

Mobility, Modernity and Status

The World in Phnom Penh and Phnom Penh in the World

Willem Paling

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the Institute for Culture and Society

University of Western Sydney
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Acknowledgements

When I first visited Cambodia almost ten years ago at twenty years of age, I didn't bother learning any Khmer words beyond yes and no. I thought I'd be there for just a few months, and would probably never return. But I did return—quite often—and some of the students and foreign volunteers that I taught and worked with during my first visit, would come to play a significant role in my life as they, and I, progressed through university and established a career (or avoided work by doing research degrees). In particular I'd like to acknowledge the advice and friendship of Hem Tola, Huy Sambo, Chann Sokrasmey, Lay Sovichea, Alice Jowett and Geordie Smith all of whom have shared a large part of my engagement with Phnom Penh and Cambodia, and whose insights and criticism have shaped the development of this thesis.

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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CTS	Center for Transcultural Studies
FDD	Financial Development District
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FUNCINPEC	<i>Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif</i> (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	Information Technology
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LDC	Least Developed Country
MLMUPC	Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPMG	Phnom Penh Municipal Government
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPSEZ	Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone
PPWSA	Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SAR	Special Administrative Region
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UBPA	Urban Best Practices Area
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
US	United States (of America)
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Abstract

In September 2010, Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, lauded Phnom Penh's recent progress, linking new buildings, vehicles and goods in the city to Cambodia's emergence as a 'modern society in the modern world'. But what does it mean to be 'modern' in Phnom Penh, and what constitutes local knowledge of the 'modern world'? In this predominantly rural, post-conflict country, there are many local reference points, both historical and contemporaneous, against which superior modern status can be cast. At the same time there is a growing awareness of people and places that are vastly more modern, as residents are increasingly engaged with and affected by mobilities—of people, capital, popular culture, images and information—connecting Phnom Penh with other cities throughout the Asian region and beyond. It is in this context that popular knowledge is (re)produced of who, where and what is modern and through these links that modern urban spaces such as skyscrapers, shopping malls and edge-city projects are being planned and built.

Building on recent explorations of the meaning and usefulness of theorising what it is to be modern by authors such as Ferguson (2006) and Cooper (2005), I will seek to establish the ways in which the residents of Phnom Penh understand themselves to be or not be modern, and through what connections these understandings are produced. This thesis makes an original contribution to academic understanding of vernacular and political modernity in Asian cities. I find that in this context, modernity can be understood through multiple core-periphery relationships, corresponding to perceived prominence in areas such as technology, urban development, popular culture, and political and economic power. The study highlights the growing influence of a number of cores of modernity within Asia. Additionally, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to knowledge of contemporary Phnom Penh—the city has not been the subject of many social and cultural academic analyses in recent decades. The exploration takes place through analysis of data from personal interviews illustrating upward social mobility and 'being modern', positioned within the broader context of the contemporary economic, political and infrastructural changes that have taken place in Phnom Penh over the last decade.

Maps



Figure 1: Administrative map of Cambodia

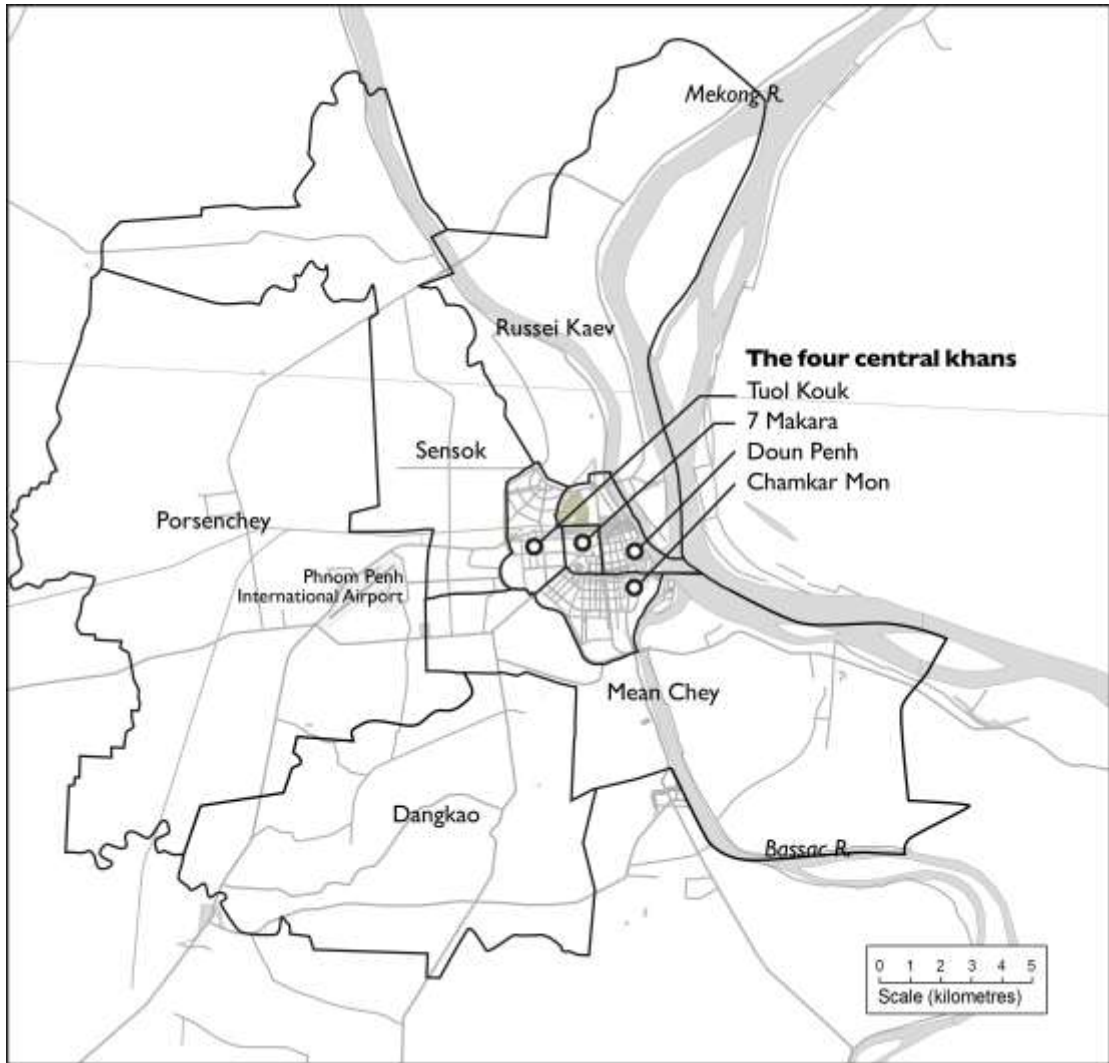


Figure 2: Administrative map of Phnom Penh

1 Introduction: A Modern Society in the Modern World?

Cambodians and foreigners can clearly witness Cambodian development when they come to visit Phnom Penh. The surge in new buildings, vehicles, and various goods reveal the improvement and progress of Cambodia's society, economic, culture and art to become a modern society in the modern world. In this regard, at present as well as in the future we have to continue working together to develop the capital so that it will become a pivotal source for economic growth and represent the sophistication of the Cambodia's society in modern time [*sic*].

Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, 16 September 2010¹

In September 2010, Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, lauded Phnom Penh's recent progress, linking new buildings, vehicles and goods in the city to Cambodia's emergence as a 'modern society in the modern world'. This was one of many speeches in which Hun Sen has positioned the success of his government in the development of Phnom Penh, and made claims of Cambodia's rising world status. But what does it mean to be 'modern' in Phnom Penh, and what is this 'modern world' to which Hun Sen is claiming membership? If Cambodia has improved its world status, which countries has it risen above? Perhaps it is the handful of skyscrapers that have emerged in recent years that make Phnom Penh a modern city, or the increasingly reliable infrastructure, and the emergence of shopping malls. But the skyscrapers can hardly be compared

¹ 'Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh' Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

with towers that have been built elsewhere in Asia, in cities like Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur and Taipei. Further, it could be argued that the broad claim that Cambodia is a modern society due to the visible presence of 'buildings, vehicles, and various goods' is hollow as these are only accessible for a small proportion of the population. Cambodia is still home to high poverty rates and has seen rising national inequality over the past decade. Political patronage continues to play a strong role in business and politics, and Cambodia has never had a change of government prompted by a democratic election.

The above quote reflects an elite desire for improvement of the status of Cambodia's capital in the world—a desire that has been widely observed throughout Asia (Roy & Ong 2011). However, this concern with 'Cambodia's society' becoming more modern is also a popular aspiration, both in terms of the status of the city and the nation, and on smaller scales such as the individual or the family. Being 'modern' is central to the aspirations of many Cambodians who seek a higher standard of living—both the residents of Phnom Penh and the provincial population. For those less privileged, aspiration towards 'being modern' is a driver of the migration of rural women to work in Phnom Penh's garment factories, or for rural men migrating to Thailand to work on construction sites or fishing trawlers (Derks 2008; Derks 2010). It drives fashion, media consumption, mobile phone purchases and choices in education. For those who are more privileged, it drives the purchase of luxury cars, the design of houses, travel plans, and the pursuit of international education. It is linked to the ability to stay inside, particularly in air-conditioned spaces, and to have soft hands and light skin. It plays a large role in the scarcity of pedestrians, and the social stigma attached to riding a bicycle.

In Phnom Penh, as in many Asian cities, skyscrapers stand out as the most obvious symbol of a modernising city. Other aspects of the built environment such as shopping malls, universities, bridges and overpasses confirm the emergence of modernity in Phnom Penh and appeal to popular desires to modernise. These transformations have

been facilitated by economic growth and increasing flows of trade and aid, which have been mirrored in the cultural flows of tourism and entertainment media. All of these flows have grown in significance, and many have become engaged primarily with Asia. China is the largest partner in terms of trade and aid, and Chinese and South Korean firms have dominated the large-scale construction sector, pointedly seeking to change the skyline of Phnom Penh to that of a 'modern' city. Asian sources also inspire individual aspects of being modern—particularly in areas such as fashion, consumption and interior design. South Korean popular music and dramas are broadcast frequently, along with shows from mainland China, Hong Kong and the Philippines (Peou 2009). Alongside these intra-Asian flows, the influence of the West remains strong. Most notably, the prominence of English language in international business and advanced education maintains a strong association between being a modern professional, the Anglophone nations and the West more broadly.

It is the assertion of this thesis that it is through geographically specific links such as these that popular and political understandings of what is 'modern' or 'world-class' are (re)produced in Phnom Penh. These understandings draw on multiple, geographically uneven imaginaries with particular aspects of modernness associated with various international locations. These key locations, or cores of modernity, correlate to perceived prominence or appeal in education, economic and political power, popular culture, city-image and the built environment. While Phnom Penh has an almost unchallenged claim to national prominence in all these areas, its international position is far from prominent—situated on the margins of these many core-periphery geographies of modernity. The status of this modernising city is ambiguous, simultaneously the foremost symbol of national modernity and an exemplar of international marginality. For its one-and-a-half million residents, this ambiguity is amplified—as we will see, there are those who are highly mobile, live transnational lives and participate in modernity on a global scale, while others are excluded on intensely local scales such as the household or a shared rental room.

Ordinary Modernity and Popular Modernism

The aspiration to become modern is not a desire to implement the European ‘project of modernity’ (Habermas 1983) in Cambodia, but is associated with a more ordinary understanding of the word ‘modern’—an everyday desire to be ‘up to date’. My interest in the desire to become modern in Phnom Penh was born around seven years ago, a few years into my engagement with Cambodia, when I came to see that aspirant Cambodians were not explicitly trying to become ‘Western’. Rather, I saw that they aspired to be ‘modern’—and importantly, that being ‘modern’ and being ‘Western’ were not the same thing. My naïve and myopic lament that Cambodians were seeking to emulate Westerners like myself, was quite embarrassingly revealed for what it was. This realisation transformed my early objection to their Westernisation into a fascination with individual and collective desires to be modern—and it is this fascination that has driven this thesis.

