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

Boreth Ly**

[*Abstract*]

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

* I would like to thank Mirren Theiding for reading drafts of this article. An additional thank-you to Neak Sophal, Tith Kanitha, Sylvain Sreng Lim, and Suppya Hélène Nut for their help and generosity.

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

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

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

Ⅰ. Introduction

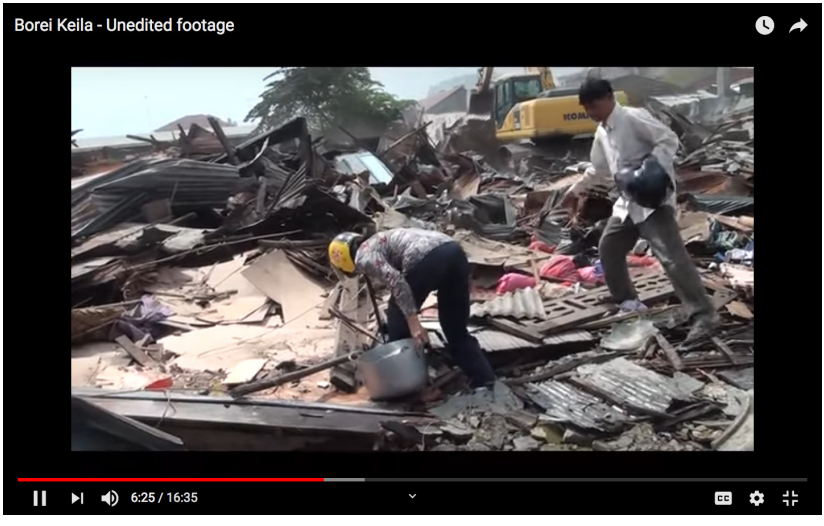
In traditional Cambodian culture, a woman's role is confined to and revolves around the kitchen. Two utilitarian and symbolic objects associated with womanhood are the stove and the pot. The pot is a symbol of both the womb and female sexuality, and the stove is a symbol of feminine, domestic labor.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

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

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

Ⅱ. The Conditioning of Gender Roles in Cambodian Society

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

According to the novelist:

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

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

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

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

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

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

<Fig. 4> Nhek Dim, *A Famous Star Song* (1974)
Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001: 120).

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

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

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

<Fig. 5> Nhek Dim with Walt Disney, 1964.
Source: https://www.picluck.com/media/875580089720240071_1542212940. (Accessed October 22, 2019)

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

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

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

<Fig. 6> Nhek Dim, illustration for the late King Norodom Sihanouk's song, *Bopha Vientiane* (1964)
Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001: 4)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

creates a mirror like reflection.

<Fig. 7> Nhek Dim, Untitled (1974)
Source: Lors Chinda, Nhek Dim (Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher, 2001**:** 105)

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

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

<Fig. 8> Nhek Dim, *Untitled* (1973)
Source: Lors Chinda, *Nhek Dim* (Phnom Penh: Arts Publishers, 2001: 128).

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

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

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

> **Neak Na Oy Kou** (Who Gives You Permission to Paint Me?)
> A duet sung by Pen Ron and Sin Samouth
>
> Male singer: Hello, where are you heading to, please wait.
> If you marry me you will be rewarded with a precious gift.
> Here is a portrait of you, are you pleased with it?
> I spent three days and nights without sleep painting your portrait.
>
> Female singer: Who gives you me permission to paint me?
>
> Male: Why are you so furious?
> Why you do you have no pity on me?
> I worked so hard to create a gift for you in exchange for your love.
> Not only are you apathetic, you don't even thank me.
>
> Female: You are lucky that I didn't bawl you out.[5]

---

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

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

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

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

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

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAhHQYTwrdU
Seng Dara, "History of Mok Chanmaly" (Accessed May 18, 2919).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> **Ber Jong Ban Aune** (If You Desire Me, Do You Know How To Cook?)
> If you desire me, do you know how to cook?
> I am different from other girls because I always want to be served by my husband.
> No matter what I ask you to do, you have to do it for me unconditionally.
> If you want me, please learn how to accept all my demands before you can become my husband.
> Many men have come and gone. They really irritated me because they failed to please me. I asked them to do this, but they did that. They were helpless. As a result, they lost their opportunity to marry me.
> Oh, my dear! Please do not come to complain to me because I don't like to be cajoled.
> If you want me, please learn how to accept all my demands before you can become my husband.[11]

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

---

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

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

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

As I mentioned earlier, Nhek Dim was killed under the Khmer Rouge regime in 1977; because he was an artist, he was considered an advocate of a capitalist regime that went against the Maoist communist ideology of Democratic Kampuchea (1075-1979). One is inclined to ask: did the communist regime under Pol Pot change the sexist representations of Khmer women, especially of the Khmer female body? Unfortunately, not much in terms of visual arts was produced under Democratic Kampuchea. Propaganda films featured both women and men dressed in the mandatory black uniforms engaged in physical labor such as building dams, farming, and participating in communal song and dance (Ly 2020: 111). In the post-Democratic Kampuchea period, these masculinist visual representations of Khmer female body as "sex pots" created by Nhek Dim prevailed, as evident in paintings produced by many Khmer male artists that I have discussed earlier.

