



CAMBODIA 2040

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

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Chapter 2 | Cambodian Identity, Culture, and Legacy

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Daly has a short bob hair with icy blue highlights. She works at one of the top three contemporary art studios based in Phnom Penh; her style shines through and her work outfits are always composed of loose colourful pantsuits and shiny dark loafers. She is an early riser. Her gym routine starts as the sun rises at 5AM and usually includes an hour of powerlifting. After coming back from the gym, she makes a quick breakfast while listening to a newly released post-rock album from her favourite Cambodian female artist. Then, off to work she goes. During her train ride to work, Daly listens to a news headlines podcast by a local media start-up called Phnom Penh Scoop. She likes their content a lot, especially a young commentator who is very good at making everything sound very relevant to people her age. It's Friday and that means Daly has plans after work. Her colleague asked her last week to go to a photo exhibition opening at Phnom Penh Art Centre. The exhibition is an exploration of homosexuality pre and post Khmer Rouge through photography and spoken word. The artist is a 27-year-old photography student from The Royal University of Fine Arts. Afterwards, she's going to meet her friends for dinner and then head to a live psychedelic Kse Diev concert at The Box, a famous venue for live local music in town. This band is from Kampong Cham and they are so famous that her Cambodian friend in London asked her to get a signed t-shirt for when she visits. Daly will try to be home before midnight because she has an important gathering with her family tomorrow. It will be the Day of Remembrance, celebrated nationwide, to pray for lives lost during the Khmer Rouge and to celebrate the nation's resilience. On the day,

she always goes to pray at the pagoda with her family and spends time with them afterwards to hear her parents' stories of the old times.

I. Cambodian Identity, Culture, and Legacy: The Ideal Scenario

In 2040, Cambodian young people will define themselves using a more individualistic approach and accompanying values. An individualistic culture refers to cultures that emphasize the needs of the individual over the needs of the group as a whole. The identity of young Cambodians will shift from focusing on family values to focusing on their individualistic values, whilst retaining a hint of family influence. With these values, young Cambodians will be more ambitious and progressive which will continue to enable them to be creative and culturally expressive. The future Cambodian young people will define themselves to be an actualization of an ideal self, transformed from the old traditional Khmer identity by integrating traditional and modern elements of being Cambodian, and detached from the victimized stain of their Khmer Rouge past. Artworks, both visual and performing, created by young Cambodians will look very different to how they do now.

The process of developing one's identity involves a close relationship between the individual and the social surroundings in which that person is embedded (Weber, 2002). In 2040, much of the social surrounding in Cambodia will be vastly different from what they are now, particularly in the fields of politics, economic development, arts and culture. Based on a pattern observed in the shift on youth identity in Vietnam in the early 2000 (King, Nguyen & Minh, 2008) and China in the early 90s (Weber, 2002), it can be argued that changes in Cambodian identity are closely connected to changes in government versus modernization. Furthermore, the modern Cambodian national identity will not be as strongly influenced by the trauma of the Khmer Rouge as it is currently.

Cambodian collective memory, a very significant element in the identity construction process, will extend beyond the traditional Angkor glory and the victims of the Khmer Rouge era. Over the next 20 years, Democratic Kampuchea (DK) will be an historical topic widely explored and studied by young

Cambodians as part of their national identity but with a completely different connotation. They will explore the topic, not as a victim of the war, but as scholars, observers and second and third generation survivors who are keen to learn and understand how something as tragic as the Khmer Rouge was possible; in addition to their determination to change the representation of the country. The media through which the Khmer Rouge narrative will be explored will be far more diverse and expand beyond the conventional narrative.

The development of four key factors will determine the path by which Cambodian youth identity is heading. Their ultimate destination under the ideal scenario will see the following:

1. There will be institutional representation for younger generations throughout the mechanisms of government.
2. A more diverse range of perspectives and narratives which more widely mirror the current changes in the country's social representation and identity.
3. Economic development brings in new values and information, embracing globalization and bringing about access to diverse and free media.
4. Art utilized as a powerful tool to influence a national identity and representation.

II. Scenario Space and Key Factors for Cambodian Identity, Culture, and Legacy

Current state of identity

It is this author's opinion that the current state of youth identity in Cambodia is less affected by the country's violent history than their parents' generation. Young Cambodians today are considered to be politically active and engaged. This group, born between 1986 and 2001, dominate a large part of the population representing 50 percent of the entire country (Pen, Hok & Eng, 2007). Socio-economic transformation has significantly influenced the dynamic of youth through: urbanization, better education, internet access and information literacy, labour migration and social fragmentation (Pen et al., 2017). It is plausible to argue that these factors expose Cambodian youth to new ideas and values,

technology and diverse economic opportunity. These experiences influence their expectation and aspiration (Ibid).