At the time, my understanding of the word ‘modern’ was quite ordinary—it was to be ‘up to date’. It was largely to do with the capacity to earn money, to consume, to travel, and the social knowledge to comfortably participate in these activities. I was a student of design, so ‘modern’ was also the *Bauhaus*, grotesque typefaces like *Futura*, twentieth century chairs, and the music, poetry and typography of Italian Futurism. There aren’t many direct links between the outright glorification of war by Italian Futurists and Cambodian desires for an iPhone. However twentieth century European modernism and contemporary Cambodian consumerist desires are strangely similar. They share a strong enthusiasm for all things new, for modern technology, for man’s dominance of nature, and for the rapidity of change.²

² Many artistic and literary movements that were considered to be ‘modernist’ questioned dominant aspects of industrial modernity (Cooper 2005). The comparison that I am making is with the dominant view of modernism, as that which strives to be modern.

Other aspects of modernism in the arts are informative for their similarities to the 'project of modernity'. Both of these terms, 'modernism' and 'modernity', are more strongly associated with the past than the present, yet have established an enduring claim to being 'modern' (Cooper 2005). As analysed in more detail at chapter two, the term 'modernity' is typically situated with relation to the project of European modernity. It is seen as the inevitable rise of rationalism over traditional modes of thought; establishment of modern democratic institutions to replace authoritarian systems of rule; transparency in public processes and the eradication of corruption; the rise of meritocracy and abolition of nepotism; and the separation of church and state. In this sense, Phnom Penh is far from being modern. Of course the dominance of this singular project of modernity has been subject to rigorous debate. Numerous authors have argued for new understandings of modernity, including 'alternative' or 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 1999; Eisenstadt 2000; Gaonkar 1999; Gaonkar 2001); the end of modernity and the rise of 'post-modernity' (Harvey 1989; Lyotard 1984); 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000); 'reflexive modernity' (Beck et al 1994); and even that 'we have never been modern' (Latour 1993). I would suggest, however, that these analytical positions often do little to speak to ordinary, everyday understandings of 'being modern'.

That is not to say that analytical understandings of modernity based in the experience of Western Europe have had no influence in Cambodia. They have had a significant effect on the ideologies of Cambodia's twentieth century regimes, and on international aid, which still maintains a strong presence in the country. But this discourse does not dominate contemporary popular and political desires to 'be modern'. It is not my intention in this thesis to provide a thorough critique of the Eurocentric history of the word 'modern' and how it is, or is not relevant to popular and political aspirations in contemporary Cambodia. Rather I will explore and analyse these desires, their reference points and the processes that facilitate contemporary imaginings of what it means to be modern in Phnom Penh. As we shall see, while there have not been any

thorough analyses of vernacular modernity in Phnom Penh over the past few decades, comparable analyses in other Asian and African contexts are informative. Adrian Vickers has argued that in Bali, being modern is linked to enhanced capacity for consumption and advanced social status—‘owning new cars or living in nicer houses rather than being inwardly “progressive”’ (1996, p. 6). Writing in the context of Africa, James Ferguson (1999; 2006) details everyday understandings of modernity that are more in line with the use of the word modern by the Cambodian Prime Minister in the quote at the beginning of this chapter—concerned with status, issues of membership, and aspiration (or a lack thereof).

The Khmer word that is most often translated as ‘modern’, ទាន់សម័យ (toan sa?may), literally means to have caught up with the present (Headley et al 1997)—to be up to date. Associated terms such as ទំនើប (tumnəp) similarly refer to being up to date, recently created or stylish (ibid.). Broadly speaking, Cambodia is none of these things, like many other poor countries elsewhere in the world, it cannot lay claim to being ‘up to date’. As such, Ferguson asserts that ordinary people in poor countries typically approach the question of modernity from *without*. Very few are making assertions of the validity of their own ‘alternative’ modernity, speculating over whether the present represents a post-modern period, or debating whether they have ever been modern. More often than not, they are positioned close to the bottom of their own imaginings of a global hierarchy of ‘modernness.’ They do not necessarily see themselves as culturally inferior, but are well aware of their lack of global political and economic status and that of their cities and their nations (Ferguson 2006; Ferguson 2002b). Of course this is not universal or similarly strong in all of the developing world, but it is common in some form, in many poor countries. This is not to say that the aforementioned analytical accounts of modernity are without merit, but they tell us little about what it means to ‘be modern’ in the vernacular.

Setting the Scene: Phnom Penh Today



Figure 3: Phnom Penh skyline viewed from Sorya Shopping Mall in March 2012

Driving around Phnom Penh in March 2012, after I'd been absent for almost a year and a half, the rapid change in the city was readily apparent. By now this has become the norm, the change has always been marked on the many times that I've returned to the city since I first visited in 2002. Economic growth has contributed to major changes in the appearance of Phnom Penh. This growth has been centred in the capital, which as a primate city³ plays host to the vast majority of Cambodia's political and economic power. Alongside the skyscrapers, shopping malls and other new developments are new government buildings constructed to house the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly and a venue built to host international conferences starting with the 2012 ASEAN summit. On the streets, traffic has intensified and diversified, reflecting the transformation of the Cambodian economy. The white four-wheel drives of the development sector—the dominant force in the 1990s economy—are now significantly outnumbered. They have been replaced as the supreme vehicles on the streets of Phnom Penh by the black sports utility vehicles of the city's growing upper class.

³ A primate city is a city that dominates a country or region, and is significantly bigger than other cities in the urban hierarchy. The idea was first proposed by Mark Jefferson in a 1939 issue of *Geographical Review* (republished in 1989).

Hummers, Range Rovers, Lexuses, Land Cruisers, and other large cars, assert their authority over the masses of small motorbikes, a handful of bicycles, and middle class Toyota sedans.

These visible signs of modernisation are outcomes of a period of rapid and sustained economic growth. From 1998—2007 Cambodia's economy grew at a rate that was the sixth fastest in the world (Guimbert 2010, p. 2) and the second fastest in Asia after China. Its per-capita income more than doubled from US\$285 in 1997 to US\$593 in 2007 (World Bank 2009, p. ix). This period of growth followed the cessation of armed conflict and establishment of political stability. It involved significant structural changes in Cambodia's economy, its social and cultural networks and processes, and its urban form. Roads have been sealed and infrastructure put in place, indicators of health and education have significantly improved. Modern banking and telecommunications services have been established in every province. There has been significant growth in the manufacturing sector, and with it, the creation of hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and the migration of huge numbers of rural workers to fill them.

This recent trajectory of modernisation in Phnom Penh has taken place during what Hun Sen has described in his speeches as 'the era of globalisation'. This has been a period of intensifying international involvement in the Cambodian economy and a shift in the geographies of the donor community. 'Globalisation' has involved the development of specific, often bilateral relationships, particularly within the region. At the same time, many of the same developments that have facilitated international connections have also enabled increased connectivity within the country—new technologies have made it possible for capital, information, images, ideas, people and objects to travel further and faster on a wide range of scales. It is a city where it is common for university graduates—many of whom have migrated from the provinces in search of a better life—to find work in an emerging field, unrelated to their study. It is home to a newly significant population of female migrant workers who staff the

garment factories on the outskirts of the city. By now its numerous international links are highly visible—on cranes branded with the romanised names of South Korean construction companies, and bold Chinese characters on partly constructed bridges. Consumption is increasingly rapidly, as European sports and fashion brands are just starting to establish themselves. Fashionable youths ride to Phnom Penh's many universities on current-model Japanese motorcycles, speaking on the latest mobile phones. For many of those with lesser financial capacity, Vietnamese and Chinese model motorcycles and motorised bicycles—not readily available in the 1990s—are now within reach, as are cheaper mobile phones produced by these same countries.

This has not been an evenly distributed process of development: while poverty rates have fallen, national income inequality has been rising; the country's natural resources have been plundered by a handful of elites; land speculation is rife and forced evictions have been common (Hughes & Un 2011; Springer 2010). Even within the city, these changes have been highly variable—there is a marked difference between Phnom Penh's four central khans (administrative divisions) and the five outer khans. The central khans are home to the majority of high-rise developments, shopping malls and established traditional markets. The dense housing and commercial activity in the central khans is expanding into the outer khan of Russei Kaev, in which two 'world class' edge-city developments are currently under construction, with a third already proposed for the Chruy Changva Peninsula—the spit of land that separate the Bassac and Mekong rivers. The central Khans are far denser than the outer khans—these four districts represent just over five per cent of Phnom Penh's land area, but are home to almost forty per cent of the city's population. The outer khans—and Dangkao, Porsenchey and Sensok in particular—are a stark contrast, much of the land is used for agriculture, and development is currently centred around the garment factory districts which are located along major national highways. The city's beautification program has greatly enhanced its aesthetic appeal through upgrading gardens, roads and public parks, but also through physically removing poor people from the central khans often

to relocation sites on the outskirts of the city (LICADHO 2008; Human Rights Watch 2010).

In the outer khans, modernisation takes a different form, though it is no less significant. Chinese-owned garment factories⁴ operate at all hours, producing clothing and footwear for the European and North American markets. In a pattern that would be familiar to observers of neighbouring countries such as Thailand (Mills 1999) these factories attract hundreds of thousands of rural migrants—predominantly women—who seek to improve their lives, and to engage with urban modernity and consumption (Derks 2008). Come payday, the areas surrounding Phnom Penh’s industrial estates are buzzing, as garment workers upgrade their mobile phones, buy clothes, makeup and fashion accessories, or arrange to send money home to their families in the provinces. This is also modernisation, but the middle class university students on their Japanese motorbikes experience a vastly different engagement with modernity than the many garment factory workers who often commute to the factories squeezed into pickup trucks.

⁴ Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China account for over sixty per cent of garment factories in Cambodia (Natsuda 2009).



Figure 4: University students in the Chamkar Mon and Doun Penh, and garment factory workers in Porsenchey

All of this modernisation and development represents a dramatic departure from the war and isolation that plagued Cambodia in the 1970s and 1980s. As we will see in chapter six, informants frequently positioned their pride in the present with reference to the horrors of the recent past. During the Khmer Rouge regime in particular, Cambodia was a place of conflict, mass-killings, starvation and disease. While the past decade has seen the numbers of factories increase and skyscrapers and bridges built in and around the city, the period from the late 1960s to the late 1970s saw the closure of factories, the destruction of many of the city's landmarks and the bombing of the Chruy Changva bridge. During the Khmer Rouge regime, armed conflict, executions, emigration, disease and starvation saw the national population decline consistently. In contrast, since their overthrow in late 1979, the population has grown from six and a half million to over fourteen million in 2010 (World Bank 2011). Against this backdrop of conflict and national decline, the contemporary period of economic growth and modernisation is all the more remarkable.

From Post-Independence Modernism to Year Zero

Post-independence Cambodia was similarly marked by an enthusiasm for modernity which ultimately gave way to one of the most tragic and brutal social experiments in history. As a modernisation drive that ultimately failed, it is important to understand the reasons for its failure, and to be able to identify the differences and similarities compared to today's Cambodia. The path to Cambodia's first attempt at modernising Phnom Penh begins in the years of colonialism. Prior to independence from France in 1953, Cambodia's strongest links to a 'modern' country were with its colonial master. The shift from wood to brick for official buildings and elite residences came in 1872 after a long period of persuasion on the part of the French (Edwards 2007). But this modernisation draws on a much longer history. The Angkorean kingdom, which flourished from the ninth to fifteenth centuries was home to the largest pre-industrial city in the world (Evans et al 2007) and is still home to the world's largest religious building. As we will see in more detail in chapter six, Angkor was the basis of a narrative of civilisational decline that would underpin the morality of French rule. Angkor remains central to a belief in the inherent superiority of Khmer culture, albeit increasingly unlinked to the reality of Cambodia's present day world status.

