	3(2+1)
1895	51	24	17	7
1896	48	16	12	4
1897	50	19	17	2
1898	3	0	0	0

<Table 4> Observance of Sabbath by Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's

Year	Total	Recorded	Observed	Not Observed
1886	37	0	0	0
1887	49	3	3	0
1888	49	0	0	0
1889	49	0	0	0
1890	52 (48+4)	7	5	2
1891	50	3	1	2
1892	45	3	2	1
1893	50	10	8	2
1894	49	13 (12+1)	8	5 (4+1)
1895	51	23	17	6
1896	48	26	21	4
1897	50	18	16	2
1898	3	0	0	0

The tables above show that the Sabbath Day observance of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt's wife and family members was far less. Table 5 shows that his wife observed 5.4% of the total Sabbath days in 1886. This is not very far from the rate of observation of his family. Despite this, we may still conclude that religious practices were still maintained despite the changes.

<Table 5> Percentage of His Wife's Observance

Year	Total	Recorded
1886	5.4%	100%
1887	6.12%	100%
1888	2.04%	100%
1889	0%	0%
1890	9.61%	71.42%
1891	2.12%	33.33%
1892	8.88%	80%
1893	26%	100%
1894	22.44%	78.57%
1895	33.33%	70.83%
1896	25%	75%
1897	34%	89.47%

<Table 6> Percentage of His Family Members' Observance

Year	Total	Recorded
1886	0%	0%
1887	6.12%	100%
1888	0%	0%
1889	0%	0%
1890	9.61%	71.12%
1891	2.12%	33.33%
1892	4.44%	66.66%
1893	16.32%	80%
1894	33.33%	61.53%
1895	33.33%	73.91%
1896	43.75%	80.76%
1897	32%	88.88%

3.2 The Effect of the New Calendar on Traditional Buddhist Society

If we remember, there are four Sabbath Days in a month. In the days of the Burmese kings, courts are closed and people go to monasteries to perform their obligations (Zawgyi 1995: 41). Among these are the Thingyan Water Festival (Burmese New Year), Thadingyut, and Tazaungtaing. These were days of rest, a break from the daily work of officials (Aung Thein 1983: 15, 27, 37, 50).

Clearly, the Gregorian calendar changed all these, as may be seen in Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt’s own recording. He had to attend to both personal and royal matters, as may be seen in the next table.

<Table 7> Days Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt Could not Observe the Precept

Year	Bank	Office	Meeting (House)	Total	Sabbath Day	Percentage
1886			1	1	37	2.7
1887	2	2	4	8	49	16.32
1888	1			1	49	2.04
1889	1		2	3	49	6.12
1890	1			1	52	1.92
1891	1		19	2	50	4
1892	1	2	1	4	45	8.88
1893	1			2	50	4
1894					49	0
1895	1			1	51	1.96
1896	1			1	48	2.08
1897	5	2	1	7	50	14

In this table, 1894 recorded no overlap between Sabbath Day weekdays. 1887 recorded the most number of overlaps. Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt could not observe the precepts by 16.32% that year. On average, across twelve years, he could not observe precepts by 5.33% of each year because of his engagements. His experience is taken as something reflective of a regular Buddhist Burmese who had to work and live according to the new order of time.

Based on the combined appreciation of our tables, those who worked in offices or in a companies in those days could have only observed 14.43% of the total number days to observe the precept between 1886 and 1897.

IV. Conclusion

The case of Wekmasuk Wundauk U Latt is indicative of the changes experienced by Buddhist Burmese society after the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the early days of colonialism. Instead of being able to practice their faith during Sabbath Days, as prescribed by the Burmese traditional calendar, he and his family members were also overtaken by different concerns. This also reflects the changes being experienced by ordinary workers during the colonial era.

This experimental work has also underlined how the concept of “holy day” was transformed into “holiday” as it had examined in a micro-level individual behaviors that may be deemed reflective of the larger behavior of people in this particular part of the social history of British Myanmar.

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**Between Two Deaths:
Representation of the 1968 Huế Massacre 1968 in
“Song for the Dead” of Trịnh Công Sơn**



Lo Duc Anh*

[*Abstract*]

The 1968 Huế Massacre is a horrifying event rarely mentioned today in Vietnamese history and mass media. It is forgotten perhaps because it is simply indescribable. This study reads a song by Vietnamese musician Trịnh Công Sơn, where he attempted to chronicle the catastrophic images of the massacre. We use the notion of symbolic death in psychoanalysis to interpretation of the song, and shed a new light on how it captured this historical event which eludes understanding.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, symbolic death, the Real, Trịnh Công Sơn, Huế Massacre.

“Song for the Dead” (Bài ca cho những xác người) emerged from the early period of the career of Trịnh Công Sơn. It first appeared in the debut album *Yellow Skin’s Songs (Ca khúc da vàng)* released in 1969. This album was first released in 1967 without the two songs on Huế Massacre “Song for the Dead” and “Singing on the Dead.” The two were added in the 1969 release.

* Professor, Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam. dangtienthieu@gmail.com

As one of the few Vietnamese composers who became popular outside Vietnam, Trịnh Công Sơn was famous for his mysterious lyrics and deep meditations on life, especially love and war. During the Vietnam war, he composed numerous anti-war songs, denouncing the deception and emphasizing the meaninglessness of the civil war between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

These anti-war songs often possessed melancholy and lament shared with everyone. “Song for the Dead” has that same tone, yet it somehow possesses a haunting effect much stronger than any of the other anti-war songs as it had reached a level of absurdity. This made scholars shy away from studying, much less interpreting it.

I . The Forgotten Massacre

With regards to Vietnam War history, people more often remember the My Lai Massacre, also in 1968, as having compelled widespread anti-war protests in America in the 70s. Little has been said about Huế Massacre, when the People's Liberation Armed Forces engaged in a surprise attack throughout South Vietnam.

In January 31, 1968, the North Vietnam Army operated multiple attacks in many cities including Huế. Within a month, the Communists seized control of Huế City before they were pushed back by the South Vietnam Army and American Forces which utilized overwhelming firepower and napalm bombs. When Huế was recovered by the Americans and South Vietnamese, thousands of people have already gone missing or have been killed. The survivors dug up common graves to find their dead relatives. In the following years, numerous common graves were found inside and around Huế City. Casualties were pegged between 2000 to 5000.

Compared to My Lai massacre, the massacre at Huế was much larger, in terms of area covered and death toll. This however was

not enough to be remembered, though it had become a means to question the legitimacy of Vietnam War, as well as to make the North Vietnam Army responsible.

