

Paste-up Modernity: Visual Depiction of Modern Cambodia in the 1960s in the Magazine

*Kambuja Review*

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**Abstract**

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Modernity is central to postcolonial discourse. This paper examines how the state of Cambodia constructs modernity in the public imagination. Reflecting upon Homi Bhabha's discussion on *mimicry* "almost the same, but not quite", this paper looks at different aspects of modernity that appear in the state-owned magazine *Kambuja*. While many scholars have examined the political and ideological angles of this modernity, however, few have examined the artistic and visual representation of it. This paper examines how modernity is presented in *Kambuja*. To accomplish this task, the paper proposes a new concept of "paste-up" modernity as a way to demonstrate a unique character to Cambodia modernity which incorporates heterogeneous elements taken from traditional and Western images in its semiotic representation of modernity. And in doing so, the paper hopes to highlight the fluid nature of modernity as a semiotic signifier in which different meanings can be "cut and paste" to evoke a sense of "imagined community."

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*For Eat Sokh and Khun Na Ngam*

*who have given me life and happiness that I hold dear till this day.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	i
<b>Introduction</b>	
GANEFO	1
A Visual Project	5
Kambuja Magazine	9
Paste-up Modernity	13
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
Angkor Nation, A Temporal Paste-up	18
Coming into Foreign Consciousness	19
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
A Material Change Toward Modernity	25
Modern Cities and Towns With Tradition In Mind	28
A Modern Language: Paste-up In Lyrics And Advertisements In <i>Kambuja</i>	37
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
Symbolic Paste-up	47
Depicting Sihanouk as “the Machinist”	50
<b>Conclusion</b>	63
<b>Bibliography</b>	67

## Photograph

Picture 1:	GANEFO Opening ceremony	3
Picture 2:	Exposition Coloniale Internationale exhibition of Paris in 1931	21
Picture 3:	Cover of <i>Kambuja Review</i> magazine	23
Picture 4:	View of the village “Anlong Romiet”	26
Picture 5:	A young Cambodian woman appears in traditional clothes next to an industrial sewing machine	28
Picture 6:	A map shows the location where electricity is being distributed in Cambodia from 1953 to 1964	33
Picture 7:	Map shows location of electrical plants throughout the country	34
Picture 8:	Aerial view of Angkor Thom in Siem Reap	35
Picture 9:	A view of the central boulevard of the city of Battambang	36
Picture 10:	View of the downtown area in Kampong Thom	37
Picture 11:	Lyric “Irony” appears in <i>Kambuja</i> 1967	39
Picture 12:	<i>Ciment Portland</i> an advertisement for a national cement company	46
Picture 13:	Sihanouk inspecting a power-plant generator in Pailin	54
Picture 14:	A picture showing Sihnauk operating a tractor	55
Picture 15:	Sihnauk’s visit to Kampong-Speu	56
Picture 16:	Samdech’s EUV team.	57
Picture 17&18:	Ceremony handing over material to provincial officials	58
Picture 19:	Sihanouk is imagined as rays of light	59

## Introduction

### GANEF0

On 25 November 1966 Cambodia held the first Asian Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEF0).<sup>1</sup> It was a prominent moment in Cambodia history when the country was placed on a world stage. The host nation, Cambodia, was joined by representatives from Saudia Arabia, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), P.R. China, P.D.R. Korea, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Laos Lebanon, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, D.R Vietnam, Yemen, Aden, Afghanistan, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Nepal, Oman, and Turkey<sup>2</sup>. For twelve days, over 2,000 athletes congregated in the capital, Phnom Penh, to compete in twenty multi-sport events<sup>3</sup> as well as participate in cultural ceremonies.<sup>4</sup> These events were organized thematically to celebrate a sense of solidarity between

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<sup>1</sup> Chris A Connolly. "The Politics of the Games of the New Emerging Forces (GANEF0)." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 9 (2012): 1311-324. Origin of the GANEF0 games started in 1962 when Indonesia refused to issue visas for athletes from Taiwan or Israeli, due to pressure from the People's Republic of China, during the Fourth Asian Games in Jakarta. This action caused the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to suspend Indonesia from participating in its game. In response, Sukarno ordered the Indonesian Olympic Committee to "quit the IOC" and to begin preparation for the first GANEF0 games the following year. The first GANEF0 was held on November 10, 1963; there were roughly 3,000 participants from 12 nations (Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, P.R. China, Egypt, Guinea, Iraq, Lebanon, Mexico, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, the USSR, and Yugoslavia) attended the game. The second GANEF0 games was planned to be held in Cairo in 1967, however due to financial issues, it never materialized. In addition to the GANEF0 games, there was talk about creating an Asian GANEF0 games which would be held in Phnom Penh at the same time as the Fifth Asian Games held in Bangkok in 1966. The decision to hold the event at the same time as the Fifth Asian Games was reached by the GANEF0 Committed, which China chaired as head, at their second meeting in September 1965 as a direct challenge to the IOC which backed the game held in Bangkok. This was a political move by Beijing to expand its influence in Southeast Asia during the Cold War, especially as it feared increasing influences by the United States and the Soviet in the region.

<sup>2</sup> National Committee for the Organization of the First Asian GANEF0 , Issuing Body. *1st GANEF0 of Asia, Phnom Penh Nov. 25th Dec. 6th 1966*. Bulletin (National Committee for the Organization of the First Asian GANEF0 (Cambodia)) ; 1. Cambodia: [publisher Not Identified], 1966. This was a brochure published by the state of Cambodia for the games in 1966. There was no publisher identified with the material but I assume it must have been approved, if not a direct involvement, from *Sangkum* in the process of its publication.

<sup>3</sup> These are essentially sporting events that we see during the Olympics. The twenty sports that are listed in the brochure of the event are athletics, rowing, badminton, basketball, boxing, cycling, fencing, football, gymnastic, weightlifting, judo, lawn tennis, westling, swimming and diving, table tennis, shooting, archery, volleyball, water polo, and yachting.

<sup>4</sup> *Kambuja*, issue 21, 1966, 45. Here we see different countries represent something different on a stage that is set up in the closing ceremony as a way to show their differences but also their commonalities. It is called the "Garden Party" and is taken on the grounds of the state Palace of *Chamka Mon*.

these new “emerging” countries against imperialism and to display their determinations in their “struggle for peace, independence and progress.”<sup>5</sup>

For Cambodia, the event presented something more. It was a rare international spotlight<sup>6</sup> since it gained independence in 1953. There was a swift and enormous preparation before the event with the construction of a new stadium that can accommodate over 1,000 guests<sup>7</sup> and an “international village” with modern buildings which include a gymnasium, an administrative building filled with offices and reception rooms, eight three-storey dormitories, and two restaurants furnished with the latest style amenities<sup>8</sup>. Hundreds of new sport officials and staff were hired and trained along with thousands of volunteers who participated in the opening ceremony.

This sentiment was captured perfectly in *Kambuja*, a state-owned magazine, that reported the event at the time. Describing the opening ceremony, the magazine wrote, “this ceremony started with a procession of the delegates from each participating country who accompanied by cheers from the crowd, marched round[sic] the stadium in alphabetical order with Cambodia, the host country, bringing up the rear.” It continued, “... lighting of the flame which was carried by a young Cambodian athlete up the monumental staircase to the urn at the top... was followed by the oath of the athletes and a song of welcome: then thousands of doves and coloured balloons were released into the air in a spectacular medley of colour.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> GANEFO of Asia. 1966, *1st GANEFO of Asia, Phnom Penh Nov. 25th Dec. 6th 1966*. Opening statement by Tep Phan, a Chairman of the National Committee of the first GANEFO.

<sup>6</sup> Another international spotlight that Cambodia was able to receive was when General de Gaulle visited Cambodia in 1966. There were many articles in *Kambuja* that described the preparation as well as the actual events during the visit. It was probably one of the most proudest and talk-about events in Sihanouk's own narrative. He wrote about it in his memoir, *Sihanouk Reminisces: World Leaders I have known*, as an “unforgettable” event and as a reason for his undying love for De Gaulle and France.

<sup>7</sup> “Sport, Militarism and Diplomacy: Training Bodies for China (1960-1966).” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 1 (2012): 30-52, 46.

<sup>8</sup> *Kambuja* issue 20, 1966, 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Kambuja* issue 21, 1966, 44.



Picture 1. The first Asian GANEFO games opening ceremony. Top right shows the starting point where the torch is anointed by an official who lights the flame and then has an *apsara* hand it over to the first runner who begins the journey from Angkor Wat through major cities all the way to the capital, Phnom Penh. Left picture shows some of the runners running through a city. Bottom left is an image of a program represented during the opening ceremony. French words read “*Angkor Wath Nous est tres cher*” which means “Angkor Wat you are very dear to us”. On the field we can see a formation by people which represent an image of Angkor Wat.

There was no shortage of excitement in the air during the game and *Kambuja* was determined to cover all of it. Starting with the lighting of the flame in Angkor Wat to the subsequent ceremonial passage of the torch beginning from Siem Reap all the way to Phnom Penh. Images of crowds gathered to cheer and reporters took pictures of athletes running along modern buildings and on newly built roads that led to the capital which was kept cleaned,

organized, and decorated prior to the opening in order to “enchanted” incoming visitors. There were news and pictures of foreign delegations arrive at Pochentong Airport<sup>10</sup> where they were greeted warmly and led to a luncheon to celebrate the games.

But the most spectacular display was during the opening ceremony.

Over twenty thousand young school children... members of Cambodian sporting organizations and the Armed Forces. Presented simultaneously, these mass movements and formations, lasting for an hour, were a unique and impressive spectacle which was enthusiastically appreciated by the crowd present. Based on the theme, ‘Cambodia advances towards Prosperity’, the placard formations, which were perfectly executed, depicted the main aspects of modern Cambodia and the progress made in its national edification. Different patterns, each remarkable in its technique and artistry, served to impress the spectators whose applause doubled when for example, they saw the flags of the 17 participating countries or the imposing towers of Angkor Wat. The final of these mass movements was the highlight of colour and form which met with a thunder of applause.<sup>11</sup>

All of which painted an exuberant picture of a newly born state that had a promise for the future.

However, these images, along with the memory of the first Asian GANEFO games, faded quietly into history.<sup>12</sup> The second GANEFO games, which had been planned to be held in Cairo, was cancelled due to financial issues. And *Kambuja* ran only for three more years before it was

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<sup>10</sup> *Kambuja* issue 7, 1965, 82. Construction of the airport started in 1954 a year after Cambodia gained its independence. Then there were only two airfields in operation which could accommodate travel from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap. Further development took place in 1956 with the founding of the Royal Air Cambodge, a joint venture between a private French company and the state of Cambodia. It upgraded and expanded the runway to concrete which spanned nearly 3,000 metres long. Additional air terminals and modern facilities were added along with new trained staff to accommodate increasing air traffic which connected Phnom Penh to Hong Kong, Hanoi, Canton, and Singapore. According to *Kambuja*, by 1965, there were 7 airlines that operated in Pochentong. They were Air France, Union des Transports Aeriens, Union of Burma Airways, Cathay Pacific, Air Vietnam, Ceskoslovenko Aerolinie, and Garuda Indonesian Airways. *Kambuja* reported 12,636 air traffic and numbers of arrival and departure exceeded 50,000. These numbers represent an increase of twelve folds since 1954.

<sup>11</sup> *Kambuja* issue 21, 1966, 44. This marvelous opening ceremony can be watched on Youtube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Qf6572nkTk&t=219s>.

<sup>12</sup> "Sport, Militarism and Diplomacy: Training Bodies for China (1960-1966)." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, 47. In the west, the United Arab Republic declined to host the second GANEFO game because it couldn't afford it. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia, who played a major role in GANEFO, turned its back on the organization after the overthrow of Sukarno and the replacement of Suharto who was pro-United States and despised any socialist-related events. While China, the main supporter of the game, was entering into the fray of the Cultural Revolution period thus could no longer manage the affair of GANEFO.

closed down in 1969<sup>13</sup> by the subsequent regime. Yet despite its short existence, the magazine gives us a glimpse into the state of progress in Cambodia at the time and enticed us with what lay ahead<sup>14</sup>.

Through visual analysis of this overlooked magazine and detail the condition in which it emerged at the time, I seek to historicize these images at a time when Cambodia was transitioning to a modern state. It was a precarious yet optimistic time when talks of many possibilities were in the air. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Cambodian modernity in the 1960s and to demonstrate that this visual representation of modernity is, not necessarily different, repeated, or assimilated but rather stands side-by-side as one form among the multiplicity of modernities that existed at the time<sup>15</sup>.

## A Visual Project

The Third World was not a place. It was a project. During the seemingly interminable battles against colonialism, the people of Africa, Asia, and Latin America dreamed of a new world. They longed for dignity above all else, but also the basic necessities of life (land, peace, and freedom).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I am not certain of the exact date when the publication ended. There are other smaller publications such as *Kambuja Cinema* that I see in the Monash online collection part of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, *Kambuja Cinema No. 21* (Monash Collections Online), accessed at <https://repository.monash.edu/items/show/2180> which show a publication date in 1970. But according to the OskiCat search database, it lists *Kambuja* series only to 15 December 1969 as the last entry. And I have chosen that date to follow for this paper.

<sup>14</sup>Jenna Grant. *Translating the Body : Medical Education in Southeast Asia*. (Singapore : NUS Press, National University of Singapore, 2017). Similar pictures and sentiment are shown in the “Cambodia Pathology” chapter of the book by Jenna Grant who discusses the development of biomedicine in Cambodia around the same time. She gives a taste of the kind of advancement and forward looking in biomedicine at this time in Cambodia history which inspires me to do a similar project by looking at another overlooked magazine, *Kambuja*.

<sup>15</sup> Judith A. N. Henchy. *Performing Modernity in the Writings of Nguyễn An Ninh and Phan Văn Hùm*. University of Washington, 2005. Here Henchy talks about how Vietnamese intellectuals were engaged in discussion of modernity with their own understanding of the term that were in conversation with the *metropole* but also among themselves.

<sup>16</sup> Vijay Prashad. *The Darker Nations : A People's History of the Third World*. (New York: New Press People's History, 2007).

Following this quote by Vijay Prashad, we can see images presented in *Kambuja* during the first Asian GANEFO were a visual manifestation of this project that attempted to link social progress to sport and politics of anti-colonialism, and as discernible evidences of change through public display of modern buildings and mass gathering. The dream of a “new world” lay in the prospect of a modern state which, not only, promised improvement to social justice, but a better living standard. *Kambuja* came into existence during a time in Cambodia history when modernization was central to its “project” of decolonization and nation-building which looked to reconfigure its former impoverished shell to fit the imagining of a modern state.

And visual presentation was among the most impactful forces of this project. After all to complete a project it requires all constituents to imagine and work harmoniously as a unit toward national “prosperity”. Just as Benedict Anderson writes in his *Imagine Communities* where he points to public display<sup>17</sup> as an important factor in the formation of nationalism, “It is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.”<sup>18</sup> Anderson points to this imagination as a “cultural system” which comes into public consciousness in a “homogenous, empty time” of modernity through a mode of, what he calls, “print capitalism”-- these are newspapers, novel, magazine, and other form of popular media-- that galvanize and unite the mass in a project to imagine a new state. So to look at *Kambuja* is to look at the visualization of that project and to make sense of how it is being projected to the public.