As the colonial city developed, its modern landmarks were designed by the French—buildings such as the art-deco Central Market, the post office, the railway station and the national library. Modern infrastructure such as paved and laterite roads, the electricity network, telegraph and telephone lines, and treated water was all originally built under French direction (Slocomb 2010). Cambodia's colonial administrators sought to maintain a clear distinction between the purity of Khmer culture and modern European culture. Modern buildings were designed according to a French aesthetic, while a carefully 'revived' Cambodian aesthetic was developed by a team that included Cambodian artisans and French architects (Edwards 2007, p. 46). This distinction extended to the individual, with the dishonourable category of *déclassé*

used by the French to label Cambodians who took on Western traits—including many who were educated in France.

This division was always uneasily maintained, and with the establishment of independence, it rapidly eroded. Cambodian artists were free to engage in modern art forms (Muan 2001) and French educated Khmer architects integrated modern forms with Cambodian aesthetic and infrastructural references (Molyvann 2004; Grant Ross & Collins 2006). While the independence movement was overtly opposed to French rule, France remained central to imaginings of the modern and to displays of socio-economic status. While this is a crude statement, and exceptions certainly existed, it is useful to consider that during the colonial period and the early years of independence, some imaginings of what was modern, could be seen to exist wholly in France. Membership in the elite required a French education, either in Cambodia or in France (Osborne 2008). French food and fashion were popular amongst the elite, and the French remained highly influential politically and economically and importantly, French remained the language of international exchange (Fielding 2008). France was by far the most influential of the 'modern' nations across a broad spectrum of fields.

For just under two decades following Cambodia's independence, the political arena was dominated by Norodom Sihanouk. His formal political role began with his abdication from the throne in 1955 to contest parliamentary elections that saw him installed as Prime Minister. Modernisation was again seen through the lens of decline, warranting a return to the grandeur of the Angkorean era, with Sihanouk positioning himself as an heir to the builders of temples such as Angkor Wat and the Bayon (Winter 2007). This was asserted through Sihanouk's production of history books for the Cambodian school curriculum that positioned the present as the continuation and revival of the glories of Angkor, and unsurprisingly positioned him as the central character in Cambodian independence and modernisation (Ayres 2000).

This was partly enacted through a construction boom that began with the return of a small number of Cambodians from architectural training in France in the mid-1950s. This group sought to adapt the (European) modern architectural movement to the Khmer context (Osborne 2008: 132), with particular strong reference to the work of Le Corbusier, under whom some members of the group had studied. In accordance with Sihanouk's position as the revivalist monarch, the chief architect of this movement, Vann Molyvann, researched and referenced the various Cambodian urban centres of the past two thousand years (Molyvann 2004). Sihanouk prioritised public investment in prestigious projects—sometimes at the expense of long-planned projects that did not afford the same status respect (Slocomb 2010). These showcase projects included the Olympic Stadium, the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville railway, and hydropower stations.

For around a decade, Sihanouk's policies appeared to be working, but many of these gains proved to be largely superficial and were short-lived. Advances in net enrolments in education under Sihanouk were undermined by low educational standards, an oversupply of graduates and miscorrelation of skills (Ayres 2000). In part due to its evolution from the French system, the Cambodian education system produced graduates who expected that they would be provided with employment in the public service. Sihanouk's desire for international 'status honour' has been argued to be a key component of the Sangkum's ultimate failure (Summers 1986). Many aspects of the regime's development were hindered by Sihanouk's preoccupation with personal prestige at the expense of genuine social and economic development (Slocomb 2010). Behind the modern architectural façade, and the impressive educational statistics, post-independence Cambodia was highly dependent on foreign aid, which financed many of its modernisation goals (Slocomb 2010; Ayres 2000; Winter 2007).

Somehow, a vestige of this façade still stands as the Sihanouk regime is fondly remembered by many older Cambodians, and for some, still serves as the yardstick by which the present is measured (Turnbull 2006; Winter & Ollier 2006). While

Sihanouk's popularity declined in the late 1960s and 1970s, the contrast with horrific events that followed have made his rule a period that is treasured by many Cambodians. As Milton Osborne has observed, for those who lived through this period, there is a tendency to think of 'Sihanouk time' as a 'golden age'. While the reality of corruption and economic mismanagement was eventually revealed, this was certainly a time of hope and optimism during which positivity about the future was widespread in Phnom Penh and many had faith in their charismatic ruler (Osborne 2008: 123).

It was in 1963 that Sihanouk's gloss would begin to fade. While accepting foreign aid, Sihanouk attempted to maintain a stance of cold-war neutrality, and resented the political demands that were often tied to US aid. He eventually rejected assistance from the United States in 1963, at a time when the economy was already stagnant. In the midst of rising corruption, and economic recession Sihanouk's support would ultimately lapse. His support amongst the elite declined significantly, as the US aid presence had provided a pool of wealthy Americans to whom much of the elite rented their properties. The rejection of US aid did little to curb corruption in Phnom Penh, but did limit the opportunity to benefit from corruption for many of the city's more powerful residents (Osborne 2008:134).

While US interests played a key role (Kiernan 2004), it was an internal economic crisis that led to Sihanouk's overthrow by disaffected members of his own government in March 1970 (Slocomb 2010). This coup marked the escalation of Cambodia's internal conflict—Sihanouk, who had been overseas at the time of the coup, proceeded to align himself with the communist forces in the region and issued a public call for Cambodians to join the resistance and overthrow the new government. Sihanouk's support gave legitimacy to the Cambodian Communist movement, and in the wake of his backing, the Khmer Rouge would come to overthrow the Lon Nol government in April 1975. The modernist visions of early independence gave way to an era of 'unmitigated suffering, violence, and confusion' (Chandler 2007, p. 276).

For just under four years, Cambodia was ruled by Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea regime, more commonly known as the Khmer Rouge. This was a period of radical, often brutal, social upheaval. While the implementation of policy varied widely throughout the country, the regime—or parts thereof—systematically killed large numbers of public servants, educated people, doctors, teachers and technicians (Vickery 1984). Its leaders sought to rebuild society from the ground up, even going so far as to declare the time of their victory to be Year Zero (Ponchaud 1978). Estimates of the deaths that occurred, through starvation, execution, war and disease vary from around seven hundred thousand to over three million (Vickery 1984; Kiernan 2008), with the most commonly cited figures being in the range of 1.5 million.⁵ Preceding this tragic reign was a period of intense carpet bombing in the east of the country as the United States provided Cambodia with the unwanted distinction of being one of the most bombed countries in history. Well over two million tonnes of bombs were dropped on the east of the country in an attempt to flush out Viet Cong forces which were thought to be operating in these zones (Owen & Kiernan 2006).

...And Slowly Back Again

In late 1978, Vietnamese forces attacked the Khmer Rouge on several fronts capturing the seven provinces east of the Mekong by January 4, 1979. On January 6, they crossed the Mekong and the Khmer Rouge fled Phnom Penh, and the following day on January 7, the Vietnamese marched in and occupied the capital (Gottesman 2004; Chandler 2007). The government established by the Vietnamese was led by former Khmer Rouge cadres who had defected to Vietnam, with the triptych of Heng Samrin, Chea Sim and Hun Sen occupying the most senior roles. This was the beginning of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), governed by the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary

⁵ These numbers vary due to the unreliability and unavailability of population data, and disagreement over the number of Cambodians killed during the previous regime.

Party, the predecessor of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) who rule Cambodia today.⁶ The state they inherited was in disarray due to years of war and neglect, and the situation was not helped by the refusal of Western powers to recognise the new government.

Recognition was afforded to the new state by the Soviet Bloc, and with assistance from the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Eastern European technicians, the port of Sihanoukville (then known as Kompong Som) was restored, as well as the railway between the port and Phnom Penh (Gottesman 2004). The Khmer Rouge, regrouped as a resistance movement in Western Cambodia and Eastern Thailand and was widely supported internationally as the legitimate government of Cambodia—the United Nations headquarters in New York flew the Khmer Rouge flag until 1992 (Kiernan 2010).⁷ The United States lobbied foreign governments and international institutions to suspend aid and place sanctions on the PRK, while China provided direct financial aid to the Khmer Rouge through their embassy in Bangkok (Fawthrop & Jarvis 2005).

Milton Osborne, a resident of Phnom Penh during the 1960s who returned Phnom Penh in the early 1980s, described an environment of 'pervasive and extraordinary decrepitude' (2008 p. 185). Buildings had not been painted in years, large sections of the city were cordoned off, and electricity was only available in a few small areas. Phnom Penh was alive, but it was only slowly re-emerging from its complete abandonment. Many of those who returned to the city found that their former homes had been assigned to soldiers, civil servants or others with a position in the new regime (Gottesman 2004, p. 76). Other returnees lived wherever they could with multiple

⁶ David Chandler compares the Vietnamese involvement during this period to that of the French protectorate, where critical elements of government were controlled by foreigners, while less crucial areas were managed by Cambodians.

⁷ This was partly due to the establishment of a seemingly farcical alliance between Cambodia's former King Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge as well as the PRK's alliance with Vietnam and the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War.

families in a single house, and five or six people in a single room. According to Gottesman, in the wake of a regime where the possession of property was a crime, residents of Phnom Penh remained reluctant to conspicuously accumulate wealth. Only the most powerful amongst the city's residents would occupy a single house. Much of the population was unfamiliar with urban living and it was common to see cows and buffaloes in the suburbs. The city's infrastructure had been ruined—streets, buildings, the electricity grid and water supply were all in a state of disrepair. While the horrors of the Khmer Rouge had been left behind, the city was not yet in a position to embrace modernisation.

The PRK era lasted a decade from 1979 until 1989 when it was renamed the State of Cambodia. In 1987, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong announced that the Vietnamese would withdraw from Cambodia by 1990. Soviet aid had been in decline since 1985, and by late 1987 promised aid was no longer materialising (Gottesman 2004, p. 276). With Vietnam having already begun on a path of economic reform with the introduction of *Doi Moi* in 1986, Cambodia began rethinking its own economic policy and slowly shifting from a centrally planned economy towards a market-based economy. Hun Sen, who was by then the Prime Minister, announced that the party would be 'switching our struggle from the military to the diplomatic field' (quoted in Gottesman 2004, p. 278). In the following years, the PRK pursued foreign investment, particularly from within the region. As the State of Cambodia experienced triple digit inflation, and generated an unsustainable budget deficit, it turned to international donors for support and the PRK attempted to build its political legitimacy amongst Western governments (Ear 2009).

With the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops in 1989 came the resumption of peace talks between what was now the State of Cambodia and the coalition of three opposition forces—which included the Khmer Rouge—that was still waging war in the West of the country. An agreement for a UN-supervised ceasefire was reached in 1991, and the

United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) was established in 1992. UNTAC-administered elections took place in the following year, with the royalist FUNCINPEC⁸ party securing the most votes, followed by the successor to the PRK, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). A third party which emerged from the US-backed Khmer People's National Liberation Front secured around ten per cent of the vote. The Khmer Rouge had boycotted the election and resumed fighting in 1992. As no party had secured the two-thirds majority required to form government, an all-party coalition government was formed with FUNCINPEC leader, Prince Norodom Ranariddh as First Prime Minister and CPP leader, Hun Sen as Second Prime Minister.

While FUNCINPEC was officially the senior party in this coalition, this would not be the reality in many ministries, as there was significant continuity with the pre-UNTAC power structure. Public servants often continued to answer to their CPP superiors and FUNCINPEC governors possessed little real power (Gottesman 2004, p. 352). Both parties rewarded their supporters with public jobs, which resulted in an inefficient administration composed of staff who were often technically inept (Hughes & Un 2011). Division was retained in the military, with Hun Sen and Norodom Ranariddh both maintaining distinct factions. This uneasy truce came to an end in July 1997 when Hun Sen staged a coup, ousting Ranariddh as First Prime Minister and forcing him, and a range of other opposition figures—including Sam Rainsy, the leader of the most popular opposition party today—into exile.