A few months after the war, Nha Ca, a known supporter of the government of the Republic of Vietnam wrote the *Mourning Band for Huế* (Giải khăn xô cho Huế), a record of the tragedy. This is considered a most important document about Hue massacre.

In the US side, news of the massacre was quickly dislodged by a series of other major events. Olgar Dror (2018) reported:

While the discoveries of mass graves unfolded in Huế, the attention of Americans was diverted to the shocking domestic events of 1968: On March 31, President Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection; on April 4, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, an event that provoked days of rioting in American cities; on June 6, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated; in August, violent clashes between police and protesters accompanied the national convention of the Democratic Party in Chicago; finally, the presidential campaign resulted in the election of Richard Nixon. The fate of the Huế victims did not break through these headlines.

Then, even though in Huế local people continued to unearth corpses of missing people and the number of uncovered bodies was rising into the thousands, the news of another tragedy overshadowed Hue again. On March 16, 1968, less than a month after the events in Huế, American soldiers entered the hamlet of My Lai and killed between 300 and 400 of its inhabitants, including children, old men and women. When they found out in 1969, Americans were rightly appalled by the actions of their countrymen in Vietnam, and the My Lai victims and the American perpetrators pushed the Hue victims and the communist perpetrators out of the American media and, by extension, out of the attention of the American public and of world opinion (Dror 2018).

Compared to the My Lai Massacre which shocked the American because of the investigations that ensued, the Huế Massacre has received little attention. It was even reported to have been carried out by way of the point-and-kill policy of Northern

rulers. Anyone reported to be collaborating with enemy forces was summarily tried and executed. Some sources even claimed as North Army retreated, they decided to kill prisoners and bury them in mass graves: "In the final stage, when it is clear they are being knocked out of Hué, The Liberation National Front forces executed witnesses—anyone who knew their faces was killed and buried" (Pike 1970: 54-55).

However, many people expressed doubts about the authenticity of the documents on the Hué Massacre coming from the US and Vietnam Republic. For example, Gareth Porter argued that the Hué Massacre was an exaggeration created by the American propaganda machine. There are pieces of evidence that tend to deny the massacre. Firstly, the government did not allow independent reporters to inspect the mass graves. Secondly, there were also contradictions in the Douglas Pike report, which seem to exaggerate the number of casualties and conceal US responsibility (Porter 1974). Some raised that the Hué Massacre was used to legitimize US presence in Vietnam. Dorr noted that Americans only saw " his event mainly from a political perspective" (Dorr 2018).

North Vietnam was mum on the issue. Communist leaders who participated in the war, while unofficially admitting to the purges, maintained that people died because of US Army gunfire. This is a report by Hoang Phu Ngoc Tuong, which many officials and researchers agree with:

About those killed in battle, of course some of them were killed by revolutionary guerrillas. When we entered the houses to call them out, they shot back; they shot to the point where some of our soldiers were injured; then we had to shoot back and kill those people. In that case there is a deputy governor of Hué...There were cases of people tortured and arrested by the Saigon government and then had a chance to strike back. When the revolution broke out, they regained the power and eliminated those poisonous snakes who could have committed more damage if they lived longer...

Most of our prisoners were taken to re-education camps in the forest. Most of them were released. Only a few of them got sick because of the climate in the forest. They all returned to their families. But some were killed. Most of these people were killed and buried in the city by us, then excavated by the US and the Saigon Government for filming. Those people were killed by US bombs during the counterattack. American planes dropped a bomb that hit a hospital in the Dong Ba neighborhood, killing and injuring over 200 people (Tuong 1982).

In addition to the lack of consensus by those who participated in the 1968 Offensive, there was also no official condemnation from the Vietnamese government about the event. It remains a sensitive and hardly mentioned. Đức added:

The battle for Huế went on for 26 days, and proved to be one of the bloodiest. The northern forces had more than 5,000 casualties; the combined American and South Vietnamese forces has 600 dead and almost 3,200 wounded. In Vietnam today, this event is described in heroic terms, and the state propaganda machine still goes into overdrive to celebrate it every few years.

But of a massacre of thousands of Huế civilians? Not a word. No one knows exactly how many people were killed; several accounts put it at more than 3,000, most of them civilians. They died in a deliberate campaign by the Communist forces to destroy The Huế government. This massacre is appears in Western accounts but is seldom discussed in Vietnam. And yet, in what was, for the Vietnamese people, a civil war, the fratricidal nature of this event could not have been more stark (Đức 2018).

Although the Vietnamese government organized several events in 2018 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Mau Than campaign, there still was little mentioned of what happened in Huế. The word “massacre” (thảm sát) seemed to have become a taboo as observed by Olgar in a seminar in Moscow:

In 2012, while giving a presentation on the Huế Massacre and Nha Ca’s account of it at an academic conference in Moscow, I was told that we must focus on the atrocities committed by Americans and

by their South Vietnamese “puppets.” I expressed agreement that we must and will discuss American atrocities, but that we should not overlook what the other side did. No, I was told, the communists fought for the right cause and we must focus on the American perpetrators, an exchange that was reported in the conference’s proceedings. From out of 50 or so people in the room, no one voiced any support for my view; later, it was related to me that there was no need for my “Western objectivity” (Dorr 2018).

Huế is forgotten, despite its violence and horrifying number of casualties, because unlike My Lai, where the culprit is easily identifiable, the said tragedy seemed to have been caused by both the US and Vietnam. What makes this worse is that the victims were dragged inadvertently and helplessly into the battle, only to fall from memory.

It also seems, at present, that unlike My Lai Massacre is challenging to historicize. The silence of parties involved and unreliable accounts from the West make it difficult to even reconstruct it. We only see and touch the surface of signifiers, the mass graves, but fail to name the haunting event, the massacre itself. However, the dead of the Huế Massacre, having fallen out of history, would never rest in peace but symbolically return, having been repressed. What Žižek said may resonate with this observation:

let us then ask a naive and elementary question: why do the dead return? The answer offered by Lacan is the same as that found in popular culture: because they were not properly buried, i.e., because something went wrong with their obsequies. The return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt (Žižek 1992: 23).

Lacan took a classic example from the *Hamlet*: the king's specter never stopped haunting the living until the symbolic debt was repaid. The dead in Huế may also be said to be undergoing a similar process. They were not properly buried, and only in mass

graves and even for unknown reasons. The killers are also unknown. Their massacre is challenging to recreate, much less, imagine in history. Zizek added:

It is precisely for this reason that the funeral rite exemplifies symbolization at its purest: through it, the dead are inscribed in the text of symbolic tradition, they are assured that, in spite of their death, they will "continue to live" in the memory of the community. The "return of the living dead" is, on the other hand, the reverse of the proper funeral rite. While the latter implies a certain reconciliation, an acceptance of loss, the return of the dead signifies that they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition (Zizek 1992: 23).