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<sup>17</sup> He begins his discussion on nationalism with images of the tombs of Unknown Soldiers and its ceremonial display which conjure the imagination of national pride and identities. In fact culture remains a major theme throughout his book and discussion on the formation of nationalism.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

There are plenty of commentators who see this project by the Third World<sup>19</sup> as either political or ideological movements but they often neglect the cultural and, more importantly, the aesthetic expression of this project. Political scientist Margaret Slocomb writes about the 1950s and 1960s of Cambodia as an “imperative factor” in the construction of a modern state. Periods that followed independence classified a time in Cambodia where ideological fermentation created a modern political system which subsequent regimes reacted to or shunned from it<sup>20</sup>. Even Prasad views this project as a politically motivated movement by the Third World to demand “political equality.” He locates this demand in the international institutions such as the United Nation and its ancillary UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as places where the Third World can take their demands and address their anger.

With hindsight, we know that this project did not succeed. Even the Third World movement that Prasad shows died because of nationalism, and the modern project in Cambodia was cut short due to wars that eventually wiped all traces of any progress and dreams that existed. Therefore, to look at this project purely in ideological and political tokens is to fall into the entrapment of the binary discourse of the “West versus the Rest” mentality. These thoughts are convoluted with discursive arguments which often end in political deadlock and contribute nothing new that would bring about meaningful changes to improve the livelihood for those who still live in the Third World.

For this paper I wish to approach the issue differently by seriously considering the visualization of this project as a genuine wish from leaders of the Third World to attempt to bring

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<sup>19</sup> I have chosen to use the term “Third World” for this paper because it is the language that was used at the time and was employed by leaders of the Third World in their attempt to combat inequality. To substitute “Third World” with other terms such as “the Global South ” or “developing countries’ ”, I believe, is only to circumvent the difficulty with which those countries of the Third World face by choosing alternative terms to describe their challenges. Therefore, I have chosen to keep the term as it was used by leaders of the Third World themselves in their speeches and statements as a reflection of its time.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Slocomb. “The Nature and Role of Ideology in the Modern Cambodian State.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore)*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2006, 378.

about a prominent change. This paper argues that this visual expression is not just a sign of resistance but a unique approach that attempts to deal with inequality in an aesthetic form. And it does so through this process that I call “paste-up” modernity. A section of this paper is called “paste-up modernity” where I will outline this concept and discuss its content which stems from postcolonial theory of *mimicry*.

The goal of this paper is to analyse a prominent magazine in Cambodia, *Kambuja*, in order to understand its meaning and function as part of the Third World visual representation of its dream to depict a better world. This visual project represents -- especially toward the end of the 1960s -- images that symbolize an optimistic view in the face of increasing distress in Southeast Asia at the dawn of the Second Indochina War i.e. the Vietnam War. Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, unable to change the mounting force which was heading toward disaster, this visual project sought to re-contextualize reality in an optimistic view.

More importantly, the paper wishes to give credence to this project which was remembered by those who lived through the period as a meaningful experiment. People often refer to the 1960s as the “Golden Age” of Cambodia<sup>21</sup>. And it was not far from the truth. My mother remembered this time living in the province of Battambang as a profound period in her life. It was a time when people were happy and content with what they had. People talked about a brighter future and genuinely believed in the modernization project that appeared on the pages of *Kambuja*. Maybe the solution to political impasse and ideological backtracking that attempt to deal with issues in the Third World is an injection of an artistic dose that expresses the “project” as an inspirational movement.

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<sup>21</sup> Siti Galang Keo. *Writing the Postcolonial City: Phnom Penh and Modernity during Sangkum Reastr Niyum, 1955–1970*, 2019. Also see Milton Osborne. *Phnom Penh A Cultural History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Especially the “good year” in chapter 1.

Here if I may evoke an image in a speech by Sukarno during the first Asian-African Conference in 1955, also known as the first Bandung Conference, which emphasized the future that imagined an alternative world with which the Third World hoped to bring about as part of their aspiration to make change to the injustice that they experienced during the colonial period.

Nations, States, have awoken from a sleep of centuries. The passive people have gone, the outward tranquility has made place for struggle and activity. Irresistible forces have swept the two continents. The mental, spiritual and political face of the whole world has been changed, and the process is still not complete. There are new conditions, new concepts, new problems, new ideals abroad in the world. Hurricanes of national awakening and reawakening have swept over the land, shaking it, changing it, changing it for the better... In your deliberations, Sisters and Brothers, I beg of you, do not be guided by these fears, because fear is an acid which etches man's actions into curious patterns. Be guided by hopes and determination, be guided by ideals, and, yes, be guided by dreams!<sup>22</sup>

## **Kambuja Magazine**

In 1965, *Kambuja Monthly Illustrated Review*, an English-French magazine was founded by the state of Cambodia to inform foreigners about its daily affairs. *Kambuja* was an extension of the local media<sup>23</sup> which hitherto was primarily written in Khmer thus oriented to local consumptions and inaccessible to outsiders. In its opening forward, *Kambuja* claimed to reach foreign readers and inform them of the “reality” of Cambodia as “accurate” and “straightforward” as possible. And being one of a handful magazine written in foreign

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<sup>22</sup> George McTurnan Kahin. *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955*. (New York: Cornell University Press 1956), 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Kambuja* issue 1, 1. In the forward, *Kambuja* claims that its publication is a “substitute” to “*Cambodia Today*”, also known as *Cambodge D’aujourd’hui*, which ended in September 1963. And while *Cambodge D’aujourd’hui* is written in French, *Kambuja*, on contrary, is written in English and functions as a “purely governmental and non-commercial publication.” Another aspect of the magazine is that it is a magazine founded by “young Khmer elites” with the collaboration of their foreign friends who help produce most of the articles published in *Kambuja*. According to Luoth Yin, who lived and worked at the time, there were many foreign media, however the majority of them were written in French (such as *le Sangkum or Réalité Cambogienne*). There was also a Soviet-Khmer the *Revue* which Jenna Grant writes extensively about in the book *Translating the Body*.

languages<sup>24</sup>, *Kambuja* functioned as a prominent media which foreigners at the time could read about Cambodia. Articles co-authored by Cambodian, French, and English introduced a general overview of cities and towns as well as described the “rich and varied” features of the country.

Being outward looking, *Kambuja* was also central to internal discourse among Cambodian elites and intellectuals. A poet, novelist, and public intellectual, Luoth Yin<sup>25</sup>, remembered the magazine as a source of debate among local politicians, students, and journalists who were engaged in politics and social issues at the time. He talked fondly of the unique position of the magazine, to the best of his knowledge, as the only English written material and praised the beautiful photographs and illustrations of Cambodia shown in the magazine. Although, in his opinion, the magazine was elitist in tone and intended as a political tool to legitimize the state and countered foreign criticisms with their own colonial language; despite such views, he still thought of the magazine as a great achievement and an important historical asset to Cambodia. There were talks about democracy, nationalism, and modernity mixed with discussions of traditions, culture, and religion. And *Kambuja* expressed the visual manifestation of those ideas and thoughts in a public forum.

More importantly, the founding of the magazine coincided with the end of a five-year-plan launched by the state from 1960 to 1966<sup>26</sup> to improve every sector of the country.

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<sup>24</sup> To the best of my knowledge, I only know four other foreign media that operated in Cambodia at the time. All of them were either owned, or associated, with *Sangkum*. They were *Réalité*, *Le Sangkum*, *Neak Cheat Niyum* and *the Revue*; the former two used French while the middle was written in Khmer with French editorial and the latter was written in French by Cambodian and Soviet authors.

<sup>25</sup> Luoth Yin is a poet, novelist, public intellectual, lecturer, and community leader who I am fortunate enough to interview for this paper. He was a law student and worked for a private publishing company in Cambodia in the 1970s. His experience and expertise have helped me so much with my understanding of Cambodia at the time.

<sup>26</sup> Donald P. Whitaker, United States. Department of the Army, and American University. Foreign Area Studies. *Area Handbook for the Khmer Republic (Cambodia)*. United States. Department of the Army. Pamphlet ; No. 550-50. Washington: For Sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1973. The five-year-plan started in 1960 by the state of Cambodia to develop more domestic resources than the previous two-year plan in 1956 and 1957 which relied heavily on foreign aids and assistance. The US contributed 62 percent to the plan. The plan was interrupted in 1963 when Sihanouk terminated relations with the US which caused stagnation to the plan. Thus, the state decided to allow additional two years

This came two years after Cambodia ended diplomatic relations with the United States<sup>27</sup> and committed to a policy of “self-reliance” which involved the nationalization of both public and private spheres. *Kambuja* played a vital part to illustrate the ability of the state to project itself as politically and economically stable; moreover, it wanted to show that Cambodia had achieved a state of self-sufficiency.

The magazine comprises illustrative articles, reviews, monthly reports, and essays which are completed with photographs, maps, diagrams, and chart-tables showing developments throughout the country. Pictures ranging from opening new factories and plants to numerous constructions of roads, ports, and dams are a constant theme which expresses an intention to expand and optimize every part of the country to its optimal capacity. In doing so, *Kambuja* presented images of Cambodia as a striving modern state with robust industry and rapid developments. *Kambuja* had ambition to showcase how the country was undergoing a transformation from a secondary fulcrum within Indochina<sup>28</sup> to a hub full of vigorous activities and developments.

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(1965 and 1966) for the plan to complete. A second five-year plan was discussed, and planned to start in 1967, but initiated in 1968 instead. For more detail see chapter 11 of the book on “Character and Structure of The Economy” in Cambodia in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>27</sup> Cambodia gained its independence in 1954 after a century of subjugation under French colonialism. And as a newly found state with only agriculture as means of production, Cambodia relied heavily on foreign aid and protection as it looked to modernize itself. This was done through US aid. Starting from the late 1950s, as the Cold War intensified, the US increased its involvement in Southeast Asia by propping anti-communist regimes with financial aid. And Cambodia was a beneficiary of this policy. From 1954 onward to the early 1960s, Cambodia witnessed a steroid boom in terms of improved infrastructure and economic prosperity. But this exuberance was cut short in 1963 when Sihanouk decided to end relations with the US. His reasoning was the fear of increased US military activities along the Cambodian-Vietnamese borders and his commitment to keep Cambodia a “neutral” country to steer away from the Cold War conflict. However, the end of US aid heralded the end of economic prosperity and signaled a new beginning for Cambodia to stand on its own as a sovereign state.

<sup>28</sup> Siti Keo writes about this in the introduction part of her dissertation; it is also backed by testimonies of other historians of Cambodia. Certainly, both Osborn and Chandler acknowledge such facts that Cambodia and Laos were always a secondary thought to French’s ambition when it created Indochina in 1887. This disparate attention between these colonies is highlighted in the impoverished infrastructure and governmental oversight that exist in Cambodia and Laos. And in many ways, it was used by Sihanouk in his political rhetoric as one of the reasons why he wanted to construct so many schools, roads, hospitals etc. in order to catch up with the rest of the world.

*Kambuja* also aimed beyond the mere materialistic transformation to include advancement in social progress such as education, arts, culture, and public health. Beside the economic and political goals, *Kambuja* represented a cultural project that looks to improve and embolden its citizenry with moral rectitude. Reports of educational programs, advancement in social welfare, and openings and expansions of new medical facilities are regularly highlighted in the magazine. And the reinforcement of this imaginary resides in pictures of the mass who are being portrayed as more healthy, educated, and spiritually lifted to a zealous state of happiness and are committed to the “project” of building a modern Cambodian state.

While these images, on one hand, presented a propagandistic depiction of reality; they are also complex visual presentations that try to wrestle with ideas of identity, sovereignty, and progress. Furthermore, they are counter-aesthetic representations that conflate different visual elements together. Tradition and modernity is co-constructed in this visual presentation. Techniques of placing images of Angkor Wat with Olympic runners which simultaneously symbolize that Cambodia is not just looking forward but turns back to glory of the past as a beacon of “prosperity”. Pictures of modern machines are placed side-by-side with Khmer workers to present material achievement equivalent to any other progress; scientific methods along with professional language are used to overcome the inferiority complex of the “otherness” that Frantz Fanon talks about in his analysis how people of the Third World experience in the post-colonial<sup>29</sup> condition. In sum, these images are not simply presenting a socialist utopia<sup>30</sup>. They are a gradient image of modernity which weave together ideas of tradition and progress,

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<sup>29</sup> Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991) Specifically in chapter one when he talks about the black inferiority complex and language.

<sup>30</sup> This brings up Edward Bellamy’s book *Looking Backward* a kind of socialist utopian society which for the most part ditches traditional sense of identity and embraces merely the future.

past and present, private and public to form a visual presentation I call “paste-up” modernity and which I will discuss further below.

Theoretically it is a discourse of post-colonialism which represents an alternative approach to modernity. And here I follow what Homi Bhabha writes about modernity in the Third World as, “such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate’, and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity.”<sup>31</sup> And it is in this ability to “reinscribe” their identities to something new and beyond what is inscribed to them that the Third World conjures up a visual rendition of modernity that is “almost the same, but not quite.” And that idea of “almost the same” is wrapped in a concept that Bhabha calls *mimicry*. It is a hybridity of what is modern and indigenious and represents the repeated visual “disavowal” that the Third World must continuously bring forth in their political speeches, with their formation of statecraft, and in their stylistic and aesthetic expression which often breakdown the prescriptive borders of their “authentic” identity and the “received” tradition<sup>32</sup>. And it is in this concept of *mimicry* that I start my discussion on paste-up modernity.

## Paste-up Modernity

Bhabha writes about *mimicry* as the following:

Mimicry represents an ironic compromise. If I may adapt Samuel Weber’s formulation of the marginalization vision of castration, then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is *almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its

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<sup>31</sup> Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (Bhabha 2004:122)

*Ambivalence* is central to the understanding of *mimicry* as an act of mimicking dominant culture by the subverted culture as a “strategy” to expose and “rupture” the normalization of power structure established by colonial rule. Bhabha locates this *ambivalence* in the use of equivocal language by Enlightenment intellectualists, such as John Locke, who, on one hand, talk about slavery as “legitimate form of ownership”, and on the other, protest against it as “trope of an intolerable, illegitimate exercise of power.” So there exists a “split” understanding of liberty. If liberty happens for a white colonist then that liberty is “legitimate” and thus should be guarded with forces of justice and if needed forces of arms. However, if the same liberty is uttered by the black or brown subjects then it is “illegitimate” and trespasses the white man’s right to his property. And when it comes to the discourse around progress and modernity, the language of “legitimate” and “illegitimate” is replaced by a category of “appropriate” and “inappropriate”. So what can be incorporated as progress by the indigenous culture is judged based on a rubric of “appropriate” adaptation of a civilized society which dispenses its knowledge and power through this *ambivalent* or “split” language that contains in it a racialized undertone.

Therefore the act of *mimicry* by the colonial subjects of their former “masters” is described, by Bhabha, not as a wish to imitate but rather a “desire” for reform and to subvert the power structure of this “inappropriate” adaptation of progress through the act of “continually produce its slippage, its excess,[and] its difference”. In other words, it is a process by which the indigenous repeatedly re-edit and re-paste images of modernity with tradition as it negotiates its position from inappropriately adopting foreign elements to appropriately representing the “authentic” self.