In his study of Cambodian modernism, Karbaum (2015) finds that educated youth living in urban areas are less adherent to traditional beliefs than their less educated peers living in the countryside are. Since the agency and world view of youth are predominantly determined by their education, future aspirations of the majority of Khmer youths are still confined by tradition and situations (Pen et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that only seven percent of youth annually graduate with a university degree (World Bank, 2015). It is important to note that despite its increasing openness and economic development, Cambodia remains a traditional, paternalistic, hierarchical, and patriarchal society (Pen et al., 2017). This means that values such as a sense of oneself in relation to family and gender norms remains highly influential in shaping social behaviours (Cook, 2015; Jacobson, 2012). Furthermore, due to the omnipresence of traditional age-bound hierarchies, young Cambodians are not expected to express any views that differ from their elders (Pen et al., 2017).

The key factors to consider in this scenario space include identity, the concept of imagined community, the role of narratives in identity construction and Cambodian generational differences.

Identity and imagined community

Since this chapter mainly focuses on identity, an elaboration about its meaning is necessary. Definitions of identity are fluid and complex. They vary depending on the context in which they are being discussed. Hall (1990:222) argues that identity is far from being an accomplished fact but a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990, p. 222). In Welsch's (1999:5) concept of "transculturality", we are cultural hybrids whose identities are formed by multiple cultures (Welsch, 1995). Although perceived as an aftereffect of the "inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures", transculturality is not a completely new concept specifically assigned to today's society (Ibid).

Looking at these arguments, it is plausible to make the point that an individual has multiple identities depending on how many social contexts and groups that person operates in and belongs to. Therefore, this chapter will approach the term “identity” as a combination of cultures and nation that an individual associates with. Regarding the term nation, this chapter will approach it as an “imagined community” whose image is constructed by people who consider themselves part of the group in which collective memory is shared (Anderson, 1983). Anderson perceives nationality, nation-ness and nationalism as cultural artefacts of a particular kind. Members of an imagined community will never know or meet most of their fellow members, yet all of them have the image of their communion (Ibid). A nation is not only a political entity but also a system of cultural representation (Hall, 1992). Therefore, this chapter will explore Cambodian young people’s identity as individuals and as a collective. What the chapter will not cover are the citizenship aspects of being Cambodian.

Shaping identity through narrative transformation

Cambodia is a country known for stark contrasts in its history: the glory of Angkor and the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge (formally known as Democratic Kampuchea). These two distinct and contradicting pasts are undeniably significant in the construction of Cambodian identity. In order for Cambodia to have a new social representation, which extends beyond the two main historical events, the government needs to focus on related policies that can help represent the country in a different image and allow diverse narratives. Hall (1992) argues that we were not born with national identities. They are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation.

It is important to note that today’s modern Cambodian national identity is strongly informed by the trauma perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge. This can be explained through the concept of collective memory which has a direct influence in shaping one’s identity. Collective memory is defined as “a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days” (Halbwachs, 1992). Simply put, collective memory is individual memories placed in a social dimension. Cambodian people share many collective memories which

define their ethnic and national identity. Takei (2007) argues that Khmer identity is not based on culture, but rather on a collective memory that emphasizes the Angkor Empire and relations with external powers, particularly Vietnam and Thailand. Contemporary Cambodian identity still emphasizes the old collective memory of Angkor glory but with the addition of the recent collective memory of the Khmer Rouge. Close relationship between the individual and the social surroundings is inevitable in the process of identity construction. Therefore, the interdependency of the two concepts needs to be considered. Social surroundings are influenced by many factors including politics, economic development, globalization, arts and culture.

Cambodian generational differences

With the disruption during the Khmer Rouge period, a whole generation is arguably missing. This means that there are huge generational differences between older decision makers and their constituents because Cambodia is a young country in which two thirds of the population is below 30 years old (UNFPA, 2015). Generational differences can be found in personality traits, attitudes, mental health, and behaviours (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). Major factors such as parents, peers, media, critical economic and social events, and popular culture influence each generation and create common value systems which make them different from people who grew up at different times (Twenge et al., 2010). According to Karl Mannheim's theory of generations (Mannheim & Kecskemeti, 1952), older generations form the social context with which a new generation makes fresh contact. When this occurs, the new generation slightly adjusts the social context by selecting or emphasising particular aspects of it. Defined by years of birth and events that they went through, each generation has distinct characteristics. The table below demonstrates these differences:

Table 1: Synopsis of generations¹

Generation	Other names	Years of birthday (approx.)**	Values	World events/ Innovations
Generation X	Xers 13 th Generation	1965-1980	Individualism Skepticism Flexibility	Oral Contraceptives "The Pill" Cold War
Generation Y	Millennials Generation Next	1981-2000s	Moralism Confidence Positivity Environmental Consciousness	Internet MTV 9/11 Attacks Fall of the Eastern Bloc
Generation Z*	--	2000 - 2010	Digital natives Inclusion Individuality Realistic	

* *Generation Z was added to build on previous work that produced the existing table.*

** *Years of birth for each generation are slightly different based on which source is being used.*

The above synopsis cannot be fully applied to Cambodia due to the differences in context as well as social events being heavily influenced by American history. However, some characteristics are similar and can serve as a baseline when looking at generational differences in Cambodia. In this chapter, the relevant generations which will be examined are Generation X, Y and Z.