II. Trịnh Công Sơn on The Massacre

Despite these difficulties, what did Trịnh Công Sơn write about the event? Since he did not necessarily take sides, his song may be considered a minor, independent languaging of the terrors of the massacre. In fact, even if he lived under the South Vietnam regime, after the Communist Army reclaimed Saigon on April 30, 1975, he still wrote and sang "Join the Big Arms" (Nối vòng tay lớn), which called for peace and unity over Sai Gon radio. This made him particularly disliked by both governments. Vietnamese Republicans criticized him for being weak, for being "just a reed, moreover, a weak reed [though, as they say "the reed knows how to think"]" (Ban Mai 2008:28), while communists saw him as lacking in political stance. The reunification of Vietnam in 1975 led to the banning of his music which lasted a long time. This did not prevent people from listening to his songs secretly.

Trịnh Công Sơn's standpoint is clearly expressed in his verse. He was the only one who called the Vietnam War a civil war, in "Mother's Fortune" ("Twenty years of civil war", "Hai mươi năm nội chiến từng ngày"). The deaths in his lyrics are mainly observed from

the perspective of trauma rather than from a political or ideal standpoint. Oftentimes, he does not hesitate to erase the ideal often attributed to a death:

Tôi có người yêu chết trận Ba-Gia
Tôi có người yêu vừa chết đêm qua
chết thật tình cờ
chết chẳng hẹn hò
không hận thù, nằm chết như mơ

[I have a lover who died in the Battle of Ba Gia
I have a lover who just died last night
died accidentally
died without a date
without hatred, lying dead like having a dream]

In this song, the soldier death was described as surreally accidental, without the tone of hatred. Trịnh Công Sơn was obsessed with human death and trauma, but was determined to stand outside the language of the opposition, as also observed here: “In his anti-war music, Trinh Cong Son did not have any political intentions. He followed his heart...a kind, sensitive, honest heart which only speaks of his passion for his homeland and nation, despite the absence of a political attitude” (Buu Chi 2005). In “Song for the Dead,” Trịnh Công Sơn shows an altogether unusual perspective:

Xác người nằm trôi sông, phơi trên ruộng đồng
Trên nóc nhà thành phố, trên những đường quanh co.
Xác người nằm bờ vợ, dưới mái hiên chùa
Trong giáo đường thành phố, trên thềm nhà hoang vu
Mùa xuân ơi, xác nuôi thơm cho đất ruộng cày
Việt Nam ơi, xác thêm hơi cho đất ngày mai
Đường đi tới, dù chông gai
Thì quanh đây đã có người
Xác người nằm quanh đây, trong mưa lạnh này
Bên xác người già yếu, có xác còn thơ ngây
Xác nào là em tôi, dưới hố hầm này

Trong những vùng lửa cháy, bên những vòng ngô khoai

[The corpse is lying on the river, on the field
On the roof of the city, on winding roads.
The corpse is lying helplessly under the eaves of the temple,
In the city cathedral, on the deserted terrace.
Hey, Spring, corpses nurture plowed fields!
Hey, Vietnam, corpses bring breath to the tomorrow-soil!
The road ahead, though thorny,
There are people around here.
The corpses lie around here, in this cold rain.
Next to corpses of the old and weak, there were corpses of young ones.
Which corpse is my brother, under this tunnel,
In the flames, beside the corn and potato farms?]

The song lists what the speaker is supposed to have witnessed in the massacre. The catalogue is panoramic: river, field, roofs in the city, streets, pagodas, churches, houses. The listing is almost random but horrific, with the intention of reproducing an overall picture of the city with dead bodies scattered everywhere.

The middle part of the song however pivots to hope amidst the sense of nothingness in the landscape. Here, the corpses are assigned to certain functions: cultivating plowed fields, giving breath to tomorrow-soil, and being a part of the future of the nation. The musician may be described as weaving the dead into history, a process of historicization: corpses in an unknown city (for the song does not mention Huế) were connected to the future of a named nation.

However, this act of historicization immediately opens the domain of the Real. The Real, for Lacan, "in the formulations of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, [is something] that was always being 'left out'...the Real is what is expelled when a signifier becomes attached to some morsel of reality: it is the bit that the signifier fails to capture" (Bailly 2009: 83).

It may also be said that Trịnh Công Sơn tried to capture the

reality of the massacre by way of the signifier "corpse", as well as "spring," "nurture plowed fields," and "tomorrow." The connection between reality and these signifiers leads to the fact that a part of that reality is excluded from the connection between the symbolic and the imaginary. Bailly added: "In terms of Hegelian dialectics, the Real must exist in tension with the other two—for something to exist, its inverse must exist as well; and for existence to be, there must also be a state of non-being. Lacan borrowed a term from Heidegger when he said that the Real ex-sists, because the Symbolic and Imaginary exist" (Bailly 2009: 83).

The attempt to reality exists will create its opposite, a *das Ding* without being, which is invisible. Bailly wrote: "The Real is best thought of as ineffable and unimaginable—a state perhaps only experienced pre-birth, as even the act of birth introduces a 'cut' in the featurelessness of the baby's universe. Even the newborn has the proto-concept of duality—that there is presence and absence—and by this understanding, it can begin to know that things exist. It is the perceptions of the Imaginary that create ridges and flaws, differences in temperature and texture, interiors and exteriors. Then, the baby learns to attach signifiers to things—which have already made their existence known in the dialectic of presence/absence—and to their properties" (Bailly 2009: 84).

Therefore, the Real in this case, does not appear on the significance's surface, but lurks underneath the symbolic structure, preventing all light of the signifier from touching it. All that can be recorded is a bit of significant noise leaking from the symbolic structure, a mistake, a bluntness.

Hey Spring, corpses nurture plowed fields
Hey Vietnam, corpses bring breath to the tomorrow-soil
The road ahead, though thorny
There are people around here

It may be noted that the last two sentences continue to weave the dead into history (here, the future), but in the end the composer uses “people” instead of “corpses.” This is the only time the word “people” (and perhaps, “the living”) appears in this song, which is often overlooked, considered meaningless or a just a deviation. Theoretically speaking, attributing the signifier to the signifying structure erases the very signifier. We cannot name *das Ding* because any signifier will immediately slip out of its smooth and undifferentiated surface.

Examining the word "person" at the end of the verse, it may be said that it is creating a significant noise, which shakes the existing connection between the signifier and reality. It creates a situation of in-between deaths. Those who died during the actual massacre are in a a sort of limbo, an unrecognizable space that cannot be determined. They are the living dead.