Following this thinking, I define paste-up as a process by which marginalized cultures incorporate the dominant culture by means of mimicking and repeating their “otherness” to produce a different visualization that counter the stereotypical image of them. However, unlike *mimicry*, paste-up emphasizes the adoption of dominant culture as an act of adding on different identities to pre-existing identity without distinction of hierarchy: Cambodia adopted Hinduism and Buddhism from India before the coming of French, hence the embracing of a new culture that only mirrors the heterogeneous tradition of Cambodia which incorporate foreign elements as a natural progression part of self expression and aesthetic augmentation.

And more importantly, paste-up does not distinguish any boundary between these different cultures and only sees them as equal and additional to itself. It is similar to the act when one is doing a pasting art of two separate pictures on a blank piece of paper to convey a message. In the mind of the image maker, he or she sees two pictures with discrete aesthetic values which can be used to make a united message by placing them side-by-side. And this led me to the visualization element of paste-up.

I begin by considering the technical term “paste-up”. It is a method that predates the computerized editing software with which publication companies use to create publishing pages. Before the advent of computers, editing was done by artists who would literally “cut and paste” sections of the type and carefully rearrange them in columns that layout the structure of the editorials. Working with scalpels and scissors, papers, and glue, the paste-up artists organize printout strips on a board which allow the artist to create multiple columns by adding or removing the lettering. Once the layout is completed, the board is placed on an easel and photographed to create a negative, which then gets turned into a printing plate. While the typographical elements are done by typesetters, the aesthetic appeal of the final product is

determined by the paste-up artists who put in the finishing touch. This whole process is reminiscent of collage art.

Collage art is a process by which the artist uses to explore “the composition and design” of an artwork<sup>33</sup>. It gives the artist the liberty to “arrange and rearrange the compositional elements” of an artwork until he or she is satisfied with the compositions. Working in this way, it encourages the artist to take a “fresh look” at art making. The artist learns to separate the “mundane” and everyday function of an object and to give it a “new image.” In *Collage and Found Art*, Meilach Dona gives a great example of how to think about collage art by giving an example of a piece of paper. “It is not limited to being a flat rectangle for writing or wrapping. Crumpled, it is a mass or irregular plane with interacting facets of lights and shadow, shallowness and depth. Torn or stripped it expresses vigorous direction and motion.”<sup>34</sup> Thus the work of a collage artist is to evoke the “beauty form and the surface of everyday objects”<sup>35</sup> which on the immediate appearance have nothing to do with arts yet with the keen eyes of an artist, these objects transform into an “unexpected” artwork. The artist, by stripping away the familiarity of an object from its expected place and re-paste it into “new surroundings and in unexpected, ironic combinations, opens our eyes to the excitement and beauty in all forms.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, Dona concludes that “each illustration is a stimulating combination of ideas, experiences, and techniques. They are represented as sources of inspiration and as aids to develop an awareness of the aesthetic potentials inherent in the most commonplace materials and objects.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dona Z. Meilach and Ten Hoor, Elvie. *Collage and Found Art*. (New York: Reinhold Pub. Corp., 1964).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

I have chosen the term “paste-up” because what I see on the pages of *Kambuja* is an accumulation of these two processes. Photographs, lyrics, poems, and advertising drawings are constructed by paste-up artists who use collage art to assemble their images. Their aesthetic expressions summon, for me, images of a collaborative effort between these artists who work side-by-side to produce a visualization that tries to convey the “rich and varied” aspects of Cambodian modernity.

I use this concept as the basis of my visual analysis to examine images in *Kambuja*. It is a nascent concept that I have developed for this paper and not at all matured to the level of a theory; however, I believe it to be a useful concept in my analysis, especially in thinking about the hybrid nature of the magazine.

## Chapter 1

### Angkor Nation, A Temporal Paste-up

In every project of nation-building there seems to be a tendency to look to the future while simultaneously back to the past. This conundrum of temporal yearning can be seen during De Gaulle's visit to Cambodia in 1966. In a speech given at his arrival in Phnom Penh, he opened with how he noticed changes that were taking place in Cambodia and lamented the fact that he would not be able to experience all of it during his short visit. Commenting on the progress of the country, De Gaulle alluded to the past as juxtaposition to its contemporary success. "However, the fact is that the monuments of her ancient civilization stand side by side with modern achievements without the efficiency of the latter suffering nor the majesty of the former diminishing. This is your success as a nation."<sup>38</sup> Progress of a former colonial state was often viewed in this light. Any success of the present was compared to its former glory. But why did foreigners see Cambodia in this fashion? And why was the "monument", which refers to Angkor Wat, often associated with Cambodia and epitomized its race. Cambodia seemed to exist in this temporal dualism of past-and-present as it tries to move forward.

And more importantly, this nostalgia was shared with Cambodian themselves. Cambodian nationalist in the post-colonial period attempted to build a new nation that collapsed the past with the present. Son Ngoc Thanh, a leading nationalist in the 1940s, formed the first national newspaper under the name *Nagara Vetta* which was a Sangkrit translation of the name Angkor Wat. And Pol Pot infamously attempted to take Cambodia back to the past by figuratively destroying the present. After taking over the state of Cambodia in 1975, through a brutal civil war, Pol Pot relocated the population out of cities and to the countryside where they

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<sup>38</sup> *Kambuja* issue 18, 1966, 77.

were forced to dig canals and moats in order to transform the landscape of Cambodia back to the Angkor period. People who bore signs of bourgeoisie such as wearing glasses or knowing how to read and write foreign language were eliminated or re-educated to fit this new vision of a nation that placed side by side images of moving backward as a way to move forward. There is a temporal entrapment from which Cambodia cannot escape from. A nostalgia that paste-up the past with the present and a longing for by-gone glory as part of nation-building.

To undo these spatial and temporal entrapments inscribed by the iconography of “Angkor Wat” in the visual production of nation-building, I begin by thinking how this image comes into the public consciousness by locating its origin during the colonial period. I begin this analysis in the colonial period because of its role in affecting the formation of a modern state. It has the ripple effect that leaves apparent scars in former colonial states. Crucially, it is central to my paste-up argument, which at the core, argue that the combination of colonial and indigeneous ideas coalesce in this fluid form to create a visualization of past-and-present that define the temporal hybridity that Cambodia finds itself in.

### **Coming into Foreign Consciousness**

In Milton Osborn’s book *Phnom Penh*, he writes how Angkor Wat was “discovered” by a Frenchman Henri Mouhot in 1859-60<sup>39</sup> who wrote passionately about the place. Mouhot conjured Angkor Wat as a mystical and beautiful place beyond description. In fact, according to Osborn, before Mouhot’s discovery, Europeans thought of Angkor Wat as being built by “Alexander the Great or the Romans” or even by the “Jews” whom they believed to be numerous in China.<sup>40</sup> While Mouhot died in Indochina during one of his excursions, his account of the

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<sup>39</sup> Osborn, *Phnom Penh: A Cultural History*, 47.

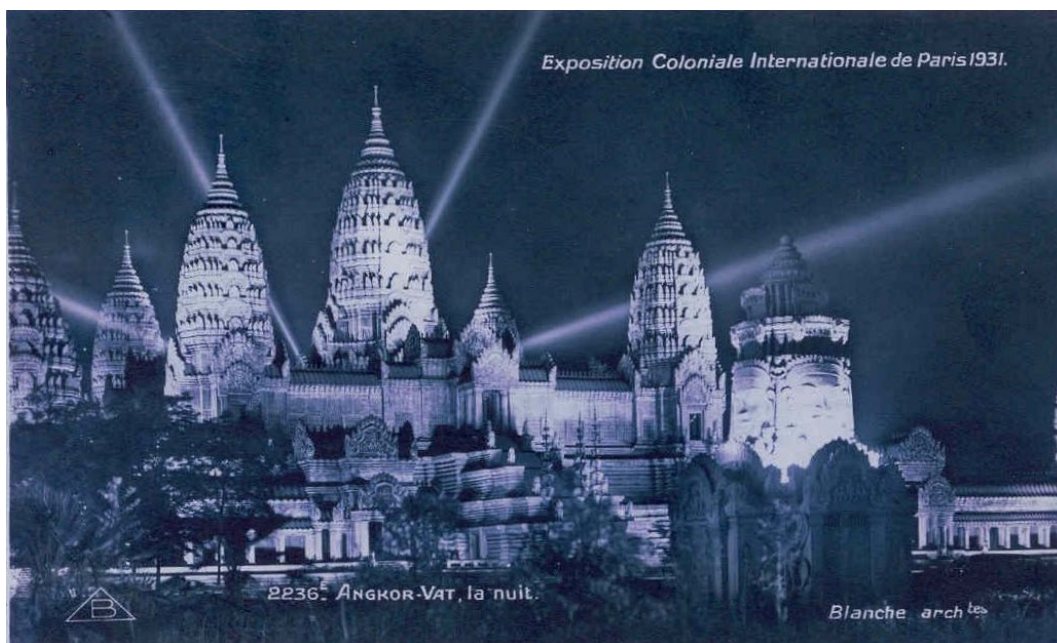
<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

temple captured people's imagination and brought Angkor Wat into the public attention. When the French colonized Cambodia in 1863, one of its cultural projects was to establish an institution that would study, collect, and bring back this “forgotten” civilization (a project that completely ignored the fact that there were still Cambodians living in and around the sanctuaries at those times).

The École-française d'Extrême-Orient or the French School of the Far East was established in 1898 for such a task. With its army of archaeologists and museologists, the institution was able to conjure an image of Cambodian past that captivated the World. It created a desire for Angkor Wat, and more importantly, it created a nostalgia for by-gone glory. For the French it was the Napoleon Bonaparte time or the monarchical period of the Louis-kings which symbolize when French culture and power dominated the European continent. Therefore, the institution was found not only as an objective mission to recover a lost past for Cambodia but it was constructed as a colonial wishful dream for past glory through the projection of its colonial “jewel” and the display of such the iconographic image of Angkor Wat. It is what Panivong Norindr calls the “phantasmatic” of the people of Indochina. This nostalgia took on as a discourse of legitimacy which the French used to justify its exploitative action over Cambodia in this *ambiguous* language of recovering and preserving the past, which the indigenous themselves supposedly neglected. It was used to justify the protected state which argued that Cambodians were not mature enough to take care of their own past and needed guidance from the French. And moreover this nostalgia manifested in the public imagination that exoticize the place and its people. Norindr points to the Exposition Coloniale Internationale exhibition of Paris in 1931 as

the apotheosis of this conjuration in which the French built an entire replica of Angkor Wat in order to show the fullest of its glory and its allure<sup>41</sup>.

This paper argues that the 1931 replica of Angkor Wat was a “paste-up” exhibition which combined the French fetish for past glory with its newly found objectified Angkor Wat -- as icon the French used in their position of power to wrest from their colonial subjects, who had to surrender not only this material possession, but the past is represented. The exhibition was a great success. It projected the French as a powerful colonial ruler. And it was done through the visual production that took on an orchestration of the public imagination in the form of the World’s Fair exhibition.



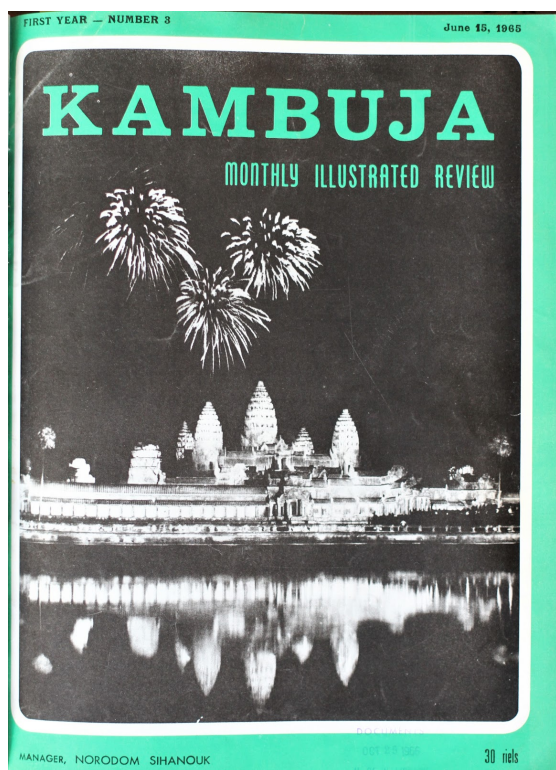
Picture 2: Exposition Coloniale Internationale exhibition of Paris in 1931.

Furthermore, the exhibition introduced Cambodia to the world in this antiquarian image which enticed the public imagination of Cambodia as being somehow associated with Angkor Wat, and

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<sup>41</sup> Panivong Norindr. *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996)

only with Angkor Wat. As a result this romanticized image does two things, especially in the context of public imagination. One, it consolidates the image of Cambodia as existing in the past. As a static, “changeless” oriental entity, that always resides in the past. Two, it mystifies Cambodians as the allure of exoticism. Yet, within this public image, it resides as a double-edge effect. For the French, this image arouses the allure of the past and excites the colonists in a feverish act to preserve it; however, for the Cambodian nationalist this image proves as a sign that Cambodia is a striving country that once was powerful and magnificent. Above all else, the image stands for the nationalist a symbol of sovereignty and self-empowerment. So it is not surprising that the image of Angkor was adopted by the Cambodian nationalists during their fight for independence and in subsequent nation-building projects. Penny Edwards points this out in her book *Cambodge* where this image was noticeable for its frequency in the first national newspaper *Negara Vetta* where images of Angkor Wat percolated around discourse of independence and tradition.



Picture 3: Cover of *Kambuja Review* magazine 1965.

But this image of Angkor Wat reached its apotheosis during the 1960s with the publication of *Kambuja* where it served as a public exhibition to demonstrate the modernization project of the state of Cambodia. In many ways, images in *Kambuja* represented a talk-back visual presentation that adopted what was presented during the World's Fair in a vernacular form which wrestle with Cambodia's position, now it found itself in, after it gained independence, as a sovereign state.

And this entrapment of past-and-present used to conjure in the public imagination can be seen in *Kambuja* as it tries to renegotiate its former image as a subject of colonialism to a sovereign and modern state. Now I return to De Gaulle's statement about "ancient" civilization as being standing "side-by-side" with modernity. The transformation that De Gaulle saw was this spatial-temporal paste-up of Cambodian antiquity to a modern state with a new set of ideas and interests with which it looked to show to the world. It is an oxymoron which is majestically laid

out in the forward of the magazine as one of its primary objectives to illustrate the “modern and eternal”<sup>42</sup> side of Cambodia.

To unpack, I will examine this strange juxtaposition as a theme of change. Here I use the term change as both literal and symbolic change. The former is quite obvious in its function as to indicate a materialistic paste-up of different things together. The latter holds a more complex form of paste-up which expresses itself in an aesthetic and cultural form. It represents the interpenetration of ideas and thoughts that permeated in the minds of those of the post-colonial period. Penny Edwards refers to this as a “dynamic intersection of European and indigenous worldviews”<sup>43</sup> which clash, mimic, and coalesce to form an assemblage of *Cambodge* identity.