¹ Some table information was adapted from DelCampo, Haggerty, Knippel & Haney, 2011

Table 2: Synopsis of some generations in Cambodia

Generation	Major events	Characteristics and values
Gen X (1965 – 1980)	Sangkum Reas Niyum, Vietnam War, U.S. bombing, Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese occupation	<i>Bak Sbat</i> , traumatized, self-sacrifice, respect for authority, tolerance
Gen Y (1981 – 2000)	Cold War, UNTAC, 1997 civil unrest, Chea Vichea assassination, internet, Cambodia becomes ASEAN member, CPP, 2013 election	Individualism, confidence, independence, skeptic, hopeful, public activism, tech-savvy
Gen Z (2000 – 2020)	Kem Ley assassination, CNRP dissolution, rapid economic development, Chinese investment	Digital native, social network, mobility and multiple realities, fake news

In the context of Cambodia, one of social events that clearly distinguish Generations X, Y and Z is the Khmer Rouge. There are contested senses of identity among the Gen X who have been through Democratic Kampuchea, Gen Y (also known as millennials), and Gen Z. As mentioned earlier, since two thirds of the current Cambodian population consists of the latter two categories, it is reasonable to assume that their modern version of national identity prevails. However, this is not completely the case because the younger generation still have their identity shaped by the influencing narrative of the older generation (Din, 2017). As mentioned previously, the older generation makes up the majority of decision makers in the government, which means that they are still in control of how the Khmer Rouge history should be remembered through both official and unofficial means. In other words, the older generation still holds the power to constitute the nation's collective memory of the Khmer Rouge. This collective memory, mainly generated by the older generation, creates a dominating narrative that the new generation has to deal with, risking having their own stories and experiences displaced. The phenomenon is known as post memory (Hirsch, 2008).

III. Policy Initiatives to Achieve the Ideal Scenario

Initiative 1. Increase institutional representation for the younger generation across the government through the rejuvenation of public administration and political leadership.

The government plays a very significant role in constructing collective memory which is one of the core elements in the process of identity construction (Bellino & Williams, 2017). For example, The Day of Remembrance, Win-Win Monument and the production of school textbooks reflect direct intervention of the government in constructing memory. In that sense, it is plausible to contend that the government can essentially contribute to the transformation of Cambodian identity.

At the moment, there is a lack of cross age representation in decision makers amongst the current government due to the Khmer Rouge. During the Khmer Rouge Regime, many educated people were either killed or fled the country. Also, in the aftermath, there were not enough institutions to train and recruit public servants. This led to the majority of people making decisions at a government level being over the age of 40 (Ege, 2016). Due to generational differences, there is a disconnect between these older decision makers and their constituents because Cambodia is a young country in which two thirds of the population is below 30 years old (UNFPA, 2015). Generational differences can be found in personality traits, attitudes, mental health, and behaviours (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). Major forces such as parents, peers, media, critical economic and social events, and popular culture influence each generation and in creating common value systems which make them different from people who grew up at different times (Twenge et al., 2010).

Another result of generational differences in Cambodia is the distinguished definition of what it means to be Khmer or Cambodian. These two terms, although not contested, have distinctive connotations and national sentiment. Ege (2016) argues that the term 'Khmer' is being used by older ruling elites who draw Khmer national identity from old traditions and culture, focussing on the glory of Angkor. The term 'Cambodian', however, is argued to represent a more contemporary Cambodia, revived from the Khmer Rouge atrocities and trying to represent the modernity of Cambodia.

Second, when there is a steady growth of young, competent public servants, the focus needs to be on how to retain those young talents in the public sector. Royal School of Administration, popularly known as ERA, serves as a good

example which can be built upon in future reform. There should be more public administration universities, which not only offer the knowledge of working in the public sector but also provide a clear career prospect to attract young talent. Moreover, the government needs to take into account that they will be working with Generation Z Cambodians who are digital natives; therefore, the public sector needs to ensure that their working environment and salary package are attractive and competitive enough to compete with the private sector in order to retain talent.

Third, following the step of attracting youths and keeping them in the public sector, these young pools of talent should be encouraged and supported to take decision-making roles so that they voice their views through policy making and represent their generation. In addition, the government needs to ensure that public administration is depoliticized. This step is crucial to guarantee that policy making will reflect the interests of the constituents instead of political parties in power.

It will also be ideal for the current ruling elites to acknowledge and understand the consequences of generational differences in policy making so that they can foster the concept among their families' future generations. When there is a narrower generation gap among future policy makers, they will explore new ways to represent Cambodia that are more suited to their generation using more contemporary values and elements. The reason for the current decision makers to not just simply step down and leave space for the younger generation but also to pay attention to educating their children can be explained by using the concept of “parental complex” (Bennett, 2015). Parental complex is a network of influences with which parenthood is necessarily embroiled. Parents hold positive expectations about many aspects of a child’s future typically in the areas of generation development, education, employment, values, sociability etc. These expectations reflect wider societal influences, such as nationality, class, economic status, political ideology and religion (Ibid). In this aspect, it is worth recalling Mannheim’s theory of generations which states that a new generation makes new contact with the social context formed by older generations. Hence, the older generations need to be aware of this connection between generations and their influence on shaping the social context.