The word "person" appearing at the end of this paragraph has no meaning, but it is just a fantasy to hide the traumatic kernel in the core of the symbolic structure. Zizek explained that in the final stage of his career, Lacan believed that:

the unconscious 'structured like a language', its 'primary process' of metonymic-metaphoric displacement, is governed by the pleasure principle; what lies beyond is not the symbolic order but a real kernel, a traumatic core. To designate it, Lacan uses a Freudian term: *das Ding*, the Thing as an incarnation of the impossible jouissance (...)

the final moment of the analysis is defined as 'going through the fantasy (*la traversée du fantasme*): not its symbolic interpretation but the experience of the fact that the fantasy-object, by its fascinating presence, is merely filling out a lack, a void in the Other. There is nothing 'behind' the fantasy; the fantasy is a construction whose function is to hide this void, this 'nothing' - that is, the lack in the Other (Zizek 2008: 148).

Trịnh Công Sơn's act of historicization may be considered a

creation of symbolic order to grasp reality. At the core of this symbolic order is trauma, which is impossible to symbolize [the word "corpse" for instance, will immediately exclude the mass of this reality, and turn it, or its remains, into a simplified signified, such as the number of deaths in official report]. There is, then, an immense gap.

The word "people" therefore functions as a patch filling the void. It may be meaningless, hiding everything the word "corpse" cannot symbolize, thus a failure in naming. In many ways, the word "corpse" used in the song refers to something, but the word "people" refers to nothing: it is brought here merely because it is the opposite of corpses, the opposite of life and death. The absolute "person" does not have a direct connection with *das Ding*, it is similar to *das Ding* in that they all have a negative relationship to "corpse."

Make no mistake, the word "person" does not directly refer to *das Ding*. *Das Ding* has nothing in common with the connotation of the signifier "people." The word "people" here, while it conceals what is lacking, also has another function: it creates a limit, a contour of the *das Ding*, a boundary of the indescribable and unknowable. However, we understand that it exists there, the reality that always avoids being signified. The dead and the living create a limit that refers not only to what they are but rather to what is *between* them: the living dead. The victims of the massacre fell into the middle of two deaths: the real death and symbolic death. According to Lacan, while biological death is the death of the physical body, the symbolic death is the destruction of the symbolic order.

In the case of the massacre, biological death came first, but its horrors and meaninglessness could not be symbolized, which therefore postpones the second death. It was the dead who didn't know they were dead, and so they continued to live, borrowing from

Zizek. The abysmal hole has created a haunting dimension in Trịnh Công Sơn's song: the remains of the dead in the city will survive without disappearing, because they are still alive.

III. Conclusion

Trịnh Công Sơn's "Song for the Dead" provided a narrow way into this most blurred yet terrible event in Vietnam War. It showed us the fate of Hue people in the massacre: they were neither from South Vietnam nor North Vietnam, but were represented as innocent Vietnamese stuck in the middle of the war between capitalism and communism. Their deaths were therefore rendered meaningless, being stuck between real and symbolic deaths. The horror that may be felt from this song evokes the recognition of the in-betweenness of the nature of the massacre which still obsesses the living because it has never ended.

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Ramon Guillermo, Scholar-Activist of Indonesian and Philippine Society



U Z. Eliserio*

[*Abstract*]

This paper presents the work of Southeast Asian scholar Ramon Guillermo. Using sophisticated computer-aided methods, Guillermo approaches a range of topics in the wide fields of social sciences and the humanities. A creative writer as well as an activist, Guillermo grounds his studies in nationalism and Marxism. Particularly interested in Indonesian and Philippine society and culture, Guillermo engages with the writings of labor leaders Tan Malaka and Lope K. Santos, translations of Marx's *Capital* into Bahasa and Filipino, and studies as well the discursive and historical connections between the Communist Parties of both countries. The paper aims to introduce the innovations of Guillermo's studies, particularly in the fields of cultural studies and translation studies. The type of cultural studies Guillermo practices is empirical, taking inspiration from innovations done in the digital humanities. Guillermo is most opposed to trendy, fashion-seeking approaches that are not grounded on history. He reserves particular ire for "hip" postcolonialism, and instead praises studies that are founded on politics and materialism. In translation studies, Guillermo goes beyond the mere cataloguing of mistakes. For him, it is the mistakes

* Professor, University of the Philippines, Diliman, uzeliserio@up.edu.ph

and "perversities" of a translation that is interesting and illuminating. Guillermo himself is a translator, and the paper ends with a brief discussion of his production in this field.

Keywords: Ramon Guillermo, translation studies, cultural studies, digital humanities, translation.

I . Cultural Studies

Let us start with cultural studies. This isn't the apolitical or "aesthetic" cultural studies commonly done in the West. Guillermo is no postmodernist. His brand of cultural studies is political, and informed by sophisticated computer-aided methods. Exemplary of this brand of cultural studies is his article "Child of Two Nations: Indonesian Perspective on the Case of Mary Jane Veloso."

Recall that Mary Jane Veloso is an overseas Filipino worker (OFW) who had been working in Indonesia for a long time. She got involved in a drug-related crime and was sentenced to death. Indonesians and Filipinos alike, on social media and elsewhere, appealed for her life.

At first glance, Guillermo's paper would seem to be standard "cultural" cultural studies; for example, explicating Veloso's letter to Indonesian President Joko Widodo, noting her rhetorical devices and use of metaphors: "Veloso used the word "Bapak" three times in the sentence above. The first usage is close to the English word "Sir" so that "Bapak yang Mulia" could be translated as "Honourable Sir." The second refers to Jokowi as the "Bapak Negara Indonesia" so that he becomes the "Father of the Indonesian Nation." The third refers to him as a "father" who must protect his "children" (anak-anak), which refers to all the children of the Indonesian Nation, or its people. Veloso therefore claims her place as a child of the Indonesian nation" (2017: 184). As for Veloso's letter to then Philippine Vice-President Jejomar Binay, Guillermo notes her continuing use of the "father image," her use of the Filipino "amin/aming" to signify her recognition of non-Filipino readers of her letter, and her use of the Indonesian "Pilipina/Filipina" to refer

to Filipinos in general (2017: 185).

Aside from Veloso's letters, Guillermo also analyzes Twitter tweets and hashtags related to the social media campaign to appeal for Veloso's life. Maddeningly, Guillermo counts the number of times certain hashtags were used in the trending tweets. For example, #SaveMaryJane was used in 852 tweets on April 28, 2015 (2017: 186). Guillermo also notes that not all tweets using this and other related hashtags were supportive of Veloso. The issue of "foreign-ness" was also brought up, an important issue in this age of globalization. Some Indonesians reject Veloso's claim to be a "child of Indonesia," and complained about the lack of outrage from Indonesians for fellow Indonesians who share Veloso's situation (2017: 189, 196).