In what follows, I explore two kinds of paste-up within an image/representation: physical transformation and linguistic juxtaposition. Pictures of changing infrastructure of cities and towns document material transformation of the nation. Juxtaposition of foreign words found in advertisements and lyrics enact modern Cambodia as a “contact zone” of Khmer and the foreign<sup>44</sup>.

In the last part of the paper I will show change as a symbolic paste-up that *Kambuja* attempts to promote in its visualization. The central character in this section is Sihanouk. I choose Sihanouk because he symbolizes modernity as the main character of the magazine, and is the leading historical actor in the real-life project of modernizing Cambodia in the 1960s. I argue that by presenting pictures of him as being omnipresent, *Kambuja* is putting forth an image of a leader who is symbolically turning into a machine. A machine that never sleeps or rest and has only one function which is to modernize Cambodia with his team of machines i.e the *Sangkum*.

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<sup>42</sup> *Kambuja* issue 1, 1965, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Penny Edwards. *Cambodge : The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes : Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (New York: Routledge, 1992).

## Chapter 2

### A Material Change Toward Modernity

In the first edition of “the Country Life”<sup>45</sup>, *Kambuja* ran an article about a town called “Anlong Romiet”. A small town located 15 miles southwest of the capital, Phnom Penh, with a meager population of 1,177 heads and its “ancient stupas” surrounded by thick forest. This place was one among many others that was neglected during colonial time. However, since the start of the state development plan (1960-1966) the town had changed dramatically. Within just a four year span, the town had undergone a transformation from an “old village with ramshackle houses” to a “modern centre” where the living condition of the people was “by no means inferior” to any other town comparable to a modern village. It had its own “public room, a medical consultation room, a sanitary block, a cooperative store with a sales-room, children’s play-ground,[and] a sports ground.” And rigorous construction was done to connect the town to the rest of the country with roads that can support modern traffic. Furthermore, technicians were sent to improve traditional methods of rice growing to meet a standardized system which promises greater yield. The traditional way of palm sugar making was improved with a new method that organized the work force in a structural manner thus optimizing production. An informational centre was built to help educate the population on how to adopt modern living with both visual and audible illustrations such as “photography, posters, radio programs and cinema.” It was a great achievement and a public display of how Cambodia was becoming more modern,

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<sup>45</sup> *Kambuja* issue 1, 1965, 37. “Country life” is one of the multiple series that *Sangkum* inserts throughout the magazine to show its achievements and other experimental projects that it has undertaken. It features aspects of Cambodia cultural and pastoral life of the rural populations, towns, or agricultural projects that the state has launched.

and it was something that *Kambuja* would repeatedly show until the end of its publication in 1969.



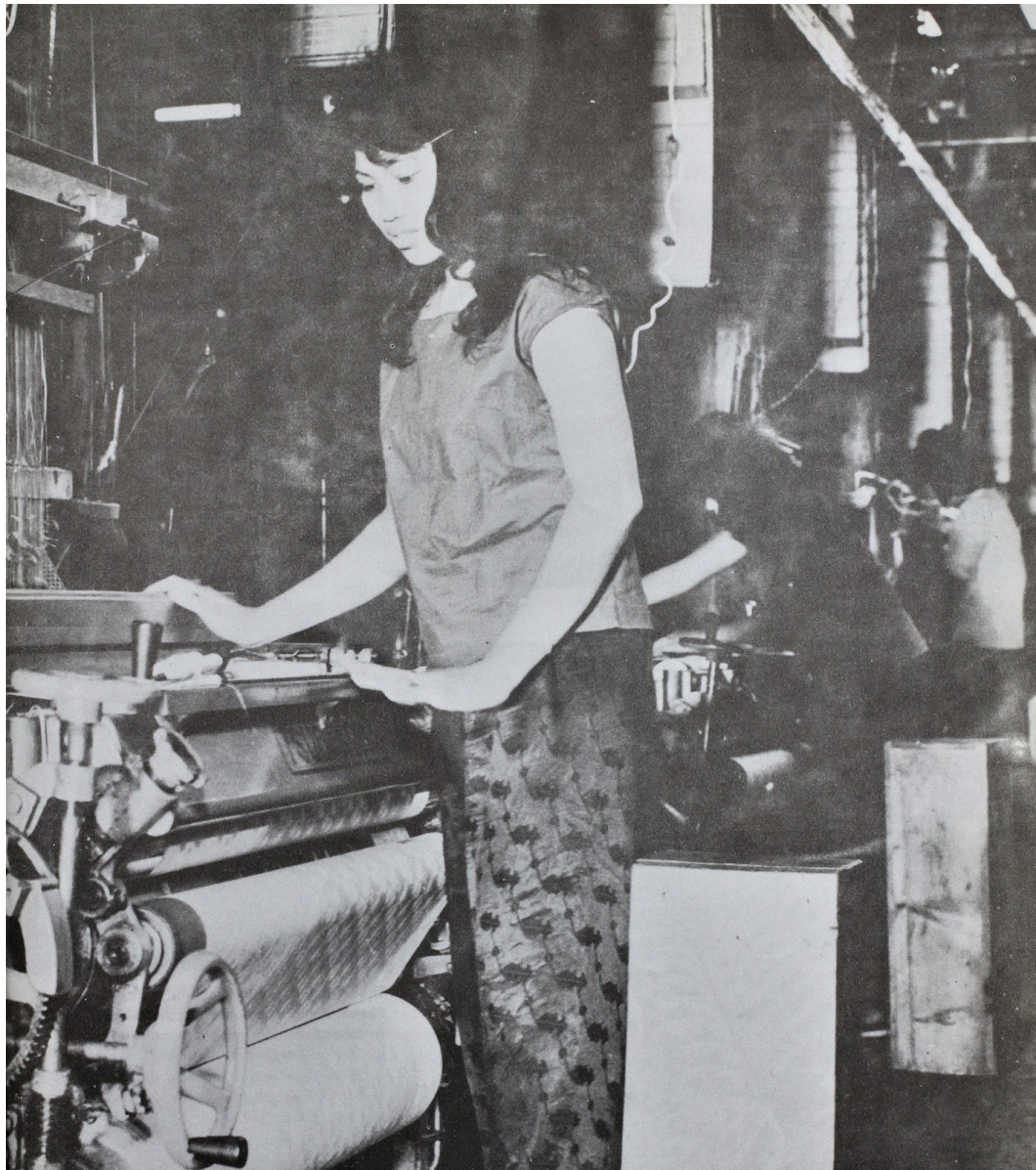
Picture 4: View of the village “Anlong Romiet”. The name Anlong is translated to “abyss” and Romiet is “saffron”, so the name means “saffron abyss”. Legend has it that a Javanese junk heavily loaded with saffron sank in this “abyss” which is now the narrow pond near the local monastery.

This story represented a great example of how *Kambuja* was able to construct an image of change that was taking place throughout the country. And this was done through a state sponsorship program which was part of its goal to project an image that would convince the public of its ability to bring about tangible changes. Specifically, material changes.

It is the first step to paste-up in which the imagining in *Kambuja* resists a typical depiction of the Third World by placing side-by-side images of modern materials next to the body of the indigenous as literally and symbolically placing modernity next to them. This visual juxtaposition of tradition and modernity symbolizes the change that can be observed in the magazine pictorial depiction of Khmer workers. For instance, the portraying of a young

Cambodian worker in traditional clothing next to a sewing machine in picture 5 is to indicate a paste-up between tradition and modern material. In this picture, the young woman appears in a beautiful silk shirt and traditional sarong is posed next to a machine. Her well-combed hair is neatly spread to the side exposing her face. And in an elegant posture, she reaches out and touches the machine. Here is where paste-up appears at its most fundamental form: which is the appearance of the indigenous working body next to modern apparatus.

I bring up this simple imagery crucially to show that progress in the Third World is often measured in this physical change. A state is determined to be modern because it has industrial machines, concrete buildings, metal bridges, advanced power-plants, and other material developments. It is part of the promise of modernity, which beside social justice, looks to bring about material change. Parallel to *mimicry*, this paste-up is an iteration of modernity that the Third World must repeatedly perform in public displays as part of their imagining of a new world. Images of this sort are transformed into opening new schools, hospitals, and roads that are paste-up with tropical landscapes and indigenous bodies to indicate a change. A sign of modernity is in the possession of material goods. It is in the cutting and pasting of the flesh of the indigenous and placing it next to modern materials. Thus, an image of a Cambodian worker operating a machine signifies progress, and importantly, it represents a material change that is tangible in form.



Picture 5: A young Cambodian woman appears in traditional clothes next to an industrial sewing machine.

### **Modern cities and towns with tradition in mind.**

The next place to look for this material change is in the paste-up of physical transformation that manifests in the infrastructure developments as the state of Cambodia transitions to a modern state. In this section, I examine how *Kambuja* conjures a visual presentation of change in the infrastructure developments which combine signs of modernity

with tradition. It represents the next step of paste-up with which *Kambuja* attempts to illustrate Cambodia as a modern state in the use of numbers, maps, city landscapes, and other signs of modernity which start in Phnom Penh and radiate out to the rest of the country.

Phnom Penh plays an important role in *Kambuja* visual presentation of Cambodian modernity. The capital is used symbolically, by the magazine, as the center of governmental operation and where important cultural events and political decisions are made. Headlines about state visits by foreign leaders to Phnom Penh demonstrate the political significance of the city on the world stage. Important rituals and major festivals such as the Water Festival and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony are held in the capital. Moreover, in the context of public display, the capital is portrayed as the heart of the nation and as a place through which the visage of the country is projected to the public. For instance, during the First Asian GANEFO games, Phnom Penh was highlighted as the center of attention. It was the host of the first international sporting event and the face of Cambodia. Image of modernity was evoked in the descriptions of the city as clean and organized with long “boulevards and broad avenues”<sup>46</sup> lined with “mango-trees and tamarind-tree” and modern architectural structures. The numerous municipalities, the “countless fountains, the magnificent Independence Monument which rears its immense rose-colored tower in the southern part of the town, the splendid stadium, the hospitals, the students’ hostels, the university faculties”<sup>47</sup> all of which gave Phnom Penh the “hallmark” of a modern city with immense beauty and charm. Therefore the capital is an ample place to start examining *Kambuja*’s portrayal of modernity.

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<sup>46</sup> GANEFO of Asia. *1st GANEFO of Asia, Phnom Penh Nov. 25th Dec. 6th 1966.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

The article “Phnom Penh: City of Broad Avenues, Trees and Flowers,”<sup>48</sup> from the first issue of the magazine, shows the extent to which the city has transformed within a short period after its independence. Writing about the state’s project to reclaim unused parts by the waterfront, the article illustrates the immensity of change in a technical voice as “hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of earth were used to fill in low-lying areas, and new quarters sprung up on this recovered swampland....366 kilometres of new streets were laid out(there had been only some 75 kms previously) of which almost 30kms were macadamized and asphalted.”<sup>49</sup>“300 kilometers”of more cleared space for the installation of water-mains is added along with additional “150,000 m<sup>2</sup>” of land for parks and gardens.

New towns and districts emerge like mushrooms<sup>50</sup> out of these cleared places and extend the urban landscapes “to the North and, more particularly, to the West and South-West, where new districts arose and formed an ancillary town, attached to the old Phnom Penh.”<sup>51</sup>As a result, the built-up area of the city doubles in size from “6,538,200 m<sup>2</sup>” to “15,382,500 m<sup>2</sup>” within just “a year or two”. And this “gigantic effort” is done to “improve the appearance” of the city from a “sleepy provincial capital” to “one of the most attractive cities in the Orient[sic]” where once “wooden houses raised on piles... can now boast of broad avenues, many-storied blocks of flats and modern government buildings”. Here we see signs of modernity appear in the use of a technical voice that paste-up numbers with the physical change of the city landscapes. Modernity as it seems, through this visual projection, emerges out of numerical representation.

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<sup>48</sup> *Kambuja* issue 1, 1965. Pg. 43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> The image of cities and towns sprung up like mushrooms is mentioned in one of the articles from *Kambuja* issue 7, 1965, 77. The association of mushrooms to emerging cities is a great image and one that I feel adequately used by the author to describe the visual changes, which I also see in pictures and illustrations of the magazine, that were taking place in Cambodia at the time.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

And this display of modernity that takes on the iteration of numbers is best illustrated in another article about a small experimental “cooperative industries”<sup>52</sup> which numbers are imbued in the minds of the writer.

“In 1964 the two cooperative of Prek Phneou and Russey Kéo produced 38,921 pieces of soap, or 17,514 tons. As the total production of soap in Cambodia is 624 tons, this represents 3% of national production. During the first half of 1965, the two production cooperatives manufactured 46,261 pieces which makes about 90,000 pieces or 40 tons up to the end of the year, that is more than double[of] last year’s output.... Chalk is produced by the Cooperatives of Tuol Kork and Russey Kéo, each of which has 2 moulds. Production in 1964 was 171,887 boxes and as national production was 240,000 boxes, the two cooperatives must be credited with 70 per cent. During the first quarter of this year, production reached 104,327 boxes or 17,773 tons compared with 90 tons produced by the private sector during the same period.”<sup>53</sup>

A palpable sense of momentous achievement is expressed in this technical voice and with numerical reference which are in themselves the location of modernity is felt in the paste-up between the literal images of numbers and the visual symbolism of robust activities of Khmer workers. Numbers plus Khmer workers equal modernity.

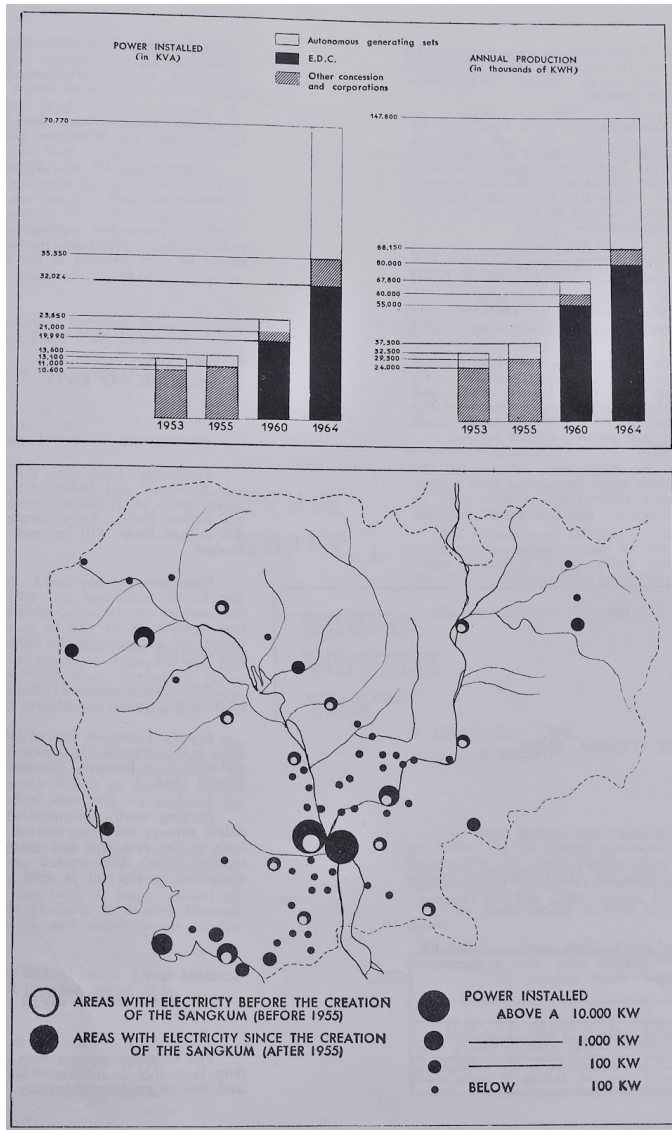
Another semiotic presentation of change is expressed in the illustration of maps and table-charts that are filled with graphs, lines, circles, bar charts, and other “modern” ways of expressing progress. In picture 6, a table graph shows material change through illustration of the country's electrical consumption which uses a graph and map to indicate progress. Here we see numbers and bar charts are used to signify changes in measurement. It gives the appearance of modernity as being structured in a methodical manner. It is a paste-up of legitimate modernity. And it validates itself in this *mimicry* because iteration of modernity by the Third World must perform its visual presentation as “appropriately” adopting modernity. Thus the appearance of this change continues to juxtaposed the world of the colonized with that of the colonizer.