Initiative 2. Allow for diverse perspectives and narratives.

As mentioned previously, Cambodian national identity has been strongly informed by the trauma of the Khmer Rouge for both the older and the younger generations. Therefore, the government will need to rethink how the Khmer Rouge narratives are being used if the country's national identity is to be transformed and less dominated by this trauma in the future.

First, all political leaders should look for more contemporary and progressive ways to debate their policies using diverse ideas and narratives that extend beyond the Khmer Rouge legacy. Currently, an official Khmer Rouge narrative is still being widely used by the ruling party for political goals. The official narrative of the Khmer Rouge has been modified constantly by the Cambodian government in power over the years since 1979 (Ngo, 2014). The Khmer Rouge official narrative focuses on the demonization of the perpetrator and victimization of the survivors. This version of the narrative has been excessively enforced annually on "January 7" labelled as Victory Day over the genocide (Strangio, 2014). According to Tyner, Alvarez and Colucci (2012), commemoration is very often utilized to construct, omit, or reinvent an official history and collective memory which can be used to justify current forms of social representation and political presence. Therefore, in order for the social representation and identity of Cambodia to change, political culture will require a facelift. All political leaders should reinvent themselves by looking for a more contemporary and progressive ways to debate their policies using diverse ideas and narratives that extend beyond the Khmer Rouge legacy. Therefore, by using new narratives in the social and political sphere, leaders can help steer discussion beyond the narrow framing of the Khmer Rouge narrative and open space for diverse narratives to penetrate.

Second, noting the importance of learning about Cambodia's dark history, the discussion of the topic should continue but instead of being linear and relying on dominant official narrative, it should be multidirectional. In 2040, the government should allow and nurture the culture of cross-generational historical dialogue and alternative narratives of Democratic Kampuchea. One should note that it is impossible to achieve a totally objective and unbiased history; hence, it

is crucial to be open-minded about it and to allow people to be exposed to as many versions as possible. That will allow them the option to choose to reconcile with the version of a narrative that they can reflect on and come to terms with.

Third, the government should pay more attention to the formulation and practice of explicit and implicit cultural policies that nurture “transculturality” (Welsch, 1995) and freedom to possess as well as express memories. The idea here is to empower Cambodians to shape their own identities instead of having the government doing it for them – including Cambodian national identity. However, if the government is to use its power to influence collective memory, it should be the one in which Cambodia is shifting from a Western rescuing project and victim of the Khmer Rouge to a strong resilient nation thriving to achieve self-actualization.

This can be done through both formal and informal means. The main formal ways include history lessons, books and teaching, museums, television and film, memorials and monuments, rituals and anniversaries. The main informal approaches include family storytelling, oral histories, online and offline conversations, anecdotes, jokes, folk songs etc.

Formal ways to shape memories

It is essential to note that cultural policy extends beyond a narrow sense of the administration of the arts. It is about the “politics of culture in the most general sense, it is about the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meaning” (McGuigan, 1996). There is a distinction between explicit and implicit cultural policy (Ahearne, 2009). Explicit cultural policy focuses on what the government is doing for culture through its official cultural administration while implicit cultural policy focuses on the effective impact on the nation’s culture of its action as a whole, including education, media, industry, and foreign policy, etc (Ibid).

When it comes to formal means, the first few points to look at are history lessons, books and teaching. Since the establishment of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) or the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, Khmer Rouge education has already been more open than before through various channels (McCaffrie, Kum, Mattes & Tay, 2018). Changes have been made to high

school textbooks, teacher training and university curriculum. Nevertheless, students still claim that they do not learn much about the Khmer Rouge history in school (McCaffrie et al., 2018). This could be because of the already limited narrative tightly controlled by the government and the quality of teaching. Research has shown that neutrality of teaching is one of the problems concerning Khmer Rouge history teaching (Ibid). The problem is either the teacher is a Khmer Rouge survivor who may find the events traumatic or difficult to explain neutrally, or someone who did not live through the regime and may struggle to understand the events or to be taken seriously as teachers (Ibid). Therefore, more research by Cambodian scholars is needed in order to examine the topic from different angles that can then be utilized in teaching.

In addition, what the government should do in the upcoming two decades is to enable and allow open impartial spaces in which younger teachers are able to express their teaching neutrality, free from political influence and students are able to challenge the historical narratives taught to them using other narratives they have gathered from other sources such as family. Quality of teaching and content of history lessons on DK history will also need to be significantly improved. A research study conducted on student focus group by WSD Handa Center found that most students said they had not studied the regime at school or university at all, although their age suggested that they would have been through high school by the time the textbook on DK produced by DC-Cam was published in 2007 (Ibid).