Guillermo's examination of the various texts surrounding Veloso's case is a prelude to his ruminations about "human" rights. At play are two discourses regarding human rights: one that is based on birth, and one that is grounded on the recognition of the self in the other. Guillermo rejects the former, and calls for "internationalist solidarity" regarding the rights of migrant workers in the world.

Later in this work we will have an opportunity to read some of Guillermo's translation from Indonesian to Filipino. For this section however it is enough to highlight a quote from Guillermo in a paper discussing the translations by Jose Maria Sison of some poems by the famous Indonesian poet, Chairil Anwar. Rather than just interpret the act of translation as an expression of admiration, Guillermo invites us to see them as "a kind of gesture toward a larger commitment to a continuing dialogue with Indonesian comrades, a commitment that is also necessarily linguistic in nature" (2018: 21). This quote may in turn be interpreted as Guillermo's project as well: a gesture, an invitation to Indonesian academics to continue dialoguing regarding Southeast Asian concerns.

In his essay "Blood-Brothers" which appeared in the journal *Southeast Asian Studies* from Kyoto University, Guillermo defends Jose Maria Sison, founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, against allegations of plagiarism (2018: 23-24). While the accusations have no weight, as the one who made them doesn't

even say who Sison plagiarized, Guillermo nevertheless presents an analysis of Sison's *Philippine Society and Revolution*, and Dipa Nusantara Aidit's *Indonesian Society and Revolution*. While there are some similarities, for example, the self-presentation of both texts as textbooks/introductions, the topics gleaned from the table of contents, the differences are striking. For our purposes here, however, what is most interesting about Guillermo's study is his method. As I mentioned above, Guillermo counted the number hashtags used regarding Mary Jane Veloso. Something similar to this counting occurs in his "Blood-Brothers" essay. Here, he used sophisticated computer-assisted techniques to perform the foundation of his textual analysis, a so-called n-gram analysis to empirically show if any act of plagiarism occurred (2018: 29-30). In an n-gram analysis, "n" refers to a number, in the case being discussed a number of words. Comparing the original text and a translation (a "plagiarism" or "plagiarized translation") would reveal the same pattern (because they would be "one" text). Overall, the results reveal that what we may call "catchphrases" of Marxists are what the two texts mostly have in common, such as "broad masses of the people," "exploitation of the people," "world proletarian revolution." Both Sison and Aidit, Guillermo explains, speak "Marxist," or "Marxist-Leninist."

Two points need to be made here. One, this is not the only use case of Guillermo's computer-assisted methods. And two, just as with his Veloso essay, in "Blood-Brothers" Guillermo also takes a political stand: condemning the plagiarism accusations against Sison as a means by which his [Sison's] credibility as an author is shamed. As well, Guillermo attacks the right-wing writers in the Philippines for their not-very-subtle insinuations that the Philippines would be better-off if a violent genocide against leftist movements was enacted (2018: 33).

As a final sample of Guillermo's brand of cultural studies, let us now turn to his study of Pramodya Ananta Toer's novel *This Earth of Mankind*. Here, Guillermo returns to his love of "counting," explicating the novel via "frequency and collocation analysis" (2017: 5). The idea of collocation reveals to us that certain words occur more frequently near one another (for example "eat" and "food," as

opposed to "eat" and "shoe"). A collocation analysis of novels would reveal which words occur more frequently near each other, and reveal what we may consider the structural theme or ideology of the text.

Because of his knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia, Guillermo is able to read Toer's novel in its original language. Guillermo's essay explores the semantic domains of the words "dunia" and "bumi" in Toer's novel. While "dunia" ("world") and "bumi" ("earth"), Guillermo explains, have similar connotations in modern Bahasa Indonesia (ibid), Toer's use of them in his novel is quite different. "Dunia" in Toer's novel is always found with certain words, for example, "dunia modern" ("modern world"), as well as other permutations including "modern science," "modern civilization." Tellingly, the word "world" appears in such phrases as "search the world," "own the world," as well as "world of pleasure" and "world of comfort." Guillermo gives us a startling reading of these frequent collocations: "the rise of the notion of the "world" itself as expressed in the word "dunia" has become inseparable from modernity which lends to its strong connotations of modernity" (2017: 11) in Toer's novel.

This, Guillermo contrasts to the use of "bumi" in *This Earth of Mankind*. "Bumi" appears in such phrases as "sky and earth," "from the sea and the earth," as well as "land of ancestors" and "land of birth." Thus, Guillermo tells us, in Toer's novel, "bumi" is more closely related to "the natural world" (2017: 12).

Guillermo, however, avoids the trap of pitting "dunia" against "bumi," a so-called "modern world" against a "native" earth, as it were. Rather, he shows through his explication that "this earth of mankind" is a response to "the modern world." This modern world of capitalism, having destroyed people's faith in tradition and "the past" is itself full of confusion and uncertainty (2017: 15-16). Toer's novel, being a novel, offers no solutions, but instead opens up the question to its readers.

Guillermo's papers which can be categorized under the rubric "cultural studies" can be viewed as deploying two layers to analyze certain texts. The first layer, the empirical side of Guillermo, is where the counting occurs. Guillermo's arranges texts into

analyzable units. It is these units that are explicated in his second layer of analysis. It can be said, therefore, that the first layer involves words, while the second layer involves meaning. However, as Guillermo himself notes (2009), in a critic's decision regarding how a text is to be divided into analyzable units, she is already in the middle of the act of analysis. It is in this sense that we can say that Guillermo's cultural studies is political.

To delve into this issue, it is best to compare Guillermo's works on Benedict Anderson, who was himself a scholar of both Indonesian and Philippine society. One of Guillermo's essays dealing with Anderson talks about the latter's essay on "the languages of Indonesian politics." There, Anderson discusses what he calls "revolutionary Malay," which, we might say, is a fusion of the vocabulary of Dutch colonialism, Western democracy/socialism, revolutionary nationalism, as well as the vocabulary of Javanese tradition (2016: 3). Tan Malaka, the Indonesian communist leader, is said to be "thinking in Dutch while writing in Malay." Guillermo uses Anderson's essay as a way to think about what may be considered "revolutionary Tagalog." In particular, he looks at the word "tao" [human being] as a focal point in his study of a Philippine revolutionary vocabulary. One might say that his essay is a repetition of Anderson's, but instead of Indonesian, he studies Tagalog.