It was not until 1998 that the Cambodian conflict ultimately came to a close. As Ranariddh and Rainsy negotiated their return to Cambodia with Hun Sen, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge floundered. Pol Pot died in April 1998, and that year, the last remaining Khmer Rouge soldiers defected to the government. Elections were held in

⁸ The name is derived from the French acronym for *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif*.

July, but these were regarded by many Western donors as not being 'free and fair'. They were controlled by the CPP, who dominated all relevant institutions and the media (Downie 2010; Peou 1998). Violence for economic and political gain was commonplace throughout the 1990s, and these elections were no exception (Hughes 2004; Springer 2010). In the 1998 election, far less violence occurred than in the lead up to the 1993 election which saw more than 200 deaths, but still, more than 20 killings occurred that were seen to have political motives (Hughes 2004, p. 76).

The elections saw the CPP receive the majority of the vote, but not the two-thirds majority they required to govern in their own right. Another coalition government was established, with Ranariddh occupying a position with his actual power still further diminished. Subsequent elections have seen the CPP returned to power with increased majorities, with the most recent election giving them power to govern in their own right following a constitutional amendment to require a majority of over 50 per cent to form government. This decline in effective political opposition has been accompanied by a decrease in politically motivated violence, with the most recent elections relatively free of violence, and open campaigning taking place throughout the country (Un 2008).

While conflict persisted in parts of the country, the 1990s marked the beginning of an optimistic enthusiasm for modernity comparable to that of the early years of Cambodian independence. Tim Winter and Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier have described the dynamic of 1990s Cambodia as 'a storm of progress, a rush towards modernity' that was propelled by the wreckage of the recent past, and by the grandeur of the Angkorean era (2006, p. 7). This wreckage was not simply the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime, but also its aftermath in the lacklustre decade of economic stagnation and limited international connectivity under the PRK. The 1990s saw more than a re-embracing of modernity—this was also an intensification, diversification and expansion of Cambodia's international economic, political and cultural engagements.

Reconstruction, Aid-dependence and 'NGO Heaven'

Whereas in the late 1980s the most common traffic on the capital's streets was Chinese-made bicycles, in the post-UNTAC era the city's main avenues were clogged with motor vehicles, including many luxury cars competing with motorcycles, bicycles, and cyclo-pousses (bicycle rickshaws).

(Curtis 1998, p. 81)

Throughout the 1990s and in the early years of the 2000s, as Hun Sen established his power base in post-UNTAC Cambodia, the economy came to be dominated by a new, more varied geography of international aid. The influx of development capital and foreign aid workers which began with UNTAC in the early 1990s, caused the price of real estate in the capital to skyrocket. It was estimated that in 1992 as many as 20 per cent of Phnom Penh's villas were occupied by expatriate staff. Apart from this real estate boom, other direct impacts of UNTAC on Phnom Penh's private-sector economy were a new market for luxury goods and services—nightclubs, restaurants, bars, casinos and brothels—and the expansion of local employment (Shatkin 1998, p. 384).

During this time Japan was the largest bilateral donor, and its aid was preferred by the Cambodian government for the lack of conditions that it placed on its assistance relative to Western donors (Hughes 2004, p. 100). Aid was the dominant force in the economy in the sense that the volume of aid was massive in relation to the country's gross national product (Godfrey et al 2002) but also in that it was the primary source of employment for tertiary educated Cambodians. These years saw a drive for the promotion of international civil society in Cambodia, reflecting broader trends in international development (Hughes 2004, p. 144). This drive resulted in the establishment of large numbers of NGOs, with over 150 in operation by 1996. By 1999, it was estimated that between four and seven hundred NGOs were operating. As Caroline Hughes and Kheang Un (2011) have observed, the primary goals of these

NGOs were rarely aligned with the goals of the government, whose main objectives were to establish political stability and economic growth.

Grant Curtis (1998) has argued that during this period Cambodia became an 'aid market'. Driven by a combination of guilt over international complicity in Cambodia's civil war, and the challenge of what was seen to be a blank canvas untouched by Western development programs, the country received more aid than it had the capacity to absorb. Characterising this period as 'development anarchy', Curtis has argued that aid was poorly coordinated, with implementing agencies largely free to conduct projects of their choosing wherever they saw fit. Competition rather than cooperation took place between various parties who were involved in the reconstruction process—notably for capable local staff and sub-grant funding. Curtis argues that this chaos was underpinned by the assumption that the country was without existing state structures having just emerged from a period of conflict, and/or by a rejection of the structures that had been put in place by the State of Cambodia.

That is not to say that the international aid to Cambodia has been ineffective.

International development organisations have played a central role in restructuring the country's economy, developing the finance sector and improving infrastructure. The benefits of projects such as the Japanese-funded reconstruction of Phnom Penh's Chroy Changva bridge in 1993 are clear and unambiguous. With donor assistance, the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority has emerged as a model of international best practice and provides potable water to over 90 per cent of the city's residents (Das et al 2010; Chan 2009). Many aid programs that took place in the 1990s such as those aimed at clearing land mines and controlling weapons have experienced broad success. However, many other programs, particularly those with social aims such as capacity building, the strengthening of democracy and the development of civil society have experienced lacklustre results (Öjendal & Lilja 2009; Hughes 2004; Bourdier & Khmersiksa 2006). In other instances results have been mixed. One of the most significant programs of the

1990s, the structural adjustment program designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank was successful in stemming inflation and stimulating short-term economic growth, but at the same time, limited government expenditure on basic public services and programs aimed at assisting the rural population (Curtis 1998, p. 84).⁹

The relationship between the development sector and the Cambodian government has rarely been amicable. To this day, a general distrust of the government has persisted in the development sector, and the government has characterised development cooperation as being 'donor-driven' rather than directed by the needs identified by the government (Hughes 2009, p. 137). While this was palatable to the government in the early 1990s, by 2008 it had progressed to a point where Hun Sen declared that 'Cambodia has been heaven for NGOs for too long' and that 'the NGOs are out of control ... they insult the government just to ensure their financial survival'.¹⁰ An NGO law has been proposed, limiting the activities of such groups and requiring compulsory registration. His ability to make these demands is underpinned by recent economic growth and increased foreign direct investment, and by the country's growing engagement with non-traditional donors. In many years over the last decade, China has been Cambodia's largest bilateral donor, and Chinese investment has seen similarly dramatic increases.

The strong presence of Western aid organisations during this period has significantly shaped English-language knowledge of Cambodia. Alain Forest has argued that 'in the years 1990-2005, no other land in the world over was observed, examined and

⁹ Simon Springer offers a much more damning evaluation of the structural adjustment program, linking this economic restructuring to what he sees as increased violence throughout Cambodia (Springer 2009a; Springer 2010; Springer 2009b; Springer 2009c).

¹⁰ "The end of an NGO era in Cambodia" Asia Times Online, accessed February 13, 2012, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JK14Ae02.html

scrutinized so much as Cambodia'. He goes on to state that 'Cambodia is essentially treated like a series of cases to be solved, abnormalities to be evaluated and to be restored to a standard' (Forest 2008). The effect of this treatment of Cambodia has been observed by a number of authors. Analyses of Cambodia's post-conflict transition have frequently evaluated the country's conformance to or deviation from models of democracy and/or 'good governance' (Hughes & Un 2011; Öjendal & Lilja 2009). As mentioned above, the government has prioritised political stability and economic development, and assessments of performance on this front have been far fewer.

More recently, a number of publications have moved outside the democracy and 'good governance' frameworks, analysing Cambodia's political economy in a manner that includes and critiques the development sector. Öjendal and Lilja (2009) have argued that analysis of Cambodia needs to move 'beyond democracy', while Hughes and Un (2011) have proposed that analysts need to do away with the post-conflict and reconstruction labels, and that the past decade is more usefully understood through the concept of economic transformation—which is the focus of the next section of this chapter. The approach taken by Hughes and Un take explores the relationship between a wide range of forces both within and beyond Cambodia. This includes Western donors, foreign and domestic investors, government and party officials and their formal institutions and informal networks of power, and in their words, 'last and unfortunately, usually least' (Hughes & Un 2011, p. 21) the political struggles of the poor.

Cambodia's Economic Transformation

In the early years of the new millennium, Cambodia effectively emerged from its post-conflict status (Slocomb 2010). Hun Sen's consolidation of power in 1997 was followed by an economic boom—sustained growth at one of the fastest rates in the world. Exports have increased dramatically—from near zero in 1994 to \$US2.8 billion in 2007 (Guimbert 2010, p. 4), as did flows of foreign direct investment which have

come primarily from Asian sources. Tourist arrivals, which are concentrated around the Angkor temple complex near Siem Reap, grew from a similarly low level to reach more than two million in 2007, the majority of these being of East Asian origin. This has been a period that has seen significant decreases in poverty and broad improvement in human development indicators. It has been a period of demographic upheaval for many villages as they are drained of young women who migrate to Phnom Penh in large numbers to seek employment in garment factories. The education sector has grown rapidly, but with poor correlation to the requirements of the job market, and many graduates find themselves unprepared for the demands of the work force. Contributing to this growth, natural resources have been heavily exploited, with 39 per cent of Cambodia's forests allocated to logging concessions (Global Witness 2009). Following a government decree in 2001, logging activity declined significantly, and economic activity in Cambodia saw a shift from the exploitation of the forests, to the acquisition of land for agro-industry or speculation (Hughes & Un 2011, p. 9). Land speculation is now rife, exacerbated by weak land titling law—at its worst, long term landholders in Phnom Penh and the provinces have been evicted, often violently and with assistance from police (Springer 2012; Hughes 2008).

Until recently, studies of this period of economic growth have been limited to international financial institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and International Monetary Fund.¹¹ As Hughes and Un (2011) observe, these studies broadly agree that economic growth is narrowly based. Growth has been strong in manufacturing and construction—primarily located in the area surrounding Phnom Penh, and along the corridor that links the capital to the port of Sihanoukville. Tourism has continued to grow, and with it the services sector, though this is similarly geographically specific. Tourism is overwhelmingly focused on the Angkor temple

¹¹ For example, Guimbert 2010; ADB 2004; ADB 2010; World Bank 2004; World Bank 2002; World Bank 2009

complex, and economic growth in this sector is centred in the nearby city of Siem Reap. Agriculture, which is the primary occupation for more than half of the country, experienced a much slower rate of growth (Guimbert 2010). Domestically, the past decade has seen the growth of the Cambodian finance sector, following a plan developed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2007; Chun et al 2001). This has seen both the development of micro-finance throughout the country (Norman 2011; Clark 2006) and the growth and establishment of urban banks. Cambodia's shadow economy is one of the world's largest relative to its official economy. It is difficult to measure, and as such is not taken into account in these formal economic statistics. It is estimated to be just under half the size of the formal economy, and has undergone small but consistent decreases in its relative size in the years from 1999-2007 (Schneider et al 2010, p. 30). As would be expected in an environment of such uneven growth, income inequality has risen over this period, with the World Bank's measure of Cambodia's Gini index rising from .38 in 1994 to .44 in 2007 (World Bank 2011). With the majority of growth centred in the city, Phnom Penh has bucked this trend, and has seen a marginal decrease in income inequality (World Bank 2006, p. 29).

With its narrow base, the Cambodian economy is considered vulnerable by many analysts (Slocumb 2010; Hughes & Un 2011; Guimbert 2010; World Bank 2009). The manufacturing sector relies heavily on the export of garments and footwear to the United States, the effects of which were demonstrated in 2008 and 2009 when falling demand in the United States had a direct effect on the Cambodian garment industry. Twelve factories closed, and tens of thousands of jobs were lost (Sullivan 2011; World Bank 2009, p. 20; Slocumb 2010, p. 290). The majority of factories are foreign-owned, predominantly by East Asian investors. The vulnerability of the construction sector has been demonstrated in recent years, as an influx of South Korean investment in particular has dried up, and land prices came crashing down as the real estate bubble burst during the global financial crisis.