Other formal means that can be hugely improved in order to transform the Khmer Rouge narrative in Cambodia are museums, mass media, monuments and memorials. It is very important to bear in mind that for Cambodia, as a nation, to have a new identity and social representation in twenty years' time, the core narratives – temple and war – used for the current representation will need to be replaced completely with new ones. For the Khmer Rouge narrative, that can only be done if the nation is allowed and ready to confront their past. By confronting, I mean asking questions, researching different narratives, creating dialogues among the younger generation who will need to accept and understand what happened and move on. At that point, the role of the government is to allow a safe space for this confrontation and reflection without interference.

Once the confrontation of the past is complete, there will need to be space for new narratives and representation of modern Cambodia to exist and grow.

Some good examples can be observed in discussions around Germany's experience with Holocaust education. In Germany, the word for education is "bildung", a concept of development that empowers youth with all the characteristics needed to succeed in life. This concept is traditionally linked to the concept of emancipation which assumed that with knowledge comes freedom (Bunch, Canfield & Schöler, 2011). In Germany, Holocaust education evolves constantly. In a landscape where survivors die and third generation slowly drifts out of the Holocaust's shadow, education must be strengthened with an understanding of the applicable lessons and principles that derived from the Holocaust (ibid). In this sense, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge education should utilise this existing experience from Germany and make sure that Khmer Rouge education evolves timely as the new generations gradually drift out of the Khmer Rouge shadow. As Bunch, Canfield and Schöler argue, "there is a fine line between instilling students with the facts of history, self-consciousness, and the ability to be critical of one's milieu without creating a feeling of guilt and defensiveness" (Ibid, (para.10)).

Furthermore, the government should reinvent a new way to remember the war. Instead of remembering the Khmer Rouge with the Day of Hatred, the nation can have an alternative way of remembering with the Remembrance Day, which will be a day to pray and remember all the lives that were lost. The re-enactment of the Khmer Rouge violence should be abolished completely. In terms of mass media, they should be allowed to operate uncensored.

It is worth noting that collective memory does not simply disappear as the legitimacy of the government who is in charge of controlling the collective memory begins to dissolve (Wertsch, 2002). Wertsch (2002) argues that there seem to be quite active, compensating forces in textual consumption that are likely to give rise to alternative ways of representing the past. It is safe to make a point that often times those forces derive from informal means of shaping memories because they are mostly free from government control.

Informal means to shape memories

Cambodia's collective memory is already shaped significantly by informal means such as oral histories, family storytelling, and conversation online and offline. For young people, the main source of knowledge about the Khmer Rouge is not educational institutions but their families (McCaffrie et al., 2018). The government should nurture these informal ways of shaping the Khmer Rouge memories by not intervening and not imposing a politically charged version of the narrative on people.

Instead, the government should invest in implicit cultural policy that can influence the shaping of a new Cambodian identity. For example, by introducing the teaching of soft skills in the public education system focusing on building future leaders equipped with critical thinking and leadership skills. Those future leaders will be the agents of change and a new representation of a future Cambodia. This suggestion is made based on the German concept of "building", which as mentioned previously, emphasizes a process of holistic growth, self-realization of the individual as an entirety, freedom, and self-understanding as well as a sense of social responsibility, and which puts the development of the individual's unique potential and self at the center of educational processes (Hu, 2015). Another example is re-routing budget normally used to build large cement monuments to invest in technology and media start-ups, business incubators, arts and culture and the like. In short, the government should change its perception of its people from being pure followers of what has already been decided for them to being partners who have a great deal to contribute in the collective efforts of building the country.

Initiative 3. Encourage the flow of ideas and knowledge through embracing globalization and access to diverse and free media.

Cambodia has witnessed significant economic growth over the past two decades reaching lower middle-income status in 2015 (World Bank, 2019). The World Bank's (2019) preliminary estimation illustrates real growth achieved a four-year high of 7.5 percent in 2018, compared to 7 percent in 2017. Economic development unarguably brings many positive changes to a country such as urbanization, globalization, technological advancement, increased literacy and so on. These changes then create ripple effects to almost all aspects of society ranging

from the increased mobility of the rural population, to how media text is consumed, to the idea of what it means to be a Cambodian. Changes driven by economic development are important factors which contribute to a shift in the self-identification of youth from collective consciousness and representative of everything Cambodian to a celebration of individuality and multidirectional ways of viewing the world.

In another aspect, high economic growth is one of the major driving forces for urbanization. The growth in Cambodia was fuelled by deep structural transformation of the national economy: taking steps toward becoming “one of the most open countries in one of the most open regions in the world” (Davies, 2010). With encouragement from the government, a significant influx of foreign private investment, concentrated in services and industry, have overtaken agriculture as a primary source of Cambodian GDP (Springer, 2015). This growth, however, has a rather narrow base focusing on the garment trade and tourism, concentrated in the capital city of Phnom Penh (Lawreniuk, 2017). These developments have caused an influx of labour migration from rural areas into the city. According to the 2008 census, an estimated 850,000 people from a total labour force of 7.5 million in Cambodia, or over 10 percent, had migrated from provinces to reside and work in Phnom Penh. Currently, the Cambodian urbanization rate is at 21 percent and is expected to be at 36 percent by 2050 (World Bank, 2017).