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

Ⅴ. Neak Sophal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ⅵ. Tith Kanitha

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

[15] The above translation of the artist's speech in Khmer is mine.

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

Ⅶ. Meanings of Destruction

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

> **Chhang Chas Bay Chhanganh** (Old Pot Still Cooks Good Rice)
> What am I to do now?
> I can't figure out what I've done wrong
> I've tried to keep you pleased every night
> Is there someone new, now you're forgetting me?
>
> If you come back, I would welcome you
> We'll start a new chapter of our lives
> The old pot still cooks rice you once enjoyed.
> Eaten day or night, the rice is always warm (Saphan 2017: 11).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ⅷ. Conclusion

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

[17] E-mail exchange with the artist, November 6, 2018.
[18] Interview with the artist, July 31, 2019.

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

<Fig. 18> A sticky rice cake weights 4 tons was made for the Celebration of Khmer New Year in 2015
Source: https://english.cambodiadaily.com/news/cambodia-claims-guinness-world-record-for-sticky-rice-cake-81990/. (Accessed October 22, 2019)

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

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

> **Nom Kom Snol Daung** (Triangle-Shaped Cake with Coconut Filling) Sung by Meas Samon and Pen Ron[19]
>
> Cake Seller (female): *Nom kom snol daon* (triangle-shaped cake with coconut filling)!
> Sweet and aromatic cakes, please buy some to taste!
>
> Buyer (male): Really Miss? Miss, please come over here. May I taste it?
>
> Cake Seller: Yes, please taste to your heart's content. If you like it, how many would you like to buy?
>
> Buyer: Miss, I have a big *ansom chrouk* (stick-rice cake with pork and mung bean filling). Do you want to exchange yours with mine?
>
> Cake Seller: I don't believe you. No, I am not interested in exchanging my cakes with you. Please go find someone else. Hey, bad boy, I am warning you, don't you try to trick me again.
>
> Buyer: Miss, my *ansom chrouk* is big.
>
> Cake Seller: How big is it?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

References

Anderson, Benedict. 1982. *Imagined Communities: Reflection On the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* New York: Verso.

Article19Asia. Unedited video footage of Borei Keila uploaded on youtube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yo8q7IhdEaE. (Accessed May 19, 2019).

Clancy-Smith, Julia and Frances Gouda, eds. 1992. *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Chakraya, Khouth Sophak. 2018. "Krama Wins a Guiness Record for the Longest Scarf," in The Phnom Penh Post (July 2, 2018). https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/krama-wins-guinness-record-longest-scarf. (Accessed May 15, 2019).

Edwards, Penny. 1998. Womanizing Indochina: Fiction, Nation, and Cohabitation in Colonial Cambodia, 1890-1930. Clancy-Smith, Julia and Frances Gouda, eds. 108-130. *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Derks, Annuska. 2008. *Khmer Women on the Move: Exploring Work and Life in Urban Cambodia*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Montague, J. 2010. *Picture Postcards of Cambodia 1900-1950*. Bangkok, Thailand: White Lotus.

Muan, Ingrid. 2001. Citing Angkor: The "Cambodia Arts" in the Age of Restoration 1918-2000. New York. PhD Dissertation. Columbia University

Frances, Fernando. 2014. *Subodh Gupta: The Imaginary Order of Things. Malaga*: Cac Malaga.

Gleeson, Erin. 2013. P*hnom Penh: Rescue Archaeology, Contemporary Art and Urban Change in Cambodia*. Berlin, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen.

Gouda, Frances. 1992. *Good Mothers, Medeas, or Jezebels: Feminine Imagery in Colonial and Anticolonial Rhetoric in the Dutch East Indies, 1900-1942*. Clancy-Smith, Julia and Frances Gouda, eds. 236-254. *Domesticating the Empire: Race,*

Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

Houn, Vicheara. 2012. *Bamboo Promise: Prison Without Walls*. Bloomington, Indiana: Abbott Press.