As we will see in chapter five, many property developments that were marketed as symbols of Phnom Penh's growing international significance have failed to fully materialise. Most notably, the largest of these developments, CamKo City, was financed by a bank that is now the subject of a wide-ranging corruption investigation in South Korea. The Korean CEO of World City Co, CamKo's parent company, was sentenced to five years imprisonment in his home country, and as at March 2012, the South Korean investors in CamKo city were in court in Phnom Penh, battling with a South Korean government agency over the ownership of the project.¹² Property development is now increasingly funded by Chinese capital, a further expansion of China's already growing engagement with Cambodia. The rapid growth of Chinese engagement began in the aftermath of the 1997 coup, when Hun Sen closed the Taiwanese trade liaison office in Phnom Penh. In the decade that followed, China established itself as the country's largest single donor, and largest source of foreign direct investment. Chinese capital is now involved in the construction of roads, bridges and hydro-electric dams in many provinces (Sullivan 2011).

Since the shift away from socialism in the late 1980s, Cambodia's economy has been increasingly privatised (Gottesman 2004, p. 318). A number of privately built and operated toll roads have opened in the last decade, and many government assets have been sold (World Bank 2002). The past decade has seen the government grant economic land concessions to 85 companies, formalising private control of almost a million hectares of land.¹³ Since 2005, 21 privately developed special economic zones have been approved, with incentives including major tax and import duty exemptions

¹² 'Battle Over CamKo City Now in Court', The Cambodia Daily, Volume 51, Issue 30, March 14, 2012. Available online at <http://sahrka.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/battle-over-camko-city-now-in-court/>

¹³ 'Overall Status of Economic Land Concession in Cambodia', Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Royal Government of Cambodia, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.elc.maff.gov.kh/en/news/12-elc-status.html>

and concessions.¹⁴ Higher education, a sector that has been not been prioritised by donors,¹⁵ has seen significant growth following the government's decision to allow higher education institutions to charge fees, and permit the establishment of private universities in the late 1990s. As was the case with Sihanouk's educational advances in the 1950s, this process has produced large numbers of graduates whose skills are often poorly matched with the demands of the labour market (Chealy 2009). Youth unemployment has been identified as a key challenge for the coming years (World Bank 2009).

Assessment of this period of growth range from overt and unqualified optimism in government rhetoric, to highly critical accounts of the country's rising inequality and pervasive corruption and even claims of increasing violence and imminent revolution (Springer 2010). Others, with whom I generally find myself in agreement with, demonstrate a mix of cautious optimism and grounded concern, and see the neoliberal marketisation of Cambodia as offering both new opportunities and new challenges at for a wide range of Cambodians (Hughes & Un 2011; Slocomb 2010; Guimbert 2010). In terms of the country's trajectory of economic growth, a recent World Bank report predicts 'a moderately optimistic medium-term scenario' (Guimbert 2010, p. 2) with the potential to again sustain the rapid growth witnessed from 1998—2007 through increased regional integration and diversification of the economy.

Knowledge of Phnom Penh and New Avenues of Inquiry

The above historical overview reflects a tendency for English-language publications on twentieth and twenty first century Cambodia to focus on politics and conflict. As Winter

¹⁴ 'Cambodia Special Economic Zones', Cambodia Special Economic Zone Board, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.cambodiasez.com/>

¹⁵ A lack of donor interest in higher education was cited as a problem by Mak Ngoy, Deputy Director General of Higher Education at Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, though he was enthusiastic about a recent World Bank initiative to support higher education reform.

and Ollier point out, while the political transition of Cambodia has been well documented, much less attention has been paid to the country's cultural transformation. The topic of this thesis was developed in response to the gaps identified by Winter and Ollier in the introduction to their edited volume, *Expressions of Cambodia*. Writing in 2006, Winter and Ollier argue that 'the rapid and profound changes that have occurred [in Cambodia] since the early 1990s demand further analysis and new viewpoints of reflection' (2006, p. 6). In particular, they call for increased attention to the cultural transformation that saw a 'near overnight shift from virtual isolation to networks of "cultural globalization"' (2006, p. 11). Winter and Ollier, along with their contributing authors, advance an understanding of Cambodia in which tradition and modernity are entwined—with each other, with the politics of nation building, and with the international movement of people and capital. My argument builds on this understanding through an in-depth analysis of modernity, mobility, the city and its position in the world—all areas that remain under-researched in the Cambodian context, and for cities of comparable size and significance around the world.

A strong political focus is evident in David Chandler's wide-ranging history of Cambodia (2007), which spans roughly 2000 years. It is also apparent in more period-specific historical analyses, such as those concerned with the Khmer Rouge and conflict and post-conflict periods more broadly (e.g. Vickery 1984; Vickery 2010; Gottesman 2004; Tully 2005; Hughes 2004). Analyses with a more contemporary focus have also been dominated by political approaches, complemented by analyses of macro-economic transitions—including assessments of the success or failure of the UN mandate. As we saw in the above analysis of Cambodia's engagement with international development aid, a range of authors have documented Cambodia's transitions—from war to peace, from socialist authoritarianism to multi-party democracy and from a controlled economy operating in a Soviet sphere of international engagement to a post-Cold War free-market economy. In recent years, historical

accounts have diversified somewhat with Penny Edwards' (2007) analysis of the development of nationalism in colonial Cambodia, Margaret Slocomb's (2010) account of Cambodia's twentieth century economic history, and Ingrid Muan's (2001) history of the Cambodian arts. Other notable historical accounts that have been published in the last five years, have addressed areas including the cultural and literary history of Phnom Penh (Osborne 2008), the development of Cambodia's rubber plantations (Slocomb 2007), and the development of Cambodian Buddhism (Hansen 2007; Harris 2008).

While dominated by political approaches, it should not be assumed that the post-war period was devoid of the publication of social and culturally focused works. There have been notable examples examining Cambodian dance (Phim & Thompson 1999; Burrige & Frumberg 2010), religion (Marston & Guthrie 2004), gender (Jacobsen 2008; Lilja 2008) education (Ayres 2000) and post-conflict heritage (Winter 2007). However, while all these works have helped to broaden our understanding of Cambodia's social and cultural history, vernacular analyses—linking the changes in everyday life to broader political and economic transformations—remain few. Annuska Derks' (2010; 2008) analysis of Cambodian migrant workers is a notable exception. Derks explores the changing and often contradictory perceptions of, and disjunctures between, rural and urban moralities, ideals, aspirations, and desires as poor migrant workers—often seen as the exploited pawns of the global economy—seek to improve their lives.

While the predominance of political and economic approaches may seem far removed from Winter and Ollier's focus on Cambodia's cultural transformation, they share a similar concern with advocating for a shift from fixity of meaning to a nuanced account of what actually exists in present-day Cambodia. Winter and Ollier argue that accounts of political, economic and social processes in Cambodia have frequently presumed stability of meaning in concepts such as tradition, modernity, culture, citizenship and

the state—but that these fixed meanings are challenged and destabilised by grounded academic analyses.

In a similar vein, Öjendal and Lilja (2009) have argued for analyses of Cambodia to move 'beyond democracy'—that is, that political development and the transformation of the state need to be understood as they exist, rather than by assessing their conformance to, or deviation from a fixed notion of democracy. Hughes and Un (2011) take a similar stance, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of what actually exists in Cambodia and the various formal and informal relationships that make up the country's networks of political and economic power. Springer (2010) also calls for specific analysis—and an understanding of 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore 2002)—that accounts for variation in meaning and context rather than judging by relatively fixed, pre-established external criteria.

So while much has been published since *Expressions of Cambodia* in 2006, Winter and Ollier's call for increased socio-cultural analysis remains pertinent, not only because of the limited scope of socio-cultural analyses of Cambodia but also in light of the enduring rapidity of change. Through an examination of modernisation and globalisation in contemporary Cambodia, this thesis will make an original contribution to knowledge that directly responds to the need for an increased focus on social and cultural change in academic analyses of Cambodia.

In addition, this thesis seeks to address weaknesses in theoretical accounts of modernity, the city and globalisation, and the absence of Phnom Penh and cities of similar size in these analyses. These cities are typically excluded from wider theoretical studies, and also from regionally specific accounts—Phnom Penh is excluded from, or afforded little attention in analyses of Southeast Asian cities (e.g. Bunnell et al 2002; Douglass & Huang 2007; Rimmer & Dick 2009). Just ten per cent of the world's urban population lives in cities with twenty million or more inhabitants, with the vast majority living in cities with a population of less than five million (UNFPA 2007, p. 10).

Urban growth in Asia is expected to follow this trend, with the strongest growth in smaller cities (Cohen 2004), meaning that addressing the gap in knowledge and understanding of these urban forms is becoming increasingly more important.

Gavin Shatkin (1998) argued for a new perspective on knowledge of Phnom Penh and of other comparable cities as early as 1998. Shatkin argued that Phnom Penh, and other cities in the world's least developed countries, have been treated as if excluded from global economic processes. In contrast, however, globalisation has had strong political, economic, social and cultural impacts in Phnom Penh. Modernity, increased international connectivity, and assertions to enhanced world status made by and within Asian cities are all processes to which Phnom Penh is typically considered to be marginal—but at the same time, they are processes that have profound impact on the city and the lives of its citizens. This thesis seeks to advance Shatkin's response to this exclusion by focusing on the social and cultural change involved in investigating popular and political desires for modernity and improved world status amidst the rapid economic development and intensification of its connections within international and regional networks over the last decade. Through the research questions that follow, I will analyse the ways in which modernity is imagined in Phnom Penh—privileging an ordinary, everyday understanding of modernity in terms of the relative measure of being 'up to date'.

Research Aims and Questions

At the beginning of this chapter, I cited the Cambodian Prime Minister's claim that Cambodia had become a 'modern society in the modern world'¹⁶. This thesis seeks to

¹⁶ 'Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh' Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

understand what constitutes modernity in such claims. That is, what it means to be modern in contemporary Phnom Penh, and how the residents of the city and its leaders view the modern world and their position within it. Such an understanding necessarily draws on theoretical material on modernity, globalisation and mobilities more broadly, and more specifically, on Asian cities and their claims to modern status.

With this in mind, I have approached this research through the following research questions:

1. What does it mean to be ‘modern’ in Phnom Penh—what are the parameters, reference points and processes that produce popular and political imaginings of modernity?
2. On what scales and in what spaces do the residents of Phnom Penh see themselves and their city to be (or not be) modern?
3. How can modernity be understood conceptually in a way that can help us to understand status-making claims in, and about Phnom Penh?

Methodology and Research Design

The following is a summary of my research design and the methods through which I have approached these questions. A more detailed account can be found in the appendix. Fieldwork took place in Phnom Penh during August and September 2010. During this time, I rented a house in the largest of Phnom Penh’s new edge city projects, CamKo City, and took the opportunity to experience and observe the lifestyle offered by these projects. This fieldwork builds on an extended engagement with Phnom Penh and Cambodia more broadly.¹⁷ My engagement has taken place in both a professional and research capacity, over a cumulative total of three years since 2002. The fieldwork on

¹⁷ The majority of my time in Cambodia has been spent in Phnom Penh, though considerable time has been spent living in rural Prey Veng and in the provincial capital of Kampong Cham.

which this thesis is based involved 88 face-to-face interviews ranging in length from eight minutes to over three hours. Interviews were conducted with a range of key figures including NGO workers, public servants, politicians and pop stars, as well as a range of laypeople residing in the city. Interviewees included staff from: Phnom Penh Municipal Government (PPMG); the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUJPC); Grand Phnom Penh International City; CamKo City; The World Bank, UNDP's Seila programme; and the opposition party MP for Phnom Penh, Yim Sovann.