Though this migration is clearly driven by the need for better income generation opportunities, modernity appears to be a perceived promise that comes with the prospect of urban work. In addition to their drive to escape hardship, many migrants long to be part of urban life, with which come freedom, fun, and fortune (Lawreniuk, 2017). Hence, it can be argued that the desire to be immersed in modernity and urban life has a potential to expose migrants or new city dwellers to range of media texts and narratives. Even though the level of exposure and their ability to generate meanings of those texts and narratives might differ from well-educated Cambodians, it is plausible to assume that migrants’ perceptions of the country and themselves are expanded and eventually transformed when they move to the city.

Regarding the aspect of increased literacy, Cambodia currently has a youth literacy rate of 73.9 percent (Thomas, 2019). Educated Cambodians are better exposed to textual resources, which diversify and broaden their means of building a definition of who they are and want to be. It is worth noting that this does not imply that the Cambodian education system is great. However, education is an enabler of Cambodian young people to seek new information through various means.

Based on changes observed in Vietnam (King et al., 2008) and China (Weber, 2002), the transformation to a free market economy opens a big door for globalization which brings in a wide range of cultural experiences through various media including television, the internet, and literature. In the case of reform in China, Weber (2002) examines that in rapidly changing social typography brought about by reform, youth face different challenges, embrace different dreams, and pursue different opportunities from their parents and grandparents. Currently, Cambodia is witnessing similar phenomena with stronger influences in a shorter amount of time. This arguably could be because of the country's self-proclaimed democratic status, which allows more space for other cultures and values to penetrate.

Examining all of these transformations brought to Cambodia by economic development, it can be pointed out that the flow of information through ranges of media channels is crucial in influencing youths' perception of themselves and the country. Therefore, Cambodia needs to first embrace this by continuing to welcome globalization and ensuring that the media space remains free which will then allow more information to be exchanged and consumed. This will then provide the younger generation with a continuous exposure to new sets of ideas, foreign cultures and values through the range of media mentioned previously. Texts produced by the range of media are then being used by young Cambodians to achieve various individual objectives, one of which is building an identity and social representation of themselves. Ege (2016) argues that as young Cambodians become increasingly connected to the outside world, competing definitions of national identity arise, leaving a divide between Cambodians who wish to forge a new form of national and cultural identity and those who wish to revert to a shared sense of Cambodia's distant past.

Furthermore, an improved education system is required in order to increase the rate of university graduates to ensure that more young people are exposed to more textual resources through the media. There will also be the need for increased media literacy skills to be introduced by the government into the education system so that youth can best utilize good information and protect themselves from misinformation. After all, Cambodia's accessibility to the internet continues to rise reaching 8 million users representing a 49% reach in a country of 16 million people (UNDP Cambodia, 2019).

Initiative 4. Revitalize the arts and cultural sector by recognising the importance of arts in the reconciliation process and allowing artists the freedom to create more work that reflects the society.

Arts contain powerful tools for influencing society, identities, and representation. Artists can stimulate discussion on a wide range of issues that traditional actors in society may be unable to achieve. Examples can be found through many famous and powerful art forms such as Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (Panh, 2013), Ai WeiWei's *Sunflower Seeds* (WeiWei, 2010), and Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* (Eliasson 2018). Filmmaker Rithy Panh once expressed that "art is not able to change the word, but art can show the future and the past. We had to come back and deal with identity. You can't rebuild a country without rebuilding identity" (Schneider, 2016). From this quote, it can be drawn that reconciliation within and among individuals and societies is an essential first step towards building a positive future out of the remnants of a tragic past or present.

On top of that, art increasingly becomes a form of self-expression and is allowing young people to find a voice which they previously did not have. Following decades of war, especially the Khmer Rouge regime, many artists were involved in reflecting on the Khmer Rouge regime, either recounting their own experiences or eschewing the autobiographical in works that were more universal in them. This was mainly due to demands imposed by international audiences, who also demanded picture-postcard paintings of Angkor Wat or the Cambodian countryside (Wolfarth, 2017). Similar to many post-conflict countries, contemporary visual arts in Cambodia are marked by investigation into regional, national, and personal identity (Ibid). However, Cambodian artists are becoming increasingly

critical in their art which illustrates more global themes, beyond the war, be it in uneven development and social justice, the legacy of history, or questions of gender.