The first part of Guillermo's analysis already borders his work on translation studies. The first instance of "tao" that he delves into is with its usage by the Filipino national hero Jose Rizal in his translation of Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell*, from German to Tagalog, from 1887. What happens in Rizal's translation is what is called "translational neutralization." Rizal unproblematically reduces the many words that German has for human being, evoking ideas of class and hierarchies, to "tao" (2016: 5). "Herr," for example, is translated as "mataas na tao." The German word for citizen, "Bürger," is also translated as "tao," and "Natur" (nature) is translated as "pagkatao." "Tao" is likewise used in Apolinario Mabini's self-translation of his *Proposed Constitution of the Philippine Republic*, from 1898 (2016: 7).

In his discussion of the Tagalog translation of the anarchist Errico Malatesta's *Dalawang Magbubukid*, by Filipino labor leader Arturo Soriano, Guillermo once again subjects the texts to lexical analysis. Guillermo here finds the birth of a new vocabulary, a new language, "the terms are either directly borrowed or they break away and generate new lexical equivalents from preexistent or newly minted words" (2016: 10).

Moving away from his remarks on translated text, to which we will come back below, Guillermo moves on in his essay to his analysis of the digital text corpus of the political literary works of two of the most important Filipino writers, namely the conservative Lazaro Francisco, and the labor leader Amado Hernandez. Remarks Guillermo, "By combining [these works] ... into a single corpus, one would obtain a corpus which would combine and represent the language use of two of the greatest Tagalog writers of the twentieth century who stand at opposite poles of the Philippine political spectrum (2016: 11). By examining "tao" and its collocates, Guillermo shows that political ideas entered the Tagalog vocabulary through "tao" and its permutations (2016: 13-14). His lexical analysis can be said to show how words like "society" and "rights" introduce themselves into Philippine political vocabulary by anchoring themselves to "tao."

What advantage, exactly, does Guillermo's computed-assisted methods give him? What good is his first layer? His empirical base, his obsessive counting, I would argue, anchors his second layer, his interpretation, preventing them from becoming impressionistic "misrecognitions." This being tethered to reality, or at least to facts, allows Guillermo to critique the more speculative bent of Southeast Asian scholars like Vicente Rafael (2007: 57). Recall the accusations of plagiarism against Jose Maria Sison: Guillermo's analysis proves these to be empirically false.

Of course, Guillermo himself cautions against his methods being taken as a cure-all for the ills of the humanities (2017: 293). Instead, the methods should be taken for what they are: tools meant help facilitate thought and research. Indeed, Guillermo does not make a fetish of the empirical. This will become more obvious in

the discussion of his papers properly categorized under the domain of "translation studies." Before venturing forward and discussing this domain, however, it might also be beneficial to present non-computer aided studies that Guillermo agrees with, as well as more of those approaches he finds disagreeable.

As a scholar-activist with a Marxist background, Guillermo appreciates those studies that are historical in their approach. An example of a work he praises that does not use computers is the anthology *Philippine Modernities: Music, Performing Arts, and Language, 1880-1941*, edited by Jose Buenconsejo and published by the University of the Philippines. The essays in the anthology that Guillermo praises are those that involve the elaboration of the concept of the "commodification of musical labor" (2018: 390). He considers Buenconsejo's contribution to the collection of scholarly articles as particularly illuminating. Buenconsejo connects the figure of the "piano" in the Philippines during the early parts of the twentieth century to its broader social context. The piano, after all, is commodity, that was constructed and imported. Further, it held the status of a "fetish symbol" (2018: 392), as only the wealthy were able to afford it. Buenconsejo situates this with the multiplication of music stores in Manila, as well as the notion of the artist "owning" her work. None of the essays in the anthology engage in what in the digital humanities is called "distant reading," a particularly trendy way of examining the limitations and pitfalls of what is called "close reading." Close reading involves focus on particular, specific texts, some would call them canonical, something that may be found lacking from Guillermo's approach. But his praise of Buenconsejo's anthology proves this not to be the case. Indeed, for all the trendiness of his approach, Guillermo's work can also rightly be placed under traditional humanities, focused on the rigor of scientific scholarship. He is not particularly fond of "hip" approaches. Consider his review of *Beyond Bali: Subaltern Citizens and Post-colonial Intimacy*. He chides, for example, the unpolished transition the text attempted, from academic treatise to readable book (2019: 75). He takes offense in the almost mystifying way the author Ana Dragojlovic presents the idea of the "kris" and how the Balinese supposedly do not seem to be interested in the realities of

Dutch colonialism. Guillermo concludes that, for all its merits, *Beyond Bali* "just repeats what has already been done in countless dissertations influenced by mainstream academic postcolonialism" (2019: 77).

Guillermo's views on the goals of scholarship is best embodied in his "Foreword" to the sociologist Arnold Alamon's book, *The Nation in Our Hearts*. In praising Alamon, Guillermo contrasts him to other Filipino scholars in the social sciences and humanities, whom Guillermo describes as "addicted to the hipster products endlessly being churned out by the US academic publishing industry.... Many of us have mistaken the capacity to keep up with whatever is in vogue for theoretical sophistication and rigor. This kind of attitude breeds a general lack of respect for genuine and long-term commitment to ideas and their development...Today's theoretical fashionistas [posers] unceasingly denounce as hoary, false, or outmoded the radical ideas of past decades while mindlessly flitting from one guru of the moment to another" (Guillermo 2017: xiii). What, instead, should scholars do? According to Guillermo, they should start "from where we are, and [build] concepts with our own resources" (2017: xiv).

This short foray into Guillermo's views on scholarship will also inform the discussion of his translations, as well as his methods in translation studies, to which we may now turn.

II. Translation Studies

In his essay "A Pouring Out of Words," Guillermo reviews the Oey Hay Djoen translation into Bahasa Indonesia, from the original German, the three volumes of Karl Marx's *Capital*. From what has been said about Guillermo's stance on reality, that it exists, for example, one would think that he would, in a paper about a translation, obsess about mistranslations and infelicitous renderings. Of course, he makes a note about the negations in Marx's text that disappeared in Oeys (2013: 224-225). He also asserts the importance of Marx's gelatine metaphor, lost in both *Capital*'s English and Indonesian translations (2013: 227).

However, he spends most of the paper discussing the peculiarities of Oey's text. Guillermo devotes some time talking about Oey's "Indonesianizations." Marx's "eggs," for example, become "pinang" (areca nut) (2013: 226). But Guillermo's focus is on Oey's "diversifications" (2013: 230-236), how the latter rendered Marx's rather rigid vocabulary into a plurality of Indonesian words. Examples of this include "expenditure," diversified into three words, and "substance." Instead of condemning Oey, Guillermo makes these features of the translation the focus of the review. Though not without caveats, Guillermo makes the case that "such terminological diversification may bring to light original and new possibilities of interpretation, previously hidden in the placid repetitions of the original text" (2013: 238).