In most cases access was facilitated by introductions made through previously established academic and professional networks.¹⁸ Interview requests were made by email, and generally followed up by phone. In the case of the PPMG, a formal written interview request was required, and repeated phone calls and visits to City Hall were necessary before an interview was granted. Interviews were conducted in English and/or Khmer. The interviews were semi-structured, and followed a loose script. For interviews with key figures, specific questions were developed prior to the interview reflecting the interviewee's areas of expertise. While my spoken Khmer language was often sufficient for much of the interview, an interpreter was present at all interviews to assist with translation and clarification. Interviews were recorded where consent was granted, and transcriptions were made of all English and Khmer dialogue. Example interview scripts are provided in the appendix along with a more detailed account of my methodology and research design.

¹⁸ Thanks goes to Min Phannarak, Lay Sopagna, AbdouMaliq Simone, Benny Widnyono and Chann Veasna for their assistance with contacts and introductions for this study.

Thesis Overview

All of my research questions are aimed at understanding and positioning popular and political desires to become modern in Phnom Penh. These desires are typically held for oneself, but also on many other scales including for one's family, and certainly for the wider collectives of the city and the nation. The standard of what is seen to be 'up to date' is in a state of constant flux. It is continuously evolving as economic growth expands the possibilities of consumption, and a wider range of cities are mediated to, or directly experienced by, the residents of Phnom Penh. While it is clear that an understanding of these desires requires a theoretical understanding of modernity—in the everyday, and beyond the West in particular—it also requires an understanding of the social, cultural and territorial implications of increased movement and connectivity, and of comparable contemporary and historical processes in other cities throughout Asia and the world.

Through exploring situated imaginings of local, regional and international 'poles' or 'cores' of modernity throughout the world, I seek to understand a different modernity, which is far removed from the European discourse. As popular and political enthusiasm for modernisation is widespread—seeking to make Phnom Penh 'up to date'—I also acknowledge modernity's exclusions, its violence and the negative developments for which it is held responsible. This thesis posits an understanding of modernity that is not just one of many of the world's multiple modernities, but a loose assemblage of processes and ideas associated with various international geographies of status. The relationship with this assemblage of modernity for the city, the nation and its residents is of varying degrees of inclusion, exclusion and abjection.

Chapter Two begins my exploration of these theoretical threads with an analysis of the concept of modernity and the associated terms of modernisation, modern and modernness. The chapter opens with an overview of the development of modernity in Western social and political thought and goes on to explore more recent theoretical

accounts including the notion of multiple modernities (Gaonkar 2001; Eisenstadt 2000; Taylor 1999). I then proceed to articulate a limited and specific use of the word 'modern' to address the questions that I have posed in this Introduction.

Chapter Three examines the issues of movement that are repeatedly encountered in the analysis of modernity. Connectivity, mobility and the related concepts of scale and territoriality are explored as necessary background to understanding the scale of modernity, and its shifting geographies in both tangible development processes and in popular imaginaries.

Chapter Four situates the changes taking place in Phnom Penh with reference to changes in other cities throughout Asia and the world. The chapter begins with an overview of recent developments in urban studies that challenge the assumption that urban knowledge and innovation is developed exclusively in the cities of the West. I go on to detail the recent demographic and economic shifts that have prompted Ananya Roy to call for new geographies of urban theory—centred in the global South (Roy 2009a). Roy, along with Aihwa Ong and a number of other authors, have advanced the concept of 'Worlding' as a means of understanding the processes by which projects and practices situated in Asian cities represent a vision of the world and seek to enhance their position within it. Ong and Roy's understanding of efforts made to enhance the world status of certain cities in Asia informs my analysis of Phnom Penh, and is also shown to have parallels in efforts aimed at enhancing modern status on a range of other scales.

Following these three theoretically focused chapters, the thesis then proceeds with three chapters based on fieldwork data. The main body of this data is 88 interviews that took place in Phnom Penh during August and September 2010. These interviews are complemented by observations from a combined total of over three years living in Cambodia since 2002.

Chapter Five delves further into the specificity of Phnom Penh's contemporary transformation and explores the most visible expression of the city's modernisation and its claim to enhanced world status—the transformation of its built environment. Here I seek to understand the shifts in international participation in the city's development, from the colonial engagements with France, which persisted in the early years of independence, through to the dominance of international donors in the 1990s, and finally the strong involvement of intra-Asian private sector actors today.

In *Chapter Six*, the thesis assesses the efficacy and progress of Phnom Penh's assertions to enhanced world status, beginning with an analysis of the city's position in global hierarchies of modernity. The concern of this chapter is with understanding how the city and its residents view their position in the world. It seeks to answer the question of how pride and confidence in the modernisation of the city exists while Cambodia remains one of the world's poorest nations.

Chapter Seven shifts the focus outwards as I explore wider geographies of modernity as seen from Phnom Penh. The chapter details both the tangible links through which the modern city is produced, and the cultural processes that produce popular imaginings of a better life.

Finally, in the *Conclusion*, I reflect on the key theoretical threads of the thesis and identify its original contributions to knowledge of Cambodia, and to broader knowledge of the city.

2 Modernisation, Modernity and Being Modern beyond the West

It is not particularly controversial to argue that over the last two decades Phnom Penh, and Cambodia more broadly, has undergone rapid modernisation. However, it is controversial to argue that Phnom Penh *is* modern, or that it is an example of modernity. While flyovers, skyscrapers and other aspects of the built environment in the capital attest to Cambodia's modernisation, the country is heavily aid dependent and thirty per cent of the population lives in poverty (World Bank 2009). Further, the economic growth that has facilitated all this development has come at the expense of a key component of Western ideological modernity—democratisation (Öjendal & Lilja 2009; Springer 2010). While skyscrapers are certainly understood to be *modern* in most ordinary understandings of the term, do they really have anything to do with 'modernity' as it has been understood in the social sciences and humanities?

Both the modernisation of the city and its status as a site of modernity can be viewed through two very different frames. Viewed through one frame, Cambodia does not meet the requirements of an ideological modernity associated with the rise of rationalism in Western Europe. In some configurations, this serves as the primary reference point for the teleological endpoints of modernisation theory and to a lesser degree in Western development discourse. Through another framing, a more ordinary understanding of what it means to be modern, Cambodia's relationship is more ambiguous. It still falls short in terms of being up to date relative to the rest of the world—in living standards, access to technology, and levels of wealth. At the same time however, Cambodia, and Phnom Penh in particular, is distinctly modern—contemporary city life is a vast

improvement on the recent past, and far better than the still pervasive poverty throughout the country.

To probe these issues more fully, this chapter opens with a review of theoretical debates on the themes of modernity and modernisation, and on its meaning beyond the West. As we will see, theoretical understandings of modernity of European origin are of limited utility in Phnom Penh, where becoming modern can be roughly equated to improved socio-economic status. While acknowledging the multiplicity of meanings that have been ascribed to the term 'modernity', I will seek to establish a more limited definition that is pertinent to contemporary Phnom Penh. This will be more specific in its ambit and is intended to partially counter the ambiguity of modernity. I will argue for the use of modernity in terms of a set of interrelated concepts: as a native category—that is, in ordinary understandings of what means to be modern in Phnom Penh; in a related understanding in terms of overcoming poverty and conflict; and lastly as a relationship within hierarchies of status that are constituted at various levels from the local to the global. With these three understandings in mind, I argue for a theoretical understanding of modernity that is truly multiple, and is developed through engagement with a multiplicity of reference points that either inspire or play a tangible role in the modernisation of Phnom Penh.

Modernity, Modernisation and Development

In the English language the terms modernity, modern and modernisation remain entwined with a specific spatio-temporal understanding—particularly in the social sciences and humanities. They are typically associated with the discourse of European modernity and with its evolution and repackaging as modernisation theory. That is, in processes including the rise of rationalism over traditional modes of thought; the shift from an agrarian economy to an industrial economy; the establishment of democratic institutions to replace authoritarian systems of rule; the establishment of transparency in public processes and the eradication of corruption; the rise of meritocracy and

abolition of nepotism; and the separation of church and state (Harvey 1989; Habermas 1983). Of course there are more ordinary uses of the word, with meanings closer to those that are found in a dictionary. Following Raymond Williams, Frederick Cooper posits that 'the most ordinary meaning of modern is that which is new, that which is distinguishable from the past' (Cooper 2005, p. 119). This is more in-line with Williams' description of the early use of the term, which was 'nearer our contemporary in the sense of something existing now, just now' (Williams 1976, p. 208). I will return to this use of the word below, but for now I will briefly turn to the development of analytical understandings of modernity linked to the history of Western Europe and the role of this discourse in modernisation theory and development. It is this understanding that has caused 'modern' and its derivatives to develop into 'one of the most politically charged keywords circulating across languages in the modern world' (Bennett et al 2005, p. 219).

The 'project of modernity' is generally viewed as having arisen in Enlightenment era Western Europe in the eighteenth century. Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and Montesquieu sought to 'develop an objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic' (Habermas 1983; quoted in Harvey 1989, p. 12). It was expected that the accumulation of knowledge produced by many individuals would contribute to the proliferation of more fulfilling lives. Enlightenment thinkers believed that the domination of nature by man-made science would tame its unpredictability and result in the eradication of poverty. They embraced change, concerning themselves with, as Zygmunt Bauman describes it, 'the melting of solids', that is, the relatively stable social and political structures of the time. Their visionary optimism sought to 'replace the inherited set of deficient and defective solids, with another set, which was much improved, and

preferably perfect' (Bauman 2000, p. 3).¹⁹ With this aim, modernity was seen as permanent, the end of history, with no superior social structure lying beyond it (Washbrook 1997).

Peter Wagner's (2003) articulation of *A Sociology of Modernity* posits that the term 'modern society' has been applied to the social formations of North America and Western Europe over the past few centuries. He argues this characterisation relies on a distinction between these new 'modern' formations, and 'traditional' societies, typically associated with historical ruptures. In many accounts of modernity, the French and American revolutions have been seen to mark a political rupture, and the periods of industrial growth in parts of Europe and North America have been seen in terms of an economic rupture. Gurminder Bhambra (2007a) has demonstrated that these events, which she refers to as myths of European cultural integrity, are commonly mythologised and idealised.²⁰ Bhambra argues that these processes are wrongly regarded as having developed endogenously within Europe, as having cultural integrity, and as having ultimate, global, epochal importance. For Wagner, these events were so separated both geographically and temporally that significant doubt can be cast on whether these represented a major, connected social transition. Rather, Wagner argues that it was the discourses and not the revolutions themselves that were truly revolutionary (Wagner 2003, p. 4).

The influence of these discourses has been immense, both within and beyond Europe and North America. They played a major role in the relationship between Western colonisers and the subjects of colonialism. Walter Mignolo has argued that modernity is

¹⁹ Almost three decades ago Marshall Berman observed that this quest for change has endured, and with it, modernity could be seen to be 'a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal' (Berman 1982, p. 15; Harvey 1989, p. 10).

²⁰ Bhambra addresses three of modernity's 'founding moments'—the Renaissance, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution.

a narrative that 'builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, "coloniality"' (Mignolo 2011, p. 3). He goes on to argue that this discourse has positioned European modernity as the endpoint of historical time and has placed Europe at the centre of the world.²¹ In colonial times, this belief in the superiority of the modern European present translated to a sense of superiority over others who were deemed to be pre-modern. Thus their subjugation was justified in terms of an obligation to introduce modernity for improvement of the colonised peoples (Ashcroft et al 2000).