At the moment, Cambodian modern artists are at a crossroads and caught between keeping Khmer tradition and old Khmer identity, and self-expression and the new modern Cambodian identity (Ege, 2016). Although the government does not specify what it is to be Cambodian, they propagate the idea that one is not Cambodian unless they fit into the social norms related to Khmer culture, religion, language and customs. Modern day artists seem to be at the greatest odds with the concept of the old Khmer identity which associate most with the glorious Angkor, strict traditions and countryside landscape (Ibid). Furthermore, the tight control that the government has over the official narrative of the Khmer Rouge and national history hinders the artist's ability to create relatable artworks altogether. Within this context, the first key step is for the government to recognize the essential role of the arts by allowing the narrative to be free from governmental control. This will allow artists to be active agents for change using their various creative modes.

Furthermore, emerging technologies and increased connectivity brought by economic development in the country have enabled the Cambodian young population to be powerful advocates and consumers of Cambodian contemporary art. There is clear evidence that Cambodian artists are heading in the direction of shifting narrative to something that they can relate to (Ege, 2016). However, the progress is slow due to lack of clear and cohesive national cultural policy and the government's political will to control the narrative. For example, in the current National Policy for Culture (National Policy for Culture, 2014), one of the goals is "to reduce negative culture and its impact upon society" with the term "negative culture" vaguely defined as "cultural activities which impact otherwise good national tradition". In a sub-decree on the management of film industry (Sub-Decree on the Management of Film Industry, 2016), Chapter 2, Article 8, states that "it is prohibited to produce cinematographic works whose content [...] distort the truth in national history; [...]".

The government should improve the cultural sector by increasing the funding for Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, which will allow them to develop a clearer and non-prescriptive explicit cultural policy. By clearer and non-prescriptive explicit cultural policy, I refer to one that will encourage artists to create and represent without handcuffing them to the clause of old Khmer tradition and "negative culture" while also protecting the rights to their works. After all, as Scheider rightfully questioned, "If extremists grasp the importance of erasing culture in dominating and controlling, then why is the value of culture in recovering from violence not more widely accepted?" (Schneider, 2016). Economic development must be combined with healing and reconciliation to enable post-conflict rebuilding and to truly transform societies (Ibid).

IV. Cambodian Identity, Culture, and Legacy Under the Baseline Scenario: Business as Usual in 2040

In the absence of targeted reform through the policy initiatives suggested above, Cambodian youth identity will be very different from its current state. Without the implementation of Initiative 1, there will not be sufficient institutional representation for younger generations in a vibrant public administration. It is easy to picture that the older generation will eventually retire in the next twenty years; however, it is uncertain what kind of leadership or values the new wave of younger generation of public servants will possess. Without following through the three key steps of Initiative 1, it is plausible to argue that the new wave of younger generation who comes to take decision-making role in the government are there because of their family lineage, and they potentially hold some of their parents' old values transferred to them through their upbringing. This will influence the younger generations' way of working as well as their beliefs. It will also stagnate the idea of political leadership and how public administration is operated. Consequently, the Khmer Rouge narratives will uphold its existence and dominance beyond 2040 due to legacy passed down from parents who used to be in power. It is worth keeping in mind that the current ruling party might still be in power by that time despite having new leaders.

In addition, without Initiative 2 in place to enable diverse perspectives and narratives, there is no guarantee that the new younger decision makers would

dismiss the official Khmer Rouge narrative and create a new one. Applying the concept of the parental complex, it can be contended that the current leaders have influenced their children in many aspects throughout their upbringing which includes political ideology, beliefs and possibly their preferred way of telling the Khmer Rouge history. However, the new generation of leaders and decision-makers in the future Cambodian government will be those who have not experienced living under Democratic Kampuchea at all. Hence, even though they possibly were taught to utilize the Khmer Rouge narrative for their political gain and agenda, they cannot claim the same legacy as their predecessors.

In terms of economic development, it cannot be denied that it brings many positive changes; however, it also brings adverse impacts. Today, with its fast-growing economy, Cambodia faces many serious challenges. One of the most prominent challenges is uneven distribution of resources. Despite the soaring GDP, not every Cambodian benefits from this. This issue also applies to other aspects brought by development such as increased literacy and urbanization. Although these two aspects play a major role in exposing young people to the world outside of Cambodia, not everyone receives the same exposure and opportunities. Karbaum (2015) finds that young educated, especially urban, Cambodians are less submissive to traditional beliefs than the less educated countryside group. In addition, future aspirations of a majority of Cambodian youths is expected to be constrained to the traditional and situational pattern because youths' agency and world view are predominantly determined by their education (Pen, et al., 2017). According to the World Bank (Ibid), only 7 percent of young people graduate every year with a university degree, which is a huge decline from over 96 percent registration at primary level.

On the subject of urban migration, most migrants move to the city to work in labor intensive jobs and less than 6 percent have had secondary or above education (Ministry of Planning, 2012). A research paper from CDRI finds that for this youth group, ensuring daily survival is a struggle (Pen, et al., 2017, p. 113). For this reason, it is difficult to imagine that this youth group would aspire to be anything else—modern, creative, tech-savvy—beyond immediate economic opportunities. It is fair to say that being able to be individualistic is considered to be a privilege in the Cambodian context.