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<sup>52</sup> *Kambuja* issue 7, 1965, 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Evidence of this is in the portrayal of the two grayed bars on the left which indicate numbers of electricity consumption of the country under foreign enterprise while the black bars represent a rapid jump under state ownership (see picture 6). It is the placing of side-by-side measurements between Khmer and the foreign. This appearance of change initially starts in the capital and radiates out to the rest of the country. And it can be seen in Picture 7 where a planned layout to increase electricity output is shown in a map. The image of progress is circumscribed in lines and circles that spread out from the center to the edges. It is an indication of physical change toward modernity by displaying modernity in a map. From a god's eye view, the change is paste-up onto the topography as an illustration that shows how Cambodia has changed by having signs of modernity printed on itself.



Picture 6: On the top is a table graph showing the increased number of electricity consumption in Cambodia from 1953 to 1964. *Kambuja* points out that the number “quadrupled” in size from 37,300,000 kWh(kilowatt in hour) in 1953 to 147,800,00 kWh in 1964. On the bottom is a map of Cambodia which shows the location where the electricity is being distributed. Black dots are indications of places with electricity after the formation of *Sangkum* while the white dots are areas with electricity before *Sangkum*.



sign of a modern city. “And so life goes on softly to the rhythm of the new houses and new gardens taking shape. To the rhythm also of the daily work be it at the rice fields, at the model farm or at the saw mill. The handicraft are traditional: they are being done with the same taste but with more rational methods.”<sup>55</sup>



Picture 8: Aerial view of Angkor Thom in Siem Reap. The place is famous for its four faces that smile in serenity for coming visitors.

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<sup>55</sup> *Kambuja* issue 6, 1965, 63.



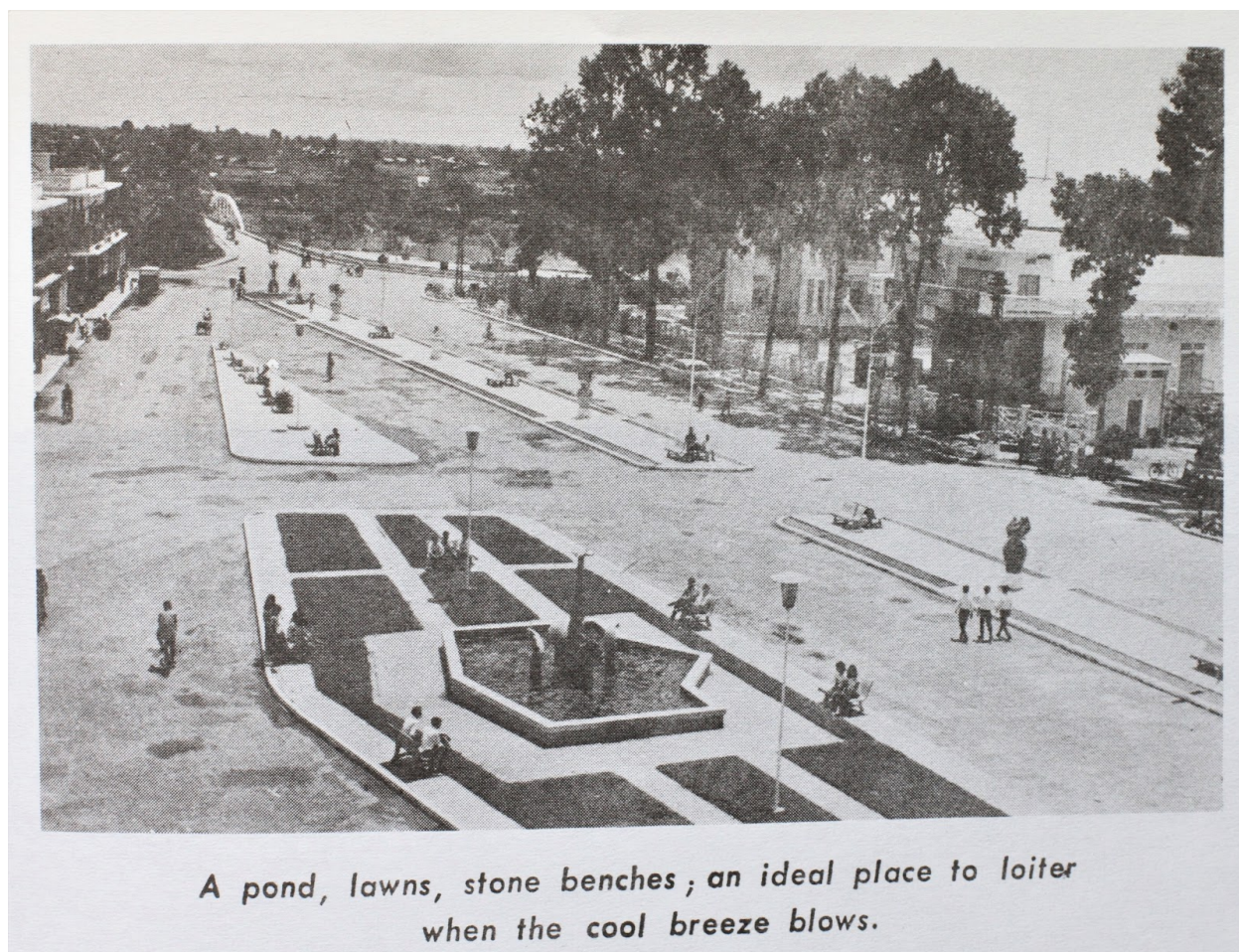
Picture 9: A view of the central boulevard of the city of Battambang. Its geometric layout is reminiscent of not just a colonial town but of the citadels in Angkor.

However, this sense of orderly gardens and rhythm of life are not to imitate western development. Rather it reflects layouts of the citadels of Angkor and the nostalgia for its imagined peaceful time. As one of the articles asks, “Against the background of green lawns, the cones of the well-trimmed filaos, the geometrically tailored shrubs, the clumps of multicolored cannas, may remind one of French gardens, but they are traditional Khmer. Are not the temples of Angkor built on strictly geometrical architectural sense of space?”<sup>56</sup> Thus geometry becomes intertwined with the project of modernity. A paste-up which may be thought of as a progress toward western modernity, but in fact, is a rendition of Khmer antiquity and its understanding of city design. The symmetrical gardens, the parallel coconut palms and tamarind trees that line the

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<sup>56</sup> *Kambuja* issue 13, 1966, 81.

streets of Kampong Thom represent a visual paste-up that *Kambuja* seems to argue modern Cambodia is both a repeat of the past and at the same time a modern city at present. It is a spatial-temporal entrapment that resides in the ambivalence of visual presentation that paste-up modernity with tradition, past with present, Khmer with the foreign. And in this image of placing side-by-side modernity with tradition I move forward to discuss how it emerges in lyrics and advertisements.



Picture 10: View of the downtown area in Kampong Thom.

### **A modern language: Paste-up in lyrics and advertisements in *Kambuja*.**

I have talked about material paste-up which places the body of Cambodian workers next to machines and modernity with tradition. In this section, I discuss the juxtaposition of foreign

words with Khmer culture. In doing so, I argue that *Kambuja* uses this visualization to enact modernity as a “contact zone” between Khmer and the foreign. Here I have borrowed Mary Louis Pratt’s concept of “contact zone”<sup>57</sup> to help me think about how elements of vernacular culture interact with foreign elements in a heterogeneous way. Pratt describes these zones as places where “ subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect.”<sup>58</sup>They are places where relations between the colonized and colonizer interact not in terms of “separateness”, but in terms of “copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices”. In other words, zones where the “diffusionist” ideas are shared but are often suppressed by the colonial language of “inappropriate” adaptation of modernity. And in this paper, I use these “zones” as places where elements of Khmer culture are pasted-up next to the foreign in an “asymmetrical” relation. A relationship I see in the structure and composition of the lyrics that appear in *Kambuja*.

In a love song published by *Kambuja* “Irony” (see picture 11) we see three different languages that appear side-by-side which represent this “contact zone”. Here the “contact zone” between Khmer and the foreign is located in the positioning of the letterings in relation to each other. A French translation appears on the left followed by the Khmer and English on the bottom. A musical note on the right appears in bold which makes it stand out from the rest.

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<sup>57</sup> Pratt describes “contact zone” as originated from linguists who use it to refer to “impoverished languages” that develop among speakers of different native languages in their trading with white settlers in the frontier. Such language begins as pidgin and becomes “creoles” when it has a native speaker of its own. Most of these languages are regarded by white settlers as “chaotic, barbarous, and lacking in structure”.

<sup>58</sup> Pratt. *Imperial Eyes*, 7.

**ឡូកឡីយ** YIM

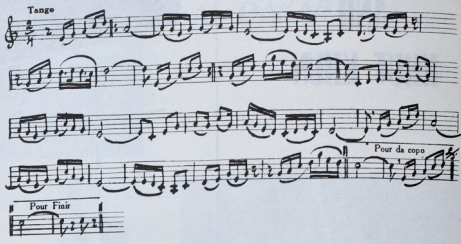
**IRONIE**

*Ne te moque pas de moi  
Lorsque je te dis que je t'aime  
Cette ironie dans ton regard, pourquoi  
Mon amour est un beau poème*

*Comment faut-il te dire  
Ce grand désir que j'ai de toi.  
Sans amener sur tes lèvres la saucisse  
Qui rend confus et malade*

*Mais puisque tu es ainsi  
Moi aussi je veux rire et chanter  
M'étourdir de mille folies  
Pour te plaire obéie et te garder*

*Tango de l'ironie  
Tango secant mon désespoir  
Rythme la danse des couples désunis  
Et je reste là seul ce soir*



Music by . . . . . **NORODOM SIHANOUK**  
 Cambodian words by . . . . . **OUK MAUT**  
 French words by . . . . . **CHRISTIAN FURET**  
 English words by . . . . . **BARBARA MURPHY**

**ឡូកឡីយ**

មរស- មុណ្យបុព្វដួងលក្ខណ៍  
 ឆោមឆើតហាក់នាងក៏ឆ្លើ  
 ក៏គ្រូផ្លែផ្លែឆ្មោះចង់ចើប - ស្រីបក្កុងហេម្លឺយ  
 រកស្រីលើលោកផ្លឹមកុំបាន  
 ចេះរៀបបូកសមភីយា  
 ចេះចរចរខ្លាច់ខាន  
 សំឡេងស្រួចគ្រលួចស្រួយ សមល្មមនិងព្រាណ  
 ឆ្មោះឆ្មោះតាងសង្សារ  
 បើបានពន្យក - មកដួចបំណង  
 មិនឱ្យនិរន្តរ៍មិនហ្នឹងត្រង់ណា  
 បីបីពេញម អមអមឆា  
 តើកែវកល្យាណល្អមកម្រម្រាវ  
 ស្រី- ពេលស្រឡាញ់ពេញល្អសព្វ  
 ពេលស្រឡាញ់បំបែកអារម្មណ៍  
 ប្រុសប្រុសល្អប្រុងស្រី នាំឱ្យលង់ផ្លូវ  
 ហេតុនេះប្អូនស្វីនេរឹងតា ។

**IRONY**

*Do not mock me  
When I tell you that I love you  
In your glance, Oh why this irony?  
When I love but only you*

*How can I express  
The yearning that I feel  
Without causing my distress  
Through your ironic smile*

*But I must take you as you are  
And with you laugh and sing  
Or else our love I can but mar  
If I would keep you, oh my darling*

*Tango of irony  
Tango marking my despair  
My evenings now are lonely  
Rhythm of a separated pair*

Picture 11: Lyric appears in *Kambuja* issue 32, 1967.

Each text is rendered differently in style. For instance, the French lettering is written in a curvy style to express, rightly or wrongly, the bourgeois sentiment often associated with French culture. And the Khmer and English are presented in these simple and easy to read letterings. Even then the two translations contain individual flair which highlight their distinctions. Khmer scripts are written in these compact characters and the English in a more spread-out and rounded lettering. While the difference in style gives each translation a uniqueness in appearance, their overall visual layout is united by a repeating theme. A theme which starts with the titles colored in blue and the texts are in black inks. This pattern is then repeated in all of the three translations

with the only exception of the rectangle box in the middle with names of the composer and translators inside<sup>59</sup>.

Furthermore, the layout is presented as a theme of repeating four. For instance, the songs are written in four stanzas which are further divided into sixteen lines with four lines in a stanza. Similarly, the layout of the page is split into four sections that are neatly separated into a widow-like appearance giving each translation a place to reside in. And it is in this symmetrically “cut and paste” lyrics with different languages and placing them side-by-side that I argue is how *Kambuja* demonstrates modern Cambodia. It presents a cosmopolitan image that is hybrid in form, and moreover, it constructs an image that contains no hierarchy and treats each translation in an equal representation by giving them the same amount of space on the page of the magazine. It represents a trans-visual-accommodation of different cultures that places them on the same visual plane of representation. And this visual representation is the first layer of visual “contact zone”; next I turn to the contents of the translation.

The content of the translation is where the “contact zone” becomes more fluid in its presentation. And this is due to the nature of translation which contains no boundary on how meaning of words from one culture can cross over to another culture in the act of translating it. The art of translation holds in it the liberty that the artist uses to express the plethora of outcomes that are contained in the arrangement of words to express the essence of the original message. In

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<sup>59</sup> Sihanouk composed most of the songs that appear in *Kambuja*. In the 27 songs that I have examined in the magazine only two of which are not composed by Sihanouk. They appear in the later publication of the magazine issue 35 and 37, in 1968. The two songs are “Champa Battambang” by Sinn Sisamouth, and “A Flower in Your Hand” by Peou Siphon. What is interesting about them is the fact that they appear only in Khmer without the French or English translations which normally accompany such lyrics that appear in the magazine. This is my personal observation, but it appears that later toward the end of the 1960s, Sihanouk seemed to become less involved with how the magazine operated and preoccupied his time mainly with making feature films. It may have had something to do with the increased intensity of the Vietnam War and the internal political tensions from both the right and the left that challenged Sihanouk’s authority to the country’s political power. This political mounting caused Sihanouk to retreat to isolationism which causes him to be less involved with other commitments that he created earlier during his reign.

this way, the act of translating is similar to the making of collage arts. As described above (in introduction), collage art is a method with which an artist uses to “arrange and rearrange” composition of an artwork to make a new meaning. It is a stylistic expression which contains an unlimited outcome and freely liberates the picture from its prescribed form. And in translation a similar process takes place where the meaning of the original message is rearticulated by the translator to present a new version of the original. And we can see it in the way this song is translated, especially between the Khmer to the foreign translations.