Bhambra is one of a number of authors who have sought to demonstrate that the development of the idea of modernity in Europe has been a product of the interaction of the non-West with the West (Bhambra 2007a; Mitchell 2000; Gilroy 1999; Washbrook 1997; Chakrabarty 2008). Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008) has argued for the 'provincialisation of Europe'—that is, not the rejection of European thought, but for its renewal 'from and for the margins' (2008, p. 16). More specifically, Paul Gilroy (1999) has challenged the established Eurocentric geography of the emergence of modernity, positioning its development as characterised by 'ships in motion' between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean. David Washbrook has outlined the role of India in the mechanisation of cotton-textile manufacture in Britain. What is frequently seen as the beginning of industrialisation in Britain can be seen as part of a much longer, connected history that includes the preceding transfer of cotton technology from India to Britain. As we will see later in this thesis, comparable processes took place in urban planning, where colonial 'experiments' would later serve as reference points for developments in European cities (Roy 2011b). All these examples reinforce the

²¹ Mignolo has argued that the development of the social sciences in Europe and academic knowledge production more broadly was deeply linked with this process, both shaping, and being shaped by its progress (Mignolo 2002; Mignolo 2003). It is therefore unsurprising that the social sciences have tended to document and interpret modernity in a manner that privileges these Eurocentric constructions of its substance, and of the events surrounding its development.

position that understanding the development of the discourse of modernity requires an analysis that reaches beyond Europe and situates European developments in a global context.

Of course, the aim of this thesis is not to question and re-imagine European modernity, but to understand the experience of modernisation in Phnom Penh. For some time after Cambodia's independence in 1953, as was the case in many former colonies, a discourse of Western-centred modernity continued to have a strong influence. The decolonisation that took place throughout the world following the Second World War saw a shift in the position of the discourse of modernity in relationships between the West and the rest of the World. The idea of modernity no longer justified the subjugation of 'pre-modern' peoples. But it retained much of its power as it was positioned at the centre of a discourse which maintained strong political influence over the decolonising world. In January 1949, in the wake of the Second World War, US President Harry Truman declared that 'more than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery' and that the solution was to 'make available our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life' (Truman 1949, cited in Escobar 1995, p. 3). Truman's stated ambition was to bring about a broad convergence of living standards through replicating the features of the world's wealthiest or most 'advanced' countries.

Modernisation theorists of the 1950s and 1960s such as Rostow (1960) and Lerner (1958) set out to establish a clear path toward modernity. For Rostow, this was to be found in a universal sequence that saw societies—contained within nation-states—as passing through five sequential stages of growth: traditional society; pre-conditions for take-off; take-off; the drive to maturity; and the age of high mass-consumption. The final stage represented a consumer society that was not unlike the United States in the 1950s. Countries were classified according to their relative modernisation with respect to an idealised model of Western modernisation (Almond & Coleman 1960). Thus poor

countries were deemed to be less advanced on a path that had already been taken by the 'developed' countries of Western Europe and North America (Ferguson 2006). It was through the process of 'modernisation' or 'development' that these poor countries would rid themselves of poverty, and share in the prosperity of the developed world. For its proponents, this program was made all the more imperative by the growing threat of communism (Escobar 1995, p. 34). But for some critics, this program amounted to little more than a 'crude justification for Western economic, political and strategic interests in the Cold War era' (Kiely 2006, p. 397).

Modernisation theory packaged economic, political, demographic, social and cultural changes as co-dependent. It was an absolute transformation—tradition and modernity were seen to be mutually exclusive (Bhambra 2007a, p. 60). It was *all* of these things that were required to alleviate poverty and to bring about broad convergence in living standards. For Bhambra, a key problem with both modernity and modernisation theory, is their reliance on ideal types. Modernity was incomplete in the West (Habermas 1983)—its goals had not yet been realised, but it was still positioned as a normative framework for addressing the transformation of each and every country regardless of its size, population or its social and political environment.²² The coherence of this framework came into question in the late 1960s and the influence of modernisation theory began to wane. The assumption of a stagnant past was questioned along with its universalising teleology. The package of changes was taken apart, with individual elements each given more nuanced analyses (Cooper 2005).

²² Raymond LM Lee (2005) offers another reading of this dilemma. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between solid and liquid modernity in the West, Lee argues that development has lost its teleology, as the solid institutions of modernity have failed to sustain their form anywhere in the world.

However, while modernisation theory was effectively discredited, its ethos remains in less rigid approaches to development (Cooper & Packard 1997, p. 17).²³

For Phnom Penh and Cambodia, colonial modernity was something that belonged to the French, who maintained an uneasy monopoly on its traits and aesthetics. Cambodians who adopted European attitudes, clothing or customs were derided by colonial administrators as *déclassés*, seen as betraying the authenticity of the Khmer race (Edwards 2007). As we saw in the Introduction to this thesis, in the early years of postcolonial independence, and in the heyday of modernisation theory, the French opposition of tradition and modernity along racial lines gave way to an enthusiastic embrace of modernity inspired by tradition. As was the case in many postcolonial countries at this time, the narrative of convergence of living standards with the West played a strong role (see Norodom Sihanouk 1991).²⁴ But the expectation of convergence ultimately subsided as Cambodia declined into a prolonged period of armed conflict.

The overthrow of Cambodia's ailing post-independence government in 1970 roughly coincided with the decline of modernisation theory. Interestingly, the first steps of Cambodia's emergence from conflict coincided with a partial revival of modernisation theory. The end of the cold war and the wave of democratisation throughout the third world in the 1980s and 1990s, led to the argument that there was no alternative to Western-style liberal democracy. At the same time, though not always linked, a similar argument emerged that saw free-market economics in the same light. Most notably, Francis Fukuyama (1992) boldly declared that we were witnessing 'the end of history'

²³ Modernisation theory and development have both been subject to significant historical analysis and critique in the emerging body of 'postdevelopment' literature. This work is usefully summarized in James Sidaway's *Space of postdevelopment* (2007).

²⁴ This idea of convergence took place over a longer time period in Thailand, starting most significantly with the reign of Chulalongkorn which began in 1868 and continued well into the 20th century (see Reynolds 2006).

in what he saw as the emergence of a worldwide consensus on the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government and on the superiority of free-market economics—an *ideal* which, according to Fukuyama, could not be improved upon. While liberal democracy and free-market economics cannot be equated modernisation theory, they represent a return to many of its fundamental assumptions (Latham 2011). With this revival came increasing emphasis on economic rationalism (Pieterse 2001). Evolutionary stages, primarily based in economic statistics, have seen countries ranked by the United Nations as least developed, less developed, developed and highly developed. For the US in particular, the end of the Cold War represented an opportunity to promote its own liberal, capitalist and democratic institutions throughout the entire world. Much like modernisation theory before it, this is a process that is tied to a western model and is similarly teleological (Pieterse 2001, p. 25).

In Cambodia these values are manifest in development discourse, which has had a strong presence in the country since the UN-led intervention in the early 1990s. The intervention, which resulted in the administration of Cambodia by the UN (UNTAC) from February 1992 until October 1993, coincided with this post-cold war assertion of a rejuvenated modernisation model (Ayres 2000).²⁵ A key component of this rejuvenated model in Cambodia, as in many places throughout the global South, was the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that the Cambodian government committed to in 1994. The plan focused on market-based economic reform, the development of the private sector, institutional restructuring, economic diversification and regionalisation (Ayres 2000). The Cambodian government committed to the reform of state institutions, promotion of private entrepreneurship and reliance on the market as the primary driver of growth (Slocomb 2010). While these policies have been successful in

²⁵ A key component of earlier modernisation theory, the mutual exclusivity of tradition and modernity, was absent from this “rejuvenated” modernization model’ (Ayres 2000). Rather, tradition was mobilised as a key driver of the rush toward modernity (Winter & Ollier 2006).

stimulating growth, a number of authors have criticised the distribution of this newly created wealth. For Simon Springer, the SAP prompted economic growth at the expense of social justice and genuine democracy (Springer 2010).²⁶ Margaret Slocomb argues that the SAP did little to address how the wealth would ultimately reach the poor, and that its restrictions on public spending put services such as health and education further out of reach for much of the population (Slocomb 2010, p. 236).

As we saw in the Introduction, another result of the UN intervention and its mandated changes has been that much of the English-language analysis of Cambodia has focused on the progression towards, or deviation from democracy (Carothers 2002; Cock 2010; Öjendal & Lilja 2009). While the formal structures of democracy have been established, Cambodia remains a state where no government has ever given up power without armed conflict (St John 2011). As many analysts have argued in recent years, focusing on the conformance to, or deviation from the ideal of democracy tells us little about the reality of contemporary Phnom Penh (Hughes & Un 2011; Öjendal & Lilja 2009), further, it ignores other references for development within the region. Asia's strongest economies—and sites of spectacular urban modernity such as Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong—are not examples of Western democracy, but of various forms of authoritarian rule (Robison 2006; Rodan 2004). Indeed, over the last decade, as China has emerged as Cambodia's largest single donor, the co-dependence of the separate elements of the package of Western modernity in alleviating poverty has been shown to be tenuous (Nyíri 2006). China's own political and economic development under an authoritarian political system has been cast as a model that can be replicated by developing countries throughout the world (Zhao 2010). This is not as direct as the promotion of Western models, as China's aid to Cambodia primarily funds the

²⁶ Springer is an advocate of the universalism of democracy, however he argues that there is no necessary link between democratisation and economic liberalism. He goes on to argue that in Cambodia the latter has been the primary cause of the country's inability to consolidate democracy.

development of infrastructure and is not attached to political reforms (Sullivan 2011). However it clearly operates as a reference point for development as do numerous other examples within the region.

Beyond Eurocentrism: Multiple Modernities?

While Eurocentric views of modernity have persisted until today, observations of economic growth, urbanisation and industrialisation from reference points located outside the West have generated new theoretical approaches. As more of the world becomes 'modern', the singularity of the European project of modernity has become untenable. Notions of multiple or alternative modernities were advanced from the 1990s onwards as a means of explaining patterns of development which did not follow the rigid paths proposed by modernisation theorists such as Rostow and Lerner.

Proponents of multiple modernities argued that the end result of modernisation can be very different for different cultures, societies or countries. Importantly, modernisation was not seen as a culture-neutral operation, and was understood to produce different results in different socio-cultural contexts—there was not only one modernity. Two schools of multiple modernities thought emerged, one led by Shmuel Eisenstadt, which was articulated in a special issue of *Daedalus* dedicated to multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000; Wittrock 2000) and later published as an edited book with the same name (Eisenstadt 2002). The other, also known as 'alternative modernities' was led by authors who were affiliated with the Chicago-based Center for Transcultural Studies (CTS) (e.g. Appadurai 1996; Calhoun 1997; Gaonkar 1999; Taylor 1999).

Eisenstadt, who played a role in the modernisation theory debates of the 1960s, has long been concerned with the form of modernity that is associated with the West, and his work on multiple modernities continued in this vein. Eisenstadt explicitly contested the Eurocentrism of modernisation theory, and particularly claims of convergence, instead arguing for the specificity of all cultures, including that of European modernity, which, he maintained, developed endogenously within Western Europe (Eisenstadt

1987). Western patterns of modernity were seen to be 'not the only "authentic" modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others' (Eisenstadt 2000, p. 3). Eisenstadt's work focuses on the development of modernity, first in the West, then throughout Asia, the Middle East, and finally in Africa. In what he describes as 'the first true wave of globalization' (Eisenstadt 2000, p. 14), societies throughout the non-Western world, adopted the Western model of the nation-state, as well as the institutional structures of Western modernity. Through the continual reinterpretation of the European cultural program of modernity, and through attempts at the redefinition of modernity by social and political movements (often anti-Western, and even anti-Modern), he asserts that multiple modernities have emerged, and continue to do so.

There are many similarities, but also some important differences in the notion of multiple or alternative modernities that was developed by members of the CTS group. The group focused more explicitly on the contemporary context, and explicitly separated societal modernisation and cultural modernity. Societal modernisation represents institutional transformations and the rise of rational thought, whereas cultural modernity refers to aesthetic and literary movements that came to be absorbed into popular culture and ultimately permeated everyday life (Gaonkar 1999). Taylor draws a looser and more limited picture of the package of changes associated with societal modernisation: 'the emergence of a market-industrial economy, of a bureaucratically organized state, [and] of modes of popular rule' (Taylor 1999, p. 162). He argues that at least the first two of these are almost inevitable if countries do not want to fall behind in hierarchies of power.