Another work of Guillermo's that belongs to the domain of translation studies is his "Themes of Invention, Help, and Will," that analyzes translations into Malay and Tagalog of Joachim Campe's *Robinson der Jüngere*. Again, Guillermo emphasizes that his goal is to provide "insights into cultural transformations," and that he won't be assessing the texts' "translational accuracy" (2014: 4). In fact, the Tagalog translation of Campe's work, by Joaquin Tuason, is a relay translation, mediated by Tomas de Iriarte's *El Nuevo Robinson*. Iriarte admits to modifying Campe's original to better serve his readers, and Tuason does the same to Iriarte's bridge text (2014: 13-14). By once again subjecting the texts to his computer-aided methods, Guillermo shows the discursive difference between Campe's *Robinson* and Tuason's *Robinson*. He says that the "conceptualization of needs and their fulfilment in [Campe's work] is neutral in relation to the situation in which the subject finds herself/himself" (2014: 39). On the other hand, in the Malay translation posits a state of affluence for human beings that need help only after entering a state of difficulties. Meanwhile, in the Tagalog translation, what is emphasized is the "normativity of suffering and deprivation" (ibid). This reveals an political slant to the Tagalog translation. Its aim, according to Guillermo, as a "moral-religious treatise was, as with many deeply ideological works in the colonial religious canon, the preaching of endurance and suffering within the context of colonial exploitation" (2014: 41).

It will do us well to compare Guillermo's approach to translation studies with another scholar from a different background. Raniela Barbaza is an expert in literatures from the Philippines's various regions. In her two studies (2014, 2017), Barbaza shows her unique view of language. Based on postcolonial theory, as well as the philosophy of the Frenchman Jean-Luc Nancy, Barbaza analyses the "orosipon" of the Bicol region as a way to present a kind of nation-building without homogenization.

The Philippines as a nation was just being built in the period that Barbaza studied the literature and language of Bicol in her *An Orosipon Kan Bikolnon: Interrupting the Philippine Nation*. Because the popular image of the nation is of a monolithic entity, Barbaza's narration of the Philippine nation through the lens of the orosipon stands out as counter-intuitive. A common language imposed from above, in a top-down manner, is considered a foundation of a nation. But Barbaza presents a playful version of language: "a word becomes a word when it makes sense to at least two users. It is the word's intelligibility to at least two users that makes the word, a word. Otherwise, it is not a word. It is in the word then, or in language, that language users touch. ... As a site of commonality, however, language keeps itself to itself. That is to say, a word can never be owned by a single language user. To put it differently, language keeps itself precisely in the space between language users" (2017: xxi). While this might seem like a Western delusion, not really useful for Southeast Asian Studies, Barbaza makes the case for her view.

She does so by contrasting the concept of the orosipon to that of "narrative." In an orosipon, there is more than one storyteller. There is always a chance or an opportunity to "butt in," as it were, to "interrupt," as in the title of her book. And it is not just narration, but that which narration tries to create (i.e. the nation), that is "interrupted" (see Barbaza 2014: 94). Barbaza explains that "Orosipon's structural multiplicity and fluidity is contrary to the monologic and thus homogenizing tendencies of "narrative"" (2017: xxii; see also 2017: 38-40). The nation is what is being narrated. And outsiders, the foreign, is not the only problem the Philippines, as a thing, as a nation being constructed

via narration. Inside the Philippines too are many challenges. Barbaza explains that "The convulsions, which have always been present, are needless to say the speakings of new speakers. These speakings occur as interruptions of a current speaking. Interruption points, of course, to a temporal and spatial positioning within an already established current. The continuous interruption of the current of speaking, the nation, is thus a seizure of the position of speaker. To put it another way, it is a continuous claiming on the name "Filipino"" (2017: xxv). From the point of view of orosipon, in contrast to the point of view of narration, not one group or institution dominates the concept of "Philippines," of "Filipino." Barbaza contrasts the concept of "bayan" against that of "nation," or "country," or "nation-state." What is this thing called bayan? Barbaza explains that "bayan guards against the centralization of geopolitical power. Bayan, a contraction of the plural bahayag (a cluster of house), is also structurally multiple and fluid" (2017: 75). Following this exposition of the nature of society and the nation, Barbaza comes to a counter-intuitive conclusion regarding language. While she still sees some value, for example, in the notion of language standardization, she also says that standardization suppresses the "structural fluidity and multiplicity" of the Bicol language, and, it follows, Filipino as the national language. She continues, "Standardization largely involves rendering the language into a structure that can be seen and held, and therefore controlled. The orosipon's language demonstrates the author's/authors' and the editors' attempt to take control of the language. The standardization of the Bikol language is the solidification in representation that has to be apparent not only in the lexicon of the language (Which is Bikolnon? Which is not?) but also, of course, in the orthography of the language... The Bikol language was no longer just a means to communicate. It functioned as a representation of the Bikolnon, and therefore, an insistence of a space/place, in the national imaginary" (2017: 103). She comes to a harsher, harder conclusion when she says that "Standardization thus acts to take up space in the national imaginary even as it also removes differences and lends itself to commodification, and, thus, to the empowerment of the non-Bikolnon in the identity of capital."

Outside of her book, based on her dissertation from the State University of New York, Barbaza also presents her views on language in the essay "Wika at Identidad: Wikang Bikol bilang Lunan ng Bikolnon, 1890-1956" ("Language and Identity: The Bicol Language as a Space for Bicol-ness/the Bicol People, 1890-1956"). There Barbaza asserts her contrary stance against the monolithic form of the nation. She says that "What happens, in truth, in the movement for unity is nothing but homogenization" (2014: 74, my translation). Of course, Barbaza doesn't say that unity is needed, or that a lingua franca is very useful and necessary. What she says is, we can have a country, a nation, a bayan, without erasing individual characteristics. What she wishes to emphasize are the differences, of each language, and each region, that will have their own contribution to unity: "it is the nature of language, even more the de facto national lingua franca, to be different (i.e. has a lot of varieties, dialects), to have differences in its uses, while fulfilling the role of uniting the many" (2014: 76-77, my translation). This is a strange view of language, but it has a potential to be a shock to thought when pushed to its logical conclusion: "This is therefore the challenge to us now: to maintain commonalities and similarities in difference. Instead of a finished unity, the possibility lies in the identification and strengthening of commonalities that will maintain difference" (2014: 94). While Barbaza recognizes the structural, linguistic similarities of the various Philippine languages, she is more interested in the possibilities of their differences, which gives Filipino, i.e. the national language, an open nature. She explains: "The iterative feature of a language that has a common grammar and structure that allows it to be understood by all that also allows it to be used by all, is also what makes it open to change and difference every time it is uttered and used" (2014: 95).