The song is called “Irony” or “Ironie” in French. Both the English and French translations are similar in their tones with a few variance in the positioning of certain words. For example, in the last segment of the French version it writes “Rythme la danse des couples désunis, et je reste la seul ce soir” (Rhythm of the dance of disunited couples, and I am the only one tonight). While the English version translates it as “My Evenings now are lonely, rhythm of a separated pair.” So the English artist takes liberty to switch the sentence around and make it rhyme at the end instead. Another variance is in the fourth lines of the beginning of the song with the English translation “In your glance, Oh why this irony? When I love but only you.” The French version says “Cette ironie dans ton regard, pourquoi Mon amour est un beau poème”(This irony in your eyes, why My love is a beautiful poem). In this case, the lyrical French language compares “love” to a “ beautiful poem” while the English sees love in a physical form of “you” and “only you.” Despite some differences the two translations are similar in tone, unlike the Khmer translation which translates the song very differently.

For instance, the title of the song in Khmer translation is ឡែកឡើយ which does not mean irony in the western sense. It roughly translates as “teasing” or “flirting” between two people. The word itself does not hold any romantic connotation and is often used to describe someone

making playful jest or just messing around. Another major difference in the Khmer version is the fact that it has two voices speaking to each other<sup>60</sup>. The first two stanza of the song is written for a male singer with an indication of the word “បុរស”(male) on the left of the first line. And the last stanza is for a female singer “ស្រី”. The tone of the song also differed in how it is translated. Unlike the French and English versions, which centered around the singer’s feeling and never mention much about the lover beside her “ironic” smile, the Khmer translation opens with lines that describe the lover's countenance and personality. ឆោមឆើតហាក់នាងកិត្តិវី (You are the most beautiful woman in the world) ភ័ក្ត្រផ្លូវផងគួរចង់ចើប - ស្រីបក្តងហឫទ័យ (And a beautiful face that I want to kiss --- that filled me with desire) ចេះរៀបប្រកសមភរិយា (You know how to hold yourself up properly) ចេះចរចាឲ្យខ្លាត់រំខាន (And you know how to amuse me with words) So here in the Khmer version the yearning for “love” is expressed as both a corporeal desire and personality trait. And this longing for the lover's affection arrives at its peak with the male singer asking for her consent. តើកែវកល្យាណល្អមព្រមពេញ (Oh, darling will you be my girlfriend). However, his advance is rejected by the female singer who understands that if she agrees to be his girlfriend she would end up being alone afterward because within his persuasive voice there is a trap he lays for her and other women to fall in. “ពេលស្រឡាញ់ពេញល្អសព្វ”(When we are in love everything is great) ពេលស្អប់គួរថប់តែអាស្រូវ (But when we break up everything is in disgrace) ប្រុសប៊ុនល្អងរឿងស្រី នាំឱ្យលង់ផ្លូវ (You lure me in a trap with your hollow promise) ហេតុនេះប្អូនស្និទ្ធនៅឯកា (Therefore, I would rather be alone).

And with the word “ឯកា”(alone) that I come back to visual paste-up between Khmer and the foreign. Here the word “alone” represents the irony of this love song. Just like in the French and English version which end with an image of a tango dancer dancing alone, the

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<sup>60</sup> Here it is interesting to notice how the Khmer version includes the two genders in their song while the foreign version has only one voice. Moreover, the Khmer version has the female voice talking back to the male flirter who is trying to win over her heart but fails to do so.

Khmer translation takes the liberty to express this loneliness in the form of a realization by the female singer who sees through the deception set up by the male singer. So irony is being conceived by the Khmer artist and foreign translators from different angles, and yet they reach the same conclusion at the end. And this conclusion is reflected in how the narrative of the song is told. The narrative of the foreign songs give an impression of a lover yearning for a desire that cannot be fulfilled and it manifests through the act of dancing alone. It is ironic because tango is supposed to be danced with two people, thus to dance alone is ironic. In the Khmer version, the song paints an image of a man trying to convince a woman to be his girlfriend. But the woman rejects saying that if she becomes his girlfriend she would end up being alone in the end. And the irony, in this case, is presented as an image of a lonely woman sitting in wait for her man (in the Khmer version) which is juxtaposed to a lonely man who dances by himself wishing for his woman (in the foreign version).

Without clear evidence whether the Khmer version is written first and then translated into French and English or it was the other way around, regardless, here I argue that the paste-up of Khmer songs with foreign translation is a process with which the Cambodian and foreign artists incorporate each other's culture in their translation of the song. Borrowing elements from each other they rearticulate the narrative of the story in their own visions. These artists are creating a “contact zone” of exchange which represent a remix of different ideas and interpretations that break the mold that are casted on them.

Another element of this paste-up can be seen in *Kambuja* advertising. In picture 12 we see a juxtaposition between a photograph of an industrial manufacturing company and a drawing of a mystical snake or colloquially called “*naga*”. Their distinctions are expressed not only in their aesthetic differences in terms of one is a photograph, which already stands as a signifier for

modernity and discourses that circulate around it as a “truth” representation of reality<sup>61</sup>, as opposed to the other is a traditional drawing of *naga* -- thus place it in the past and in relation to Khmer antiquity. But the position that they are placed in the picture which situate the photograph on top and the drawing at the bottom is another sign of a clear separation. The only connection between these two images is an incomplete rectangle line that runs from one snake’s head to the other. The splitting of the image into a geometric composition is where the paste-up of modern Cambodia occurs and can be understood in twofold. First, it can be seen as a rendition by the artist of western advertising which adores visual simplicity and structural clarity. The appearance of photography is a direct representation of the company and a proof of not just its existence, but also its association with modernity. And this modern element, moreover, it reflects in the advertisement usage of western texts which maintain that geometric form in its appearance. The texts are stacked in a reverse-pyramid-like shape with the big letter “*Ciment Portland*” on top and gradually decrease in size toward the bottom where the address of the company is then placed.


On the surface this visual composition may seem to mimic foreign elements, however, this visualization is an iteration of traditional aesthetic in that it relies on mythology and symmetry as semiotic representation. The appearance of *naga* signifies numerous connotations such as protection, prosperity, and wealth. And this is because *naga* is associated with water. In Cambodia, as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia, water plays a crucial part in daily aspects of life. Water is used to “quench thirst, cook food and irrigate and cultivate the land.”<sup>62</sup> Thus to be in possession of water means the accumulation of material wealth that water can “provided and guaranteed” with its ownership. But *naga* goes beyond this materialistic term and into

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<sup>61</sup> Roland Barthes and Stepen Stephen. *Image, Music, Text*. (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 45.

<sup>62</sup> Thierry Zéphir. *Khmer, Lost Empire of Cambodia*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 17.

cultural richness. In local tradition, *naga* is symbolized by a multiple-headed cobra which is adopted from the Hindu mythology from ancient times. Its depiction can be seen on the roof of Angkor Wat as well on ordinary houses in the countryside. And in this *Ciment Portland* advertisement, *naga* is depicted in a symmetric form that cuts the snake in half and joins two separate heads into one body. It gives a mirror-like effect that seems to suggest a Lacanian *mirror* as well the “split” identity in Bhabha *mimicry*. Thus the cutting and pasting of the body of the *naga* is yet another location where the seam of visual pasting can be seen visible, and where again tradition and modernity coalesce to form a new body of *naga* that can be seen as a change toward modernity with tradition in mind.



CIMENTERIE  
KOSSAMAK - LIOU - CHAO - CHI  
CHAKREY - TING KAMPOT

**CIMENT PORTLAND**  
**DE CHAKREY TING**  
PRODUIT à 100% KHMER DE LA  
**SOCIETE NATIONALE**  
**DE CIMENT**

SERVICE COMMERCIAL  
45, VITHEI SROK TREANG - PHNOM-PENH  
TELEPHONE : 3360

Picture 12. *Ciment Portland* an advertisement for a national cement company from *Kambuja Review*, 1966.

## Chapter 3

### Symbolic Paste-up

Now I am ready to tell how bodies are changed  
Into different bodies

I summon the supernatural beings  
Who first contrived  
The transmutations  
In the stuff of life.  
You did it for your own amusement.  
Descend again, be pleased to reanimate  
This revival of those marvels.  
Reveal, now exactly  
How they were performed  
From the beginning  
Up to this moment.<sup>63</sup>

In this section I begin by referring to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about Greek mythology of the transmutation of the gods into humans or the transformation of humans into animals and objects. The reason why I have chosen a symbolic description of change is because in every storytelling and myth there is a remnant of reality. When Ovid wrote this poem Rome was undergoing a transformation. The death of Caesar brought about a change in the Roman world from a republic to an empire with Augustus as the sole ruler. To display and inaugurate this change, Augustus initiated numerous state sponsorship programs to symbolically lionize his achievements with public baths, statues of himself, gladiatorial stadiums, aqueducts, and other public constructions. These changes mirrored the physical transformation that Phnom Penh was going through in the 1960s. Cambodia was transitioning from a former colonial state to a modern state with its sole leader, Norodom Sihanouk, at the helm leading this change.

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<sup>63</sup> Te Hughes. *Tales from Ovid*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

But, importantly, I bring up this symbolic change to give an image of the mental expression of those who saw the change. A mental description that attempts to explain the etiology of our perception which words alone cannot achieve. It deals with how we perceive the world. John Berger writes about our perception as such:

It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.<sup>64</sup>

There always existed a gap between seeing and words because the thing that we see is affected by our knowledge and our experiences. Stories and myths, thus, serve as a kind of visual dialogue that attempt to describe what we internally perceive and what are being perceived in the outside; and in doing so, we verbalize this perception, either figuratively or symbolically, as an act of explaining how “you see things” and to discover how “others see things.”<sup>65</sup>

While material change is something we can detect, there exist changes that we can sense but are unable to verbalize as such. Therefore, we use visual metaphors to describe them. For example, we call someone who is strong as a bull. Or someone is fast as a lightning bolt. These metaphors are used to describe changes that we sense but are not able to describe them with words and use visual metaphors for them. And to do this we use a word collage that bridges between what we perceive the world as such versus how we feel in our imagination.

Symbolic reference is one thing, but the materialistic form of that imagination can manifest as reality through paste-up of internal perception with real objects that are associated is another. Here, I argue that by presenting pictures of Sihanouk as being

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<sup>64</sup> John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation : Penguin Books, 1973), 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

omnipresent, *Kambuja* is putting forth a mythical hero of the prince as symbolically turning into a machine. A machine that never sleeps or rests and whose only function is to modernize Cambodia with his team of machines (i.e the *Sangkum*).

Why do I bring up myth-making and folklore? This is because they are important as part of a nation-making project. Take for example the origin myth of how the country was formed. Cambodia was believed to have been formed through the union between an Indian prince, Kaundinya, and a *naga* princess, whose father was the king of a “waterlogged country.”<sup>66</sup> Some may dismiss this story as a fictional story which holds no historical relevance. Conversely, I argue that myth and symbolism are important for the understanding of Cambodian public perception. This story of a prince seeking approval of his father-in-law, who helps drain the country, and precipitate his success of conquering the country would be in the mind of a contemporary prospective bridegroom who must gain the in-law’s approval by staying and serving them before marriage<sup>67</sup>. In public, people respect and give honor to brahmanic tradition which holds symbolic importance for many of the Cambodian’s religious rituals and kings and queens would trace their genealogy to these mythical pairs. Therefore, mythology is intrinsic to Cambodia's public milieu that connects ordinary citizens to their leaders through legends of good deeds and accomplishments. It is thus through public display of achievements, I argue, that *Kambuja* attempts to portray Sihanouk as a great hero -- similarly to August’s claims to fame by constructing public buildings, statues, bathhouses, etc. -- of great stature that plays out in modernist tropes as a machine.

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<sup>66</sup> David Chandler. *A History of Cambodia*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*.

## Depicting Sihanouk as “the Machinist”

‘*The Machinist*’ in Cambodian films may assume many forms: that of a chance meeting, a premonition, a dream, or more simply and prosaically family obligations---a father who asserts his authority, or a mother who pleads her great age may prove decisive in persuading a son, or daughter to agree to an arranged marriage---or perhaps the services of some false oracle may be enlisted to give a twist to the plot.<sup>68</sup>

I open this chapter with a quote from a movie review in *Kambuja* because it paints a great picture of how I see what constitutes the imagery that Sihanouk embodied in this visual project. He plays many roles in the construction of this image. But it is fitting to start with a movie review since Sihanouk sees himself as, not just a politician, but also an artist. In fact he directed and acted in several movies during that time. And in one of the premieres of his film he explained his interest in the arts as, “the multiform artistic activity is one of the typical Cambodian traditions and that is why not only my father, the King used to be a very good musician, but also my mother, the Queen continues to safeguard the royal ballet’s choreography.”<sup>69</sup> And thus he associated his artistic talent with his upbringing and an innate gift that is inherent as one of the “typical” Cambodian’s way of life. But he went further and proclaimed his talent to other forms of professions. “As first citizen of Cambodia, and chosen by my people in order to maintain the edification of the country, I have all kinds of professions. Thus I became a journalist and publisher of newspapers and reviews. I therefore took an interest in the development of our cinematography of which I am the leader.”<sup>70</sup> This confident statement by Sihanouk is where I locate his image as a leader with many talents and who assume many roles just like the symbolic reference in the opening quote that associates the “machinist” as a

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<sup>68</sup> *Kambuja* issue 2, 1965, 75.

<sup>69</sup> A statement by Sihanouk made during the “world première” of his film *The Enchanted Forest* in Prague on 3 March 1967.

<sup>70</sup> *Kambuja* issue 25, 1967, 27.

force that can take on many forms and affect numerous events. And it is in this “machinist” image that *Kambuja* seeks to depict changes in the country through Sihanouk as a leading force of charge. Here I argue that *Kambuja* shows Sihanouk as someone who never stops working and is dedicated completely to the project of nation-building. And in doing so, the magazine evokes an image of Sihanouk as a machine that works non-stop.

In an article “A Happy Birthday Once Again”, *Kambuja* represents an image of Sihanouk as an “untiring” leader with a relentless force and dedication to the country.

The years pass, heavy with worries that have been bravely accepted, challenges boldly met. Inevitably, the temples show a touch of white. But, from one birthday to the next, Prince Sihanouk, in the prime of life, has not changed physically, in any perceptible way. He remains in the service of a country that does not want any other Chief, but himself, the most active, the most untiring Statesmen. His rhythm of work, in spite of the Doctor’s warnings, remains *bewildering*:-- there is so much to do, so little time to do it in. His dynamism is instantaneous: he reacts within the second when national interest is at stake.<sup>71</sup>

The description given to Sihanouk is this “bewildering” image that represents him as a dynamic leader whose body seems to never aged nor tired. And despite the “Doctor’s warning” he continues to work because there is “so much to do” and “so little time to do it in.” His image is further accentuated in this machine-like imagery with reference to his reaction that can respond “instantaneous” to problems and issues. And the working of his mind, the magazine writes on, “never to take a decision which had not been fully thought out.” And like a machine, “Sihnaouk constantly measures and weights every possible repercussion that his actions may have upon the ‘human mass’ that is his people, his beloved people for whom he has sacrificed everything.”<sup>72</sup> It

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<sup>71</sup> *Kambuja* issue 7, 1965, 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

is a marvelous depiction of Sihanouk and one that repeats throughout the magazine in different forms and descriptions. One such examples is in the magazine “Monthly’s Events”<sup>73</sup> listing.