Houn, Vicheara Houn. 2012. Bamboo Promise/Prison Without Walls. http://boramtz.wix.com/bamboo-promise. (Accessed May 13, 2019).

Hunt, Lynn. 1995. *The Invention of Pornography and The Origins of Modernity*. New York: Zone Books

Ileto, Reynaldo Clemeña. 2017. *Knowledge and Pacification: On the U.S. Conquest and the Writing of Philippine History*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Jameson, Fredric. 1992. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge.

Jinja, Apsara. 2010. "Women Can Move Away From The Stove." http://jinja.apsara.org/2010/11/women-can-move-away-from-the-stove/. (Accessed May 19, 2019).

Lim, Theam Teng. 1970. Madame Sethi, une écrivaine des années 20 (1883-1963). *Kambujasuriya*, 12: 1353.

Lindstrom, Nora. 2010. The Personal is Political: Khmer Female Artists Make Themselves Heard, in *Cambodia Asia Life,* 48: 30-35.

Lors, Chinda. 2001.*Nhek Dim*. Phnom Penh: Arts Publisher.

Ly, Boreth. 2020. *Traces of Trauma: Cambodian Visual Culture and National Identity in the Aftermath of Genocide.* Honlulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.

Ly, Daravuth and Ingrid, Muan. 2001. *Cultures of Independence: An introduction to Cambodian Arts and Culture in the 1950's and 1960's.* Phnom Penh: Reyum.

Mulvey, Laura. 2007. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds. 833-844. Film Theory and Criticism: An Introductory Readings. New York: Oxford UP.

Mus, Paul. 1933.'Cult indien et indigenes au Champa.' *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient,* 33 (1): 378.

Neak Sophal. 2019. Artist's website: https://www.sophalneak.com/on-going-project/test/. (Accessed May 15, 2019).

Nut, Hélène NUT. 2013 Ros Serey Sothea, Pen Ron, Sinn Sisamouth: des monstressacrés. Unpublished manuscript.

_____. 2013. Suy Hieng. Écrivaines du Cambodge, Dictionnaire universel des créatrices. Ed., Antoinette Fouque. Paris: Des femmes.

Phak Siengly and kijewski Leonie. 2017. New Eviction Deadline For Borei Keila Holdouts, Phnom Penh Post: https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/new-eviction-deadline-borei-keila-holdouts. (Accessed November 10, 2018).

Pich, Sopheap, 2013. Sopheap Pich on Nhek Dim. *Art Asia Pacific,* 86: 23.

Ratner, Vaddey. 2012. *In the Shadow of the Banyan*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ratner, Vaddey. 2019. Interview. https://vaddeyratner.com/banyan/. (Accessed February 24, 2019).

Russeth, Andre. *What's Cooking at Basel? An Indian Feast by Subodh Gupta With Political Ambition*. http://www.artnews.com/2017/06/16/whats-cooking-at-basel-an-indian-feast-by-subodh-gupta-with-political-ambitions/. (Accessed May 16, 2019).

Saphan, LinDA. 2017. *Cambodian Popular Music Influences from the 1950 to the Present Day*. Hyunjoon Shin and Keewoong Lee, eds. 262-296. Sounds From the Periphery: Modernity and Development of Asia Pop 1960-2000.

Saphan, Linda. 2013. Norodom Sihanouk and the political agenda of Cambodian music, 1955–1970, *IIAS Newsletter*, 64(Summer): 4-5.

Seng Dara: 2015. History of Nhek Dim. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3Xgbozntms. (Accessed May 12, 2019).

Sassoon Alesssndro Marazzi and Taing Rinith. 2017. *"Num Ansorm:The Salacious Street."Phnom Penh Post*. https://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-depth-post-life-arts-culture-food-drink/num-ansorm-salacious-street-snack. (Accessed October, 17, 2019).

Valentine, Ben. 2018. Confronting Cambodian Sexism Through Portraiture. https://hyperallergic.com/382158/confronting-cambodian-sexism-through-portraiture/. (Accessed May 15, 2019).

Vachon, Michelle. 2009. Painting by Famed Nhek Dim Returns Home. *The Cambodian Daily*. https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/painting-by-famed-nhek-dim-returns-home-62786/

(Accessed May 15, 2019).

Wallace, Julia. 2019. "Cambodia Ruler's Recipe for Youth Appeal? An 8,900 pounds Rice Cake," *New York Times* (January 23, 2019). https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/23/world/asia/cambodia-hun-sen-world-records.html. (Accessed May 15, 2019).

Received: Oct. 22, 2019; Reviewed: Dec. 12, 2019; Accepted: Jan. 10, 2020