Regarding art, it is worth keeping in mind that the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts remains one of the lowest funded government institutions. Looking twenty years ahead, it is difficult to presume that the sector will thrive and flourish without a well-funded institution to regulate especially if there is no reform that leads to the expansion of the sector. Also, it is possible that the government can potentially turn the cultural sector into a powerful propaganda machine. The Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, led by a son of the Prime minister, presents a potential operationalization of this concern. This is an organization that aims to train Cambodian youth to become the pillars and backbone of the nation and as potential successors to preserve the past achievements and to achieve socio-economic development in the future (Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia, 2019). While recognizing this, the future for the art sector and artists is not all negative and grim. There have been positive changes and growth in the sector. To date, there are three local organizations – Cambodian Living Arts, Cambodia Children’s Fund, Mad Monkey – that give grants to artists directly. This will allow artists to be more independent in their work and sustain themselves. Nevertheless, the sector still heavily relies on international funding from foreign governments such as the U.S., Sweden, Japan, U.K. etc. These governments have their own agenda and policies. Hence, the question worth asking is how do artists create without being controlled by anyone’s agenda at all.

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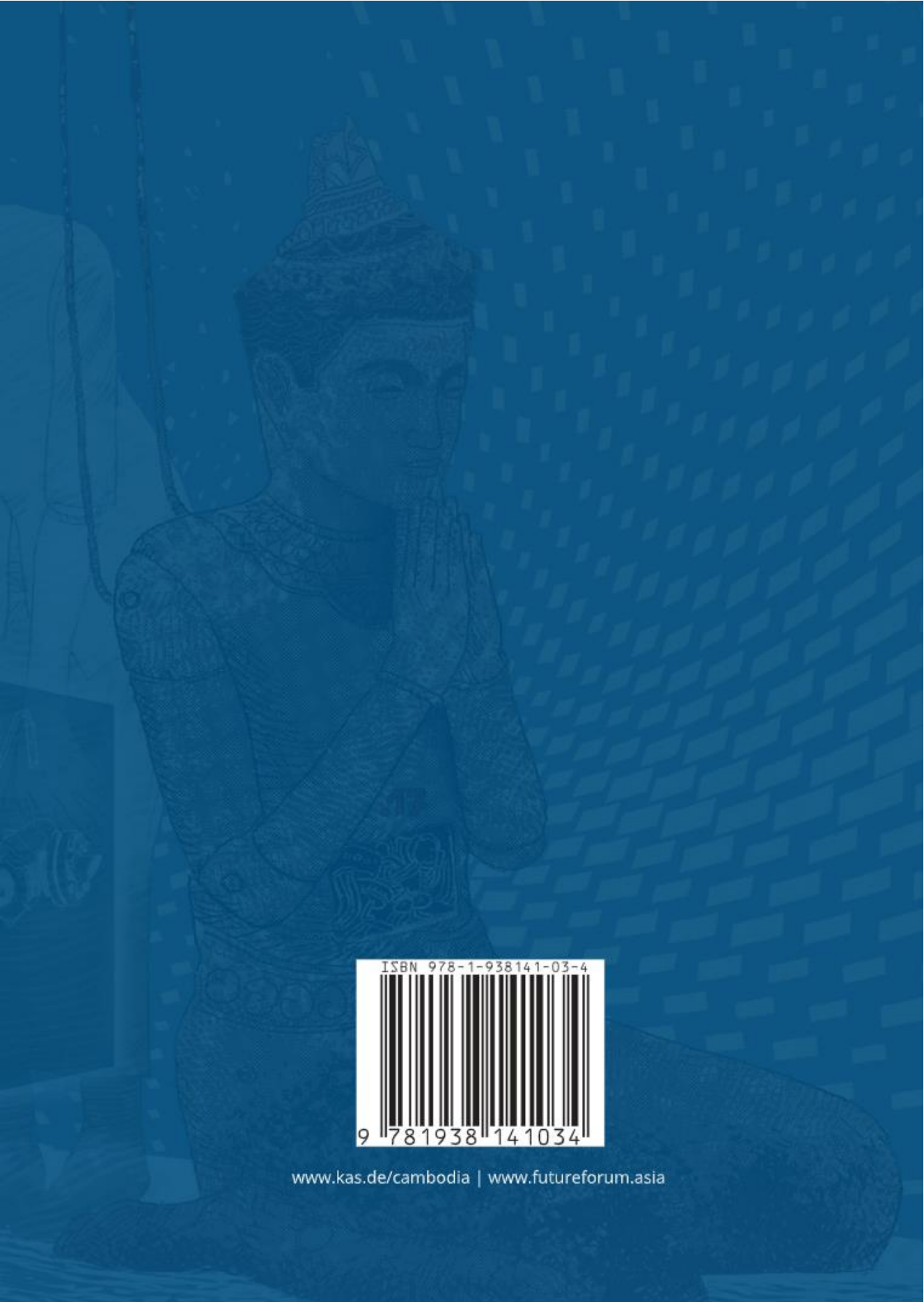
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