“7th August; the Head of State<sup>74</sup> personally organized a day of manual labour... 8th August; the new Indra Devi was opened... by the Head of State... 9th August; the inauguration by the Head of States... 11th...the Head of State opened the ‘Khmer-Japanese Friendship Cattle Rearing Centre’... 14th...ceremony ‘Buong Suong’ was celebrated...presided over by the Head of States...15th...opening of Wat Saravan...presided over by the Head of States...16th... an important meeting of Ministers, presided over by the Head of State... 17th and the 30th...promotion of four Generals...presented with the insignia...by the Head of State...18th to the 21st... the Head of State’s third visit... to the province of Battambang... 22nd... the Head of State preside over the opening...25th... the Head of State took part in the work... 28th... the Head of State presided over the ceremony... [and finally] 30th... solemn inauguration of the ‘Boulevard Mao Tse Toung’ in Phnom Penh by the Head of State.”<sup>75</sup>

In this listing, it shows Sihanouk’s monthly itinerary which demonstrates the number of activities with which Sihanouk conducts within a month. There are no breaks in between each event and Sihanouk appears to be working non-stop rushing from one place to the next. Inaugurating factories, hospitals, schools, roads; presiding over ceremonial events and “important” meetings; handing out medals to officials and generals. All of which evokes an image of Sihanouk not just as a workaholic, but also a depiction of him working almost like a machine. A machine that works on this rhyme which is “bewildering” to the observer. And to reinforce this image of Sihanouk as a machine( as described above in article “Happy Birthday”) his physique is shown to remain pristine even with the passing of time and his senses calculated and measured with every decision like a machine.

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<sup>73</sup> The Month’ Events is a prominent feature of *Kambuja* where it publishes important events and activities that are taking place in the country. Most of these events are state-related and often involve Sihanouk at the center of the activities.

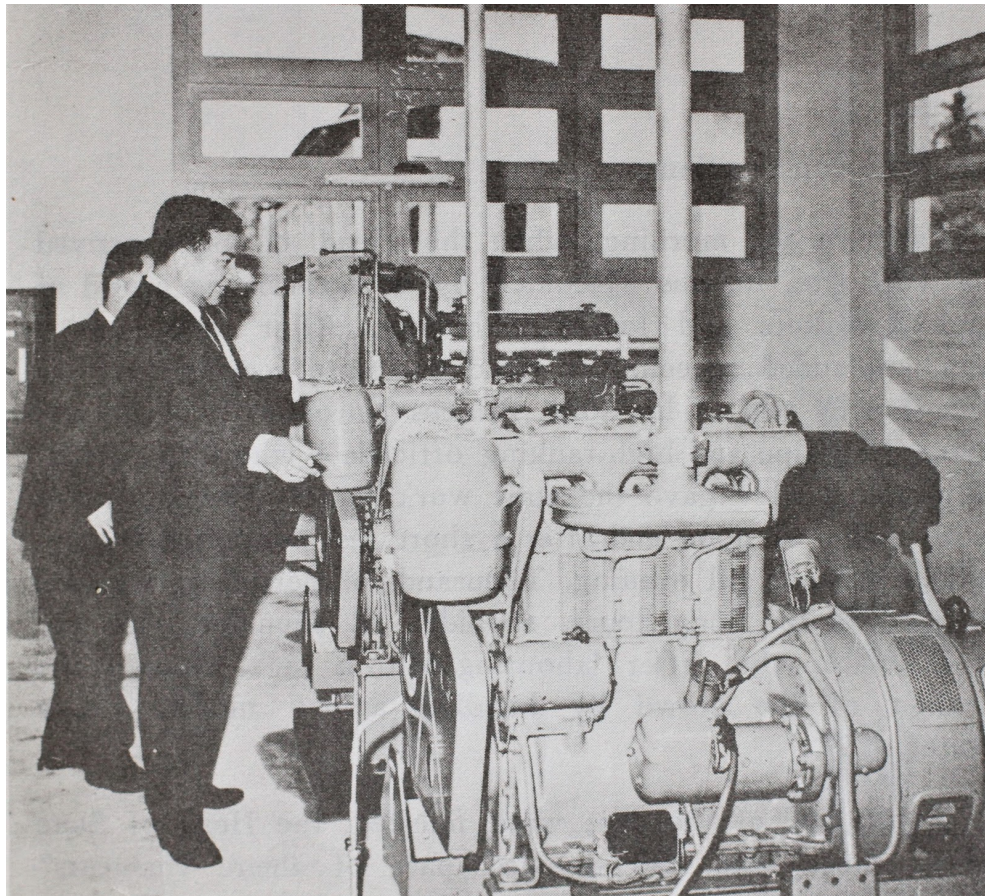
<sup>74</sup> Sihanouk has many synonyms such as Father of the Nation, King Samdech, Prince, and many others. But *Kambuja* often uses two terms in particular to refer to Sihanouk; they are “Head of State” or “Samdech”(meaning lord or your highness) in its publications.

<sup>75</sup> *Kambuja* issue 6, 1965, 15.

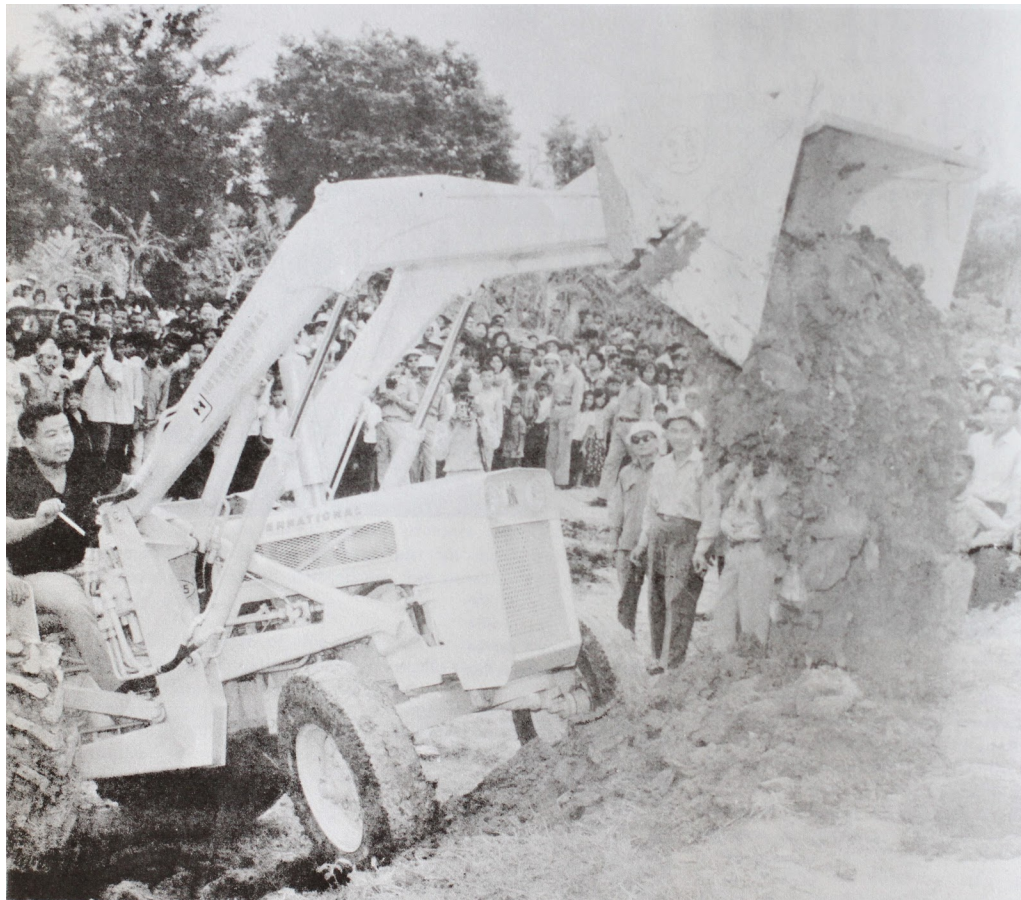
And in the photographic depiction of Sihanouk, he is often shown next to machines, touching machines, and in some cases operating the machine himself. For example, during Sihanouk's visit to the province of Battambang, *Kambuja* depicts changes with him donating a "high-power motor-pump" to the population and the photographs of him inspecting the "power-plant" of the town(see picture 14). Here change is transferred into Sihanouk's action of bringing machines and making sure they function properly. And these photographs of Sihanouk next to the machines get repeated with his every visit to new towns and cities that he inaugurated. In another visit to Kampong-Speu province, Sihanouk, after giving a speech that highlight his "tremendous" success in improving the town's communication and road networks, hands out "a modern excavator dredger-tractor" to people of the town with a message of "let us build our future with our own means ... with all our strength, our faith and our enthusiasm"<sup>76</sup>, and with these machines that he brings to them. Thus, the imagery of Sihanouk appearing with machines becomes an expected sight whenever a new factory, hospital, bridge and road opens up. And as a result, the image of Sihanouk and machines get conflated with change. A change that is manifested in the appearance of Sihanouk who brings about change in the form of a machine.

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<sup>76</sup> *Kambuja* issue 9, 1965, 33.



Picture 13: Sihanouk inspecting a power-plant generator in Pailin.



Picture 14: A picture showing Sihnaouk operating a tractor during one of his “manual labor” events in the province of Kandal.



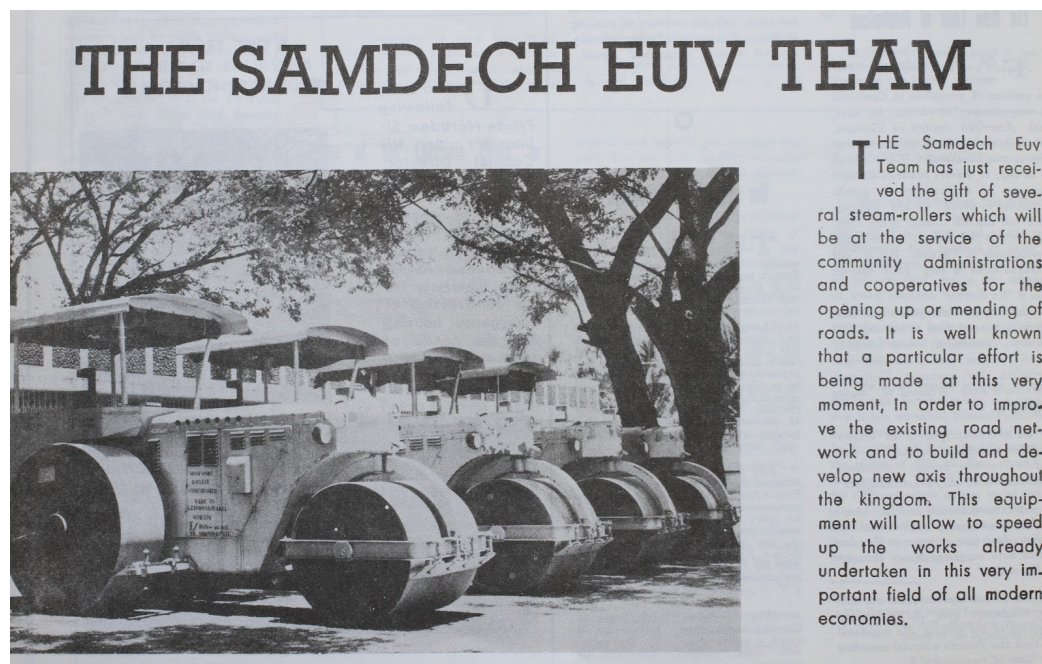
A "surprise" from Samdech for his "children": a tractor, rice and salt.

Picture 15: During Sihanouk's visit to Kampong-Speu, he "surprises" the locals with a tractor and sacks of rice and salt. Plaque in the background reads "ព្រះរាជអំណោយនៃ សម្តេច ឌី" (From the royal decree of Samdech). Here even without the presence of Sihanouk, a tractor and a sign stand in his place as signifiers of progress.

And this picture of Sihanouk who bring in change to the country in a form of machines is marvelously illustrated by *Kambuja's* regular captions of "The Samdech EUV Team" where it highlights a specific group set up by Sihanouk as part of his goal to provide various machines and equipments to "anyone who may have need of one, anywhere in the Kingdom."<sup>77</sup> In one of the captions of "Samdech's Team", it claims that it has just received several new steam-rollers and that it plans to put them into the service of improving the community and cooperatives by opening and mending roads that lead up to those places. (see picture 17) Further, the team recognizes the effort already done by "Samdech" in improving the "existing road network and to build and develop new axis[sic] throughout the Kingdom." And with these machines, the team promises to facilitate a speedy process in which change can come about in this "very important

<sup>77</sup> *Kambuja* issue 17, 1966, 58.

field of all modern economies.” And in another caption of the “Samdech’s Team”, it claims that these machines have “not stopped working. In this season of rains and intense agricultural work, all its tractors, motor pumps and motor ploughs have never remained for more than a moment in their garage.”<sup>78</sup> The machines are giving an image of busy working non-stop just like Sihanouk in their tasks of changing Cambodia into a modern state. And these changes are happening all over the country. In photographs 17,18, they show images of Samdech’s machines with local officials from different provinces standing in front of tractors and equipment that are laid out on the ground to illustrate the type of materials that are being used in their efforts to make change to the country. And through this visual association of Sihanouk with change, his image becomes a paste-up quality that can be used as metonymy to paste onto other visual presentation which symbolize change.