This view of language complicated the process Barbaza underwent in translating tales from the Bicol language to Filipino (and English). The danger she tries to avoid is the erasure of identity, the identity of the source language, in the attempt to make the text readable for a national audience. There is a moment

of stream of consciousness in the academic text that is *Interrupting the Nation* when Barbaza exposes her multiple goals and desires on the page: "Are the sentences too long? When does a sentence end and begin? My educated Tagalog [Manila] eyes demand that the sentences be whipped into obedience: clean, clear, crisp sentences please. Where are the punctuation/s? Why is this word in capital letters? Why is this morpheme used here and not this other morpheme/affix?" The result is a "rough" text, but there is something to be desired in this roughness: "The roughness that is experienced by the reader is the experience of what is foreign/not-self or to be more precise in this specific translation project, the nonacademic/literary Tagalog" (2017: 160). Just as in translating regional languages and literatures to the national language Filipino, there is always that which cannot be assimilated, cannot be rendered into ordinary Manila-based, Tagalog-based, Filipino, there is also, in the construction of a nation, in its narration, something that sticks out, does not fit, always interrupting, a constant reminder of an insider outsider. Of course, a nation that erases difference is also a nation where the needs and wants of the different is ignored and violated.

III. The Nation and Translation

In an interview, Ramon Guillermo emphasizes the value of translation in strengthening a nation. He gives the example of Germany, which, with the help of translation, was able to produce an Einstein. This remark is related to the project of the philosopher Hegel, to "make philosophy speak German," back in 1900. While it may seem strange to relate philosophy and Einstein's science, it would do us well to remember that in German, "Wissenschaft" does not refer just to the natural sciences, but to knowledge in the general sense. Guillermo explains that "Translation in a language makes this language stronger, such that it doesn't just match other languages, but attains the capability of creating its own ideas" (Guillermo 2019: 112, my translation). Of course, to be a nationalist does not mean becoming a racist, or resisting our globalized reality. Guillermo's discourse points to a way of being nationalist *and* being

cosmopolitan. To understand this, it is fitting now, to turn to Guillermo's own translations from Bahasa Indonesia to Tagalog, to read his remarks on Benedict Anderson as a translator from Bahasa Indonesia to English.

Guillermo notes that Anderson sprinkles his translations with footnotes, as a way to gloss references and bridge cultural gaps. Moreover, Anderson finds many words in Bahasa Indonesia to be "untranslatable." He takes time in his footnotes to ruminate about these words. In his discussion of Anderson, Guillermo refers to Friedrich Schleiermacher's distinction between "foreignness" and the "foreign" (Guillermo 2017: 248). Schleiermacher posits two types of people encountering a text. A student who encounters a foreign text with no knowledge of the language it is written in sees only "foreign-ness." On the other hand, a polyglot would see no "foreign-ness" at all. Counter-intuitively, they would both be bad translators. The student, obviously, because she doesn't know the foreign language, but the polyglot too, because she wouldn't see the language as foreign, wouldn't see the "foreign." Anderson, while a polyglot, avoids the pitfalls of the talent, by underlining in his translations this "foreign." This results, according to Guillermo, in a "stuttering cosmopolitanism," which is marked by "footnotes, explanations, descriptions and elucidations" (2017: 249). This "pedagogical translation praxis should connect academics with activists, activists with migrant laborers, and migrant laborers with the oppressed workers in their own countries and in those where they work" (2017: 249). Translation for Guillermo, as well as research in the social sciences and the humanities, is ultimately a political act. It comes as no surprise then that among his many translations, two from Bahasa Indonesia are political works. One is an excerpt from communist leader Tan Malaka's masterwork *Madilog*, that deals specifically with the Philippines, "Tungo sa Hardin ng Tao." It is a futuristic work that describes a kind of utopia where statues of Filipinos Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio can be found. Malaka, Guillermo explains, believes that both Rizal and Bonifacio are Indonesians, because the Philippines are part of a "Greater" or "Grand" Indonesia (Malaka 2013: 107). This is no imperialist apologetics, but rather a gesture of solidarity from one revolutionary

in a colony to two others like him. Visions of a better future like Malaka's serve as a critique of past and present regimes, as they present a picture of a life better than what we currently have.

And what a life Filipinos currently have! As is well known, the Philippine government, currently, is not above doing violence to its own citizens who happen to be critical of its policies. Guillermo translated three poems by Wiji Thukul, an Indonesian cultural worker and activist, who was "disappeared." Thukul discusses the worth of poetry in light of poverty. It is not just the subjective violence of the state that is attacked, but the violence done by socio-economic inequalities. "Ano ang saysay ng aking pagtula?" asks the persona in one of his poems. "What is the point of my writing poetry?" As scholars, we also ask, "What is the point of my research?" Guillermo, by providing a model for a committed, political scholarship, in his work, answers this question.

Instead of a conclusion, then, I offer here some remarks regarding that aspect of Guillermo's work that engages with scholars of Philippine and Southeast Asian Studies that he does not dismiss as being merely fashionable, but nevertheless finds flawed and lacking.

A discussion of Guillermo's critique and extension of the project of the greathistorian Zeus Salazar is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the entirety of Guillermo's body of work would be unthinkable if Salazar's did not exist. In his most recent appraisal of Salazar's work, "Ang Dalawang Piging ng Kapitalistang Modernidad [The Two Feasts of Capitalist Modernity]," Guillermo characterizes his own long-term project as an "encounter" of the Marxist critique of global capitalism and the version of social science indigenization advanced by Salazar (2014: 184).

Guillermo's frequent skirmishes with the poststructuralist Vicente Rafael best encapsulates his views regarding scholarship, and the aims of scholarship. Guillermo, in his review of Rafael's *The Promise of the Foreign*, criticizes the author's "peculiar" definition of translation, as well as his "confusing" notion of a "coming ... completely other cultural and social order" (2008: 55, 58). Rafael, in Guillermo's view, is too enamored with word games and not in tune

with the material reality of the Philippines. Thus, Rafael's speculations, more often than not, serve as a launch pad for Guillermo's more grounded investigations. In his essay about baybayin, Guillermo assails Rafael's discourse on the ancient Philippine script as "irrelevant" and "puzzling," and points out that Rafael is mistaken about the function of the diacritic in baybayin (2017: 8-10). Paradoxically, writings such as Rafael's also serve as a foundation for Guillermo's scholarship. To mix metaphors, they serve as a kind of negative North Star, showing the way *not* to go.

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