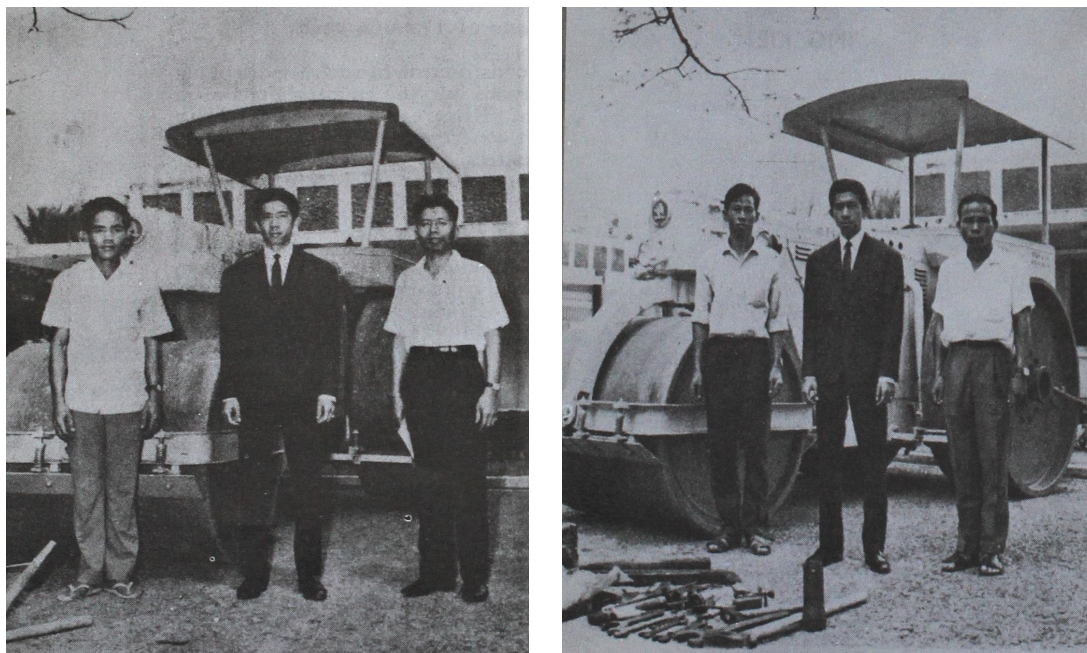
## THE SAMDECH EUV TEAM

**T**HE Samdech Euv Team has just received the gift of several steam-rollers which will be at the service of the community administrations and cooperatives for the opening up or mending of roads. It is well known that a particular effort is being made at this very moment, in order to improve the existing road network and to build and develop new axis throughout the kingdom. This equipment will allow to speed up the works already undertaken in this very important field of all modern economies.

Picture 16: Sihanouk’s team of machines. *Kambuja* issue 15, 1966.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



Picture 17, 18: Pictures show the ceremony of handing over(or loaned) materials to local officials in the Province of Stung Trèng(on the left) and Phosphate Factory at Tuk Meas(on the right).

In another article about the expanding and improvement of railroad infrastructure in the country, the working force of Sihanouk is turned into a paste-up image of oversight and exemplary for people to see. Here the article writes, “on the instruction of the Head of State the Royal Cambodian Railways began construction of a new line from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville, a total of 270 km.”<sup>79</sup> Sihanouk is now depicted as an architect who plans out the development of the country. “Eighty per cent of the work of constructing the line is being carried out through voluntary manual labour by the local population, public servants and army officials, stimulated in their enthusiasm by our Revered Leader’s striking example. The remainder is being done with mechanical equipment.” And in the vision of the “Revered Leader”, who possesses the energy of a machine and “enthusiasm” of a great ruler, Cambodia is able to move toward modernity. Images of Sihanouk, thus, becomes an image of a mover and shaker who brings in modernity to Cambodia with his army of machines.

<sup>79</sup> *Kambuja* issue 7, 1965, 86.



Picture 19: Khmer words read ក្រសួងការពារជាតិ (Ministry of Defense), here we see Sihanouk is imagined as rays of light affecting the working of the states. A literal rendition of the Royal Army of Cambodia is shown as working bodies who look up to and sense the radiant light of Sihanouk. But also the rays look like a cog with Sihanouk in the center turning and moving the country forward.

Furthermore, the machine is extended to the imagery working of Sihanouk through the state's apparatus *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (the People's Social Community) which serves as a popular movement designed to "incorporate all Cambodians"<sup>80</sup> and merge every diurnal aspect of the country under Sihanouk's control. *Sangkum* was founded by Sihanouk shortly after independence in 1955. It was intended as a movement to "unify the country", combat corruption, maintain tradition and belief in Buddhism and the monarchy, and finally to develop a "regard for the ordinary people"<sup>81</sup>. But more importantly, *Sangkum* functions as an appendage to Sihanouk's public persona and the enactment of his policy in affecting changes throughout the country. For example, in an article "Cambodia's Lines of Communication under the Sangkum",

<sup>80</sup> Osborn, *Phnom Penh*, 123.

<sup>81</sup> Whitaker, *Handbook for The Khmer Republic (Cambodia)*, 39.

images of Sihanouk and *Sangkum* appear side-by-side to give an impression of the two being in unison. “To show how justified the *Sangkum*, under the clear-sighted leadership of our Head of State, was in deciding that it was vitally necessary to our economy for us to have our own free and independent outlet of the outside world.” Talking about *Sangkum*’s decision to improve the infrastructure of the country, *Kambuja* shows that it is done under Sihanouk’s guidance and through his “clear-sight” vision that changes to the country can emerge. And this image of Sihanouk as the embodiment of *Sangkum* is repeated later in the article as, “in the choice of ends and means, national interest has throughout been uppermost in the minds of the *Sangkum*, the Government, and the Head of State.” Here *Kambuja* extends the embodiment of Sihanouk to encompass even the government. And so even the machine of the state is working under and in unison with Sihanouk to affect change. A change that is all-encompassing and pervasive in every aspect of the country.

A sign of this omnipresent image of Sihanouk can be seen in the activity of *Sangkum* expanding and conquering the unruly parts of the country. In “The Conquest of Virgin Territories” article, an auxiliary group to *Sangkum*, the Royal Cambodian Socialist Youth (*Jeunesse Socialiste Royale Khmère*, JSRK)<sup>82</sup>, is depicted as a “courage” army who “fight against trees, undergrowth and roots” with just “their arms[which] are axes, saws, shovels, pickaxes,[and] a few machines” in order to “clear and cultivate the lands which they have claimed from the surrounding jungle and then hand them over to the local tenant farmers.”<sup>83</sup> *Kambuja* describes this courageous army as “young men of 20 to 25 years of age whose one common characteristic is a love of the earth.” And it is this passion that create a

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<sup>82</sup> According to Osborn, the JSRK was an important addition to *Sangkum*. It was a body that combined all major national functions; members were required to dress in a scout-like uniform and engaged in the “good work” all around the country. There was no age limit to the membership of this “youth” group, in fact many of the members were in their forties or even fifties. Many of the civil servants joined this group and participated in the activities that the group initiated.

<sup>83</sup> *Kambuja* issue 17, 1966, 73.

“perfect spirit of mutual co-operation” that permeates through the “youth” corp in their effort to conquer and turn the “unhealthy” forest into arable lands for the future farmers. This “youth” is shown not just courageous and enthusiastic, but they are also organized and efficient in their task like a well-oiled machine. The corp is divided into eight teams each consisting of “seven members who are responsible for three hectares of earth”. Each team receives “seeds that correspond to the type of soil allotted to them.” Beside some “technical advice” from the agricultural controller of the camp, the team works in unison to plant the seeds and harvest them afterward and wait for the camp manager to decide on the “new rotation and distribution of crops according to the soil types.”<sup>84</sup> *Kambuja* describes the corps's accomplishment as “capable of removing mountains” and if given the right “the materials” and machines “they will clear the entire forest.” Their achievements allow one to hope that “the day will soon come when this beautiful area will no longer be known as ‘Les zone impenetrable’ but will be a country of welcoming mountains ready for future generations.” And Sihanouk and his army of machines are out-there working to make that change for the country in its anticipation for modernity.

Another permeating image of Sihanouk and *Sangkum* is the policy of the state. On 27 December 1965, with Sihanouk’s approval, *Sangkum* passed a bill that closed down all private night-clubs and established a state-run club in Pochentong<sup>85</sup>. An article that talked about the event described it as, “the problem of juvenile delinquency, and particularly that of the ‘blouson dorés’<sup>86</sup> focussed the attention of the public on the night-clubs of Phnom Penh.” So as to prevent the dissolution of the youth, *Sangkum*, during the 20th Meeting of Congress, unanimously voted

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

<sup>85</sup> *Kambuja* issue 16, 1966, 57.

<sup>86</sup> I am unable to find any information on this group “blousons dorés”(golden jacket) who I find to be a very interesting group. They are interesting because there are a lot of political dissidents, mainly from the left, but they are either incorporated into or stumped out by *Sangkum*. And so to have a rebellious youth, especially one that causes issues for *Sangkum*, is intriguing. It may be a fabricated group created by *Sangkum* to justify its policy, nonetheless, it would be interesting to find out more about this group.

to pass the bill. The pervasive image of *Sangkum* and Sihanouk is depicted not just as out-there working for change but it also being depicted as managing moral values and controlling how the population should behave. Here the paste-up appears as part of Sihanouk's vision of a modern state which deals with the "problem of juvenile" through state policy. This usage of state's laws to deal with moral issues is a modern approach because it stands in contrast to Cambodian traditional ways of making that change. Traditionally, moral value is taught through either folklore or religious teachings that set a code of conduct within society. However, in Sihanouk's control, modern Cambodia tames the youth with rules and regulations. The good youth are the ones who join the JSRK and follow *Sangkum* in the "frontier" to make change to the country, while the bad youth need to be managed by the state. Thus, the machine of *Sangkum* and Sihanouk reaches deep into the mass psyche and corrects them to fit a vision of an "appropriate" representation that befit a modern state.

In sum, *Kambuja* represents change to the country as a process by which it paste-up images of Sihanouk onto different visual presentations of machines. Literal image of machines and symbolic working of the state machines. And it is done through the illustration of Sihanouk as working hard like a machine, bringing machines to the population, conducting state policy toward change, and encouraging the masses as an exemplary leader. This is why I have come to see images of Sihanouk as a paste-up of change. It is through the depiction that *Kambuja* shows him as the harbinger of change.

## Conclusion

15 October 2012, news broke out about the death of Sihanouk. At the time I was in Portland trying to be an artist while working as a security guard at a museum. The news shocked me in so many ways. It came shortly after my return from Cambodia where I attended a three years ceremony of the death of my father. Sihanouk's death, similarly to my father, came to me from a distance through a little screen of my computer. Its presence seemed so far yet immediate at the same time. I found out about the death of my father by talking to my family on the phone, and Sihanouk's death was through online news. I perused through the BBC, CNN, and Voices of America (VoA) to read about Sihanouk's death and to find out if it was true. Reading through his story brought back memories of my childhood. I remembered growing up in Cambodia with images of Sihanouk everywhere. In school, we saluted his picture, which was hung in the front of the classroom, every morning before school started. Images of Sihanouk also appeared in state televisions during popular festivals and official ceremonies. And in front of the palace, a place where our family would go for weekend recreation, a large portrait of Sihanouk was always there looking over us. And nearly a decade has passed since Sihanouk died, yet his image as the "Father" of the nation remained with me and for many other Cambodians as well.

As part of the research for this paper, I interviewed my brother about his own reaction when he heard the news about the death of Sihanouk. The news came as a shock and disbelief to him. He was in tears when he learned about the news and thought the ordeal was surreal. He was at a loss and unwilling to accept the news because Sihanouk was someone very dear to him. There were so many memories that he had of Sihanouk. In middle school, he remembered going to see Sihanouk during one of his returns from the airport back to the palace. My brother remembered dressed in a white long button up sleeve shirt which he neatly tucked into his black

pants, and with one hand holding a Cambodia flag, he cheered as the motorcade carrying Sihanouk drove by. He had to walk five miles from his middle school to a designated spot and wait for an hour with other students along the road for the procession to begin. At that time, he felt uplifted and cheerful. He felt like a true patriot. And he told me further about his experience as a student that every morning before class he had to line up with other students in the school grounds. And two students were selected to raise the Cambodian flag while the rest sang the national anthem “Nokoreach” (នគររាជ)<sup>87</sup> in unison. A memory that he would never forget.

When I asked him what he thought about the legacy of Sihanouk, he told me that he thought of Sihanouk as a benevolent King and stood as a father figure who genuinely loved his people and the country. Furthermore, my brother believed in what Sihanouk did in the 1960s as a tremendous project to strengthen and modernize the country to be strong and to be able to stand against foreign aggression. He agreed with Sihanouk's neutrality and his decision to stay out of the conflict that was brewing next door. And more importantly, he saw Sihanouk as a representation of a “certain familiarity”<sup>88</sup> to him. When he saw Sihanouk it reminded him of Cambodia's landscape, its people, the festivities and traditional ceremonies. To him, Sihanouk stood as a historical moment in which things were great and hopeful. Thus, the death of Sihanouk produced an emptiness in my brother's heart and made him feel there was a loss of an important aspect of the country. A great memory of Cambodia was fading away with the death of Sihanouk.

However, Sihanouk had not always brought great things to Cambodia, my brother admitted, there were many failures during his reign. Most noticeable was in Sihanouk's failure to

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<sup>87</sup> The title of the anthem is “Royal Kingdom” or “Majestic Kingdom” and its message is about asking God to protect the King and the nation and procure their longevity.

<sup>88</sup> It was hard to decipher what my brother meant when he said “certain familiarity” that he lost when Sihanouk died. But from what I gathered that Sihanouk, to him, stood as a spatial-temporal-and-emotional aspect of Cambodia that he remembered and associated with the country.

resolve the economic crisis at the time, to stop corruption, and to prevent political infighting which led the country to a civil war and erased everything that was accomplished by him.

And this binary sentiment of Sihanouk is shared with my Khmer teacher, Luoth Yin, who lived during the reign of Sihanouk in the 1960s. Talking about Cambodia at the time, Yin told me how the country was becoming more modern. Cambodia had a better educational system and there were more schools than there had ever been since colonial time. There were other signs of modernity as well. New cinemas were seen everywhere in the country along with businesses, stores, and restaurants. A brand new modern hospital, built by the Soviet, was opened in the southern part of the capital city. And the country's infrastructure was improving at a tremendous speed. Designed mostly by Vann Molyvann, modern buildings and architectures were erected across the country's landscape. New roads and highways were built that would connect the capital to the rest of the country. There were job opportunities for students who graduated with a degree and those who hold professional certificates looking for employment. In fact, Yin worked as a journalist during his stay in Phnom Penh while he was attending law school there. However, this exuberance was cut short because of Sihanouk's inability to stop internal political struggle that was happening at the time. Yin suggested the tendency of Sihanouk to favor socialism and his indiscriminate attack on his political enemies ultimately led to his downfall and the disaster that followed.

Despite what happened, my teacher recalled the reign of Sihanouk as a momentous period in Cambodia history. It was a period with which Cambodia was transitioning into a modern state and the excitement and possibility that came with it. Mother and Dad always told me how in their times Cambodia was a great place. Everything was advancing and moving forward. If Pol Pot hadn't come to power Cambodia would have been a different country

compared to what it is now. They refer to the time as “ស៊ីវិលីស៊ីស” (modern) and foreign historians call it the “Golden Age” of Cambodia. And that modernity is what is being depicted on the pages of *Kambuja* which represent a dream of a nation as it is transiting to a modern state. It is a visual presentation that seeks to re-contextualize reality in an optimistic view and to present itself as an alternative possibility that paste-up tradition with modernity, Cambodian with the foreign, and Sihanouk with machines. This dream of a better world was a shared project of the Third World as it struggled to escape from the Cold War conflict and to find an alternative outcome. Images that appeared in *Kambuja*, thus, represent one possibility of such a project.

Something that has also been in my mind for quite some time and only through writing and talking to my family and colleagues does it become clearer to me and that is the way in which Sihanouk presents Cambodia to the outside world. He orchestrated this image of Cambodia, not just for a political facade, for a better future for the country. Through his magazines, movies, lyrics, and speeches these images that Sihanouk put forth were an attempt to display Cambodia as a sovereign and independent state free from foreign interference. But above all, Sihanouk wanted to show Cambodia in the brightest possible light that presents an emotional possibility for a nascent country as it was transitioning from a former colonial state into a modern state.

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