The processes referred to by modernisation theorists, and those on which Eisenstadt has focused, fall into the category of societal modernisation. In contrast, Gaonkar refers to Charles Baudelaire's concern with searching for modernity in the everyday life in the modern city. Here, in a cultural reading, modernity is positioned in the present, rather

than as a defined set of processes with specific spatio-temporal origins. In line with this focus on the present, the CTS group placed more emphasis on the interaction of contemporary modernities with globalisation—‘the implacable forces of global media, migration, and capital’ (Gaonkar 2002, p. 4). For Appadurai (1996; 2001), this was a world where modernity was ‘at large’. It was characterised by transnational flows through a series of cultural networks—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, and technoscapes. In this world, Appadurai considered the concepts of the imagination as being newly significant in bringing about agency, inspired and influenced by the flows of mass mediation and migration. This is an important distinction and a key concern of this thesis—through positioning modernity in the present, rather than as a historical discourse, the primacy of issues of movement becomes clear.

A more contemporary reading of Eisenstadt’s work on multiple modernities can be found in Beck and Grande’s recent work which seeks to position ‘reflexive modernity’ within a cosmopolitan turn in social and political theory. Reflexive modernity, or second modernity, is primarily associated with Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens (Beck et al 1994; Giddens 1991). This theoretical frame maintains that the world is modern,²⁷ but that modernity has entered a second phase. Modernity is now looking back on itself in response to the actuality of modern society, which includes developments that were totally unanticipated by the ideologies of first modernity. Beck and Grande retain the categories of pre-modernity, first modernity and second modernity, which they argue, are particular to the European path to modernity.

²⁷ That is, as opposed to being postmodern. I have resisted the inclusion of a section on postmodernity in this chapter in order to avoid further focusing discussion on the West.

With the retention of these categories, all other modernities remain variants of a particular European modernity (Lee 2008).²⁸ Studies of the modern throughout the non-Western world risk becoming accounts that compare a particular modernity with a European ideal. This focus may overshadow recognition of the diversity of connections and influences that drive social, cultural, political and economic changes. But if multiple modernities are not variants of an original European modernity, what attributes or processes can be seen as common to all modernities? As Frederick Cooper has observed, 'it is not clear why an alternative modernity should be called a modernity at all' (Cooper 2005, p. 114).

Cooper (2005), Ferguson (2006) and Mitchell (2000) all acknowledge the usefulness of studies that take on the vocabulary of 'alternative modernities' revealing the complexity and multiplicity of what has been broadly described as modernity. However they are amongst a range of authors who have come to criticise the 'multiple modernities' approach over the last decade. For many critics its weakness is primarily in the implication of a singular referent modernity to which all other modernities are either a multiple of, or alternative to. The original modernity is seen to have developed endogenously in the West whereas other modernities or modern societies are seen as hybrids, copies or imitations (2007; Bhambra 2007b; Robinson 2006; Mitchell 2000).

As we will see in the following chapter, this positioning of modernity within societies reflects a tendency in the social sciences to consider social forms as contained within nation-states (Urry 2007a; Urry 2000). Here, a second weakness exists—particularly in the work of Eisenstadt and Wittrock—in a lack of recognition of the importance of mobilities and interconnections in shaping modernity. Bhambra (2007) acknowledges that Wittrock (2000) identifies the importance of interconnections, but argues that he

²⁸ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, much recent scholarship on Cambodia has focused on its progression towards or deviation from particular aspects of a Western ideal of modernity.

places emphasis on differences between modern societies and on their separate trajectories rather than their co-evolution through connectivity.

Already the ‘multiple modernities’ approach has been criticised for leaving too much ambiguity as to the definition of modernity (Mitchell 2000; Cooper 2005). But I am arguing that in order to challenge the weaknesses of ‘multiple modernities’ we need to understand modernity without necessary reference to an original European modernity, and to take into account the vast range of connections through which modernity is produced. This moves even further from the established ideas of European modernity on which most definitions have been based. This does little to counter the ambiguity of modernity, but raises the important question of what modernity is, and how it can usefully be defined.

Becoming Modern: Everyday Understandings of Modernisation and Development

In the brief exploration of modernity, modernisation and development above, I have provided a sketch of the European discourse of modernity and its interpretation and influence beyond Europe through modernisation theory and development discourse. As we saw in the Introduction, international aid has had a strong presence in Cambodia since the early 1990s, and much of it has been driven by Western development ideology. This ideology—a direct descendent of modernisation theory—has meant that many aspects of the ideological project of European modernity have played a strong role in Cambodian policy making over the past few decades. But their role in changing the lives of ordinary Cambodians and their perception—perceived or otherwise—is far less clear. Drawing on the CTS group’s emphasis on cultural modernity, I will argue that it is important to develop an ordinary, everyday understanding of what it means to be modern for the residents of Phnom Penh. I will seek to establish how we can usefully approach modernity with a simpler definition—as the quality or condition of being modern—without necessary reference to the European discourse of modernity.

Even in this brief review of academic accounts of modernity, the multiplicity of its meaning makes it difficult to establish a working definition. It is an ambiguous term that continues to be used to make a wide range of social and political claims. Frederick Cooper's exploration of the varieties of claims associated with the term 'modern' and his thorough questioning of the use of the term 'modernity' leaves one wondering whether its continued use contributes more to confusion than advancing our understanding of the world (Cooper 2005). But Cooper stops short of advocating the abandonment of the term, and proposes a way forward. He advances a scholarly understanding of modernity based on what is being said in the world—how the modern and modernity are spoken of in the vernacular—rather than trying to fit political discourse into existing frameworks of what is modern, anti-modern or postmodern. This forms the basis of the first understanding of modernity that is used in this thesis, an understanding based on what is being said about modernity in Phnom Penh. That is, the everyday experiences of its residents, their aspirations for modernity, and broader social aspirations expressed in political rhetoric, mass communications and patterns of consumption.

To some degree this is the cultural modernity described by Gaonkar (1999; 2001), and can benefit from the approach taken by Baudelaire in Paris—that is, to seek modernity on the streets of Phnom Penh. Such vernacular understandings of modernity have been advanced in a range of non-Western contexts, often avoiding the use of the word 'modernity' and all its associations in preference of terms such as 'being modern', 'modernness' or a word from the local language. Writing in the context of Bali, Indonesia, Adrian Vickers separates the international discourse of 'the modern' from Balinese understandings of the Bahasa Indonesia term *moderen*. For Vickers, being *moderen* is in many cases, 'to have something to show for it and is linked to advancing one's social status' (1996, p. 7). Tarik Sabry (2010), writing in the context of the Arab world, uses the term modernness to denote the everyday understandings and expressions of being modern. Joel Kahn situates 'popular modernism' in opposition to

‘exemplary modernism’ in formulating a theory of the subjectivity of people living in modern society (2001, p. 18). These and other approaches to popular, vernacular or everyday understandings of modernity each represent a return to the more ordinary understanding of the term ‘modern’ that is referenced at the beginning of this chapter. It is tempting to use a similar term and speak of Phnom Penh in terms of modernness, or becoming or being modern. However, to do so would be to allow the European discourse of modernity to maintain its monopoly on the term, and to put forth an awkward replacement for a widely used term, which literally refers to the quality or condition of being modern. For that reason, I have chosen to use the term ‘modernity’ in this thesis to refer to everyday understandings of what it means to be modern, and to use more specific terms with relation to the European discursive modernity.

Within Southeast Asia, Marc Askew’s (2002) exploration of the modern in Bangkok, Thailand associates *modernisation* with the process of emulating European modernity, as was the case with the modernisation program undertaken by Chulalongkorn at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁹ But for Askew, *modernity* is grounded in the experiences of the people of Bangkok. He sees modernity in processes such as the engagement of youth with foreign fast food chains, and the development and experience of gated housing projects. It is ‘associated with the consumption and appropriation of new commodities, objects and symbols’ and ‘the attempts by people to become the “subjects” as well as the “objects” of modernisation’ (2002, p. 33). While Askew’s account is useful, his engagement with analytical accounts of modernity in social theory is relatively thin, as are his definitions of modernisation and of modernity. A more critical engagement can be found in Philip Taylor’s (2001) account of ‘searching for modernity in Vietnam’s South’. Taylor questions the relevance of accounts of

²⁹ King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) reigned from 1853-1910. His reign was characterised by his modernisation programs, which sought to emulate European modernity (Stengs 2009; Reynolds 2006).

modernity in 'privileged sites of discourse' to those that can be heard by listening to people who are not a part of this discourse. These are typically expressed through such terms as 'developing', 'backward', 'civilised', 'tradition' and 'modernisation'. He seeks to establish an understanding of modernity based on the imaginings of people who are removed from the privileged sites of the discourse of modernity—that is, beyond the West.

James Ferguson (2006) takes a similar position with broad reference to Africa.³⁰ While not arguing that his should be the only treatment, Ferguson treats modernity as an anthropological 'native category'. This treatment of modernity responds directly to an observation of miscorrelation between analytic and vernacular understandings of what it means to be modern. Based on his observations of modernity in the vernacular, Ferguson argues for recognition of the importance of status and membership in understanding modernity, positing that in many poor countries, people approach the question of modernity from without. This association of modernity with status runs counter to many other accounts of Africa in Ferguson's discipline—anthropology. In particular, he identifies numerous studies that have sought to historicise contemporary practices that are popularly viewed as traditional, and which declare the presence of modernity in places that are typically seen as not being modern. For example, Peter Geschiere (1997) has demonstrated that African witchcraft traditions exist as responses to modern needs and desires, updating their goals and techniques in response to the changing experience of modern life.

This anthropological identification of pervasive modernity—of previously unappreciated historicity in practices that are regarded as modern—contrasts with the observations of ordinary Africans, or as Philip Taylor (2001) has argued, the majority

³⁰ Ferguson refers to Africa in the singular, accepting that the treatment of Africa as a single place is dubious, he argues that it is so commonly referred to as a single place, that it is useful to analyse it as such (Ferguson 2006, pp. 1-4).

of people in Vietnam's South. Ferguson suggests that as Africans 'examine the decaying infrastructure, non-functioning institutions, and horrific poverty that surround them, they may be more likely to find their situation deplorably non-modern, and to say... "This place is not up to date!"' (Ferguson 2006, p. 185). While these two claims are made from very different reference points, they are not mutually exclusive. The anthropological identification of modernity is made from an understanding of modernity which is opposed to tradition—here the meaning of modern can be roughly equated to that which is new. In contrast, the understanding that Ferguson has observed amongst ordinary Africans is based on their perception of 'inadequate socioeconomic conditions and their low global rank in relation to other places' (Ferguson 2006, p. 186). Similar sentiments have been observed in Latin America, where José Domingues (2009) observes that people perceive their belonging to modernity as being in a marginal position.

This is particularly marked in the sites of Ferguson's fieldwork, where he states that the 'promise of modernisation increasingly appears as a broken promise' (Ferguson 2006, pp. 186-187). He details how Zambia experienced strong economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, which brought with it the expectation of modernity and the convergence of living standards with the developed West (Ferguson 1999). This economic growth was short lived, and was followed by rapid economic decline, decreasing international connectivity and lower standards of living for ordinary people. This is a markedly different situation from today's Cambodia, where the economy has experienced sustained rapid growth since the cessation of armed conflict in the final years of the 1990s.

Where Zambia has seen international flights reducing in number, and the cessation of tours by Western performers (Ferguson 1999, p. 235), Cambodia has seen the opposite. Poverty rates have declined, a handful of Western and South Korean pop artists have begun including the city in their tours, and increasing international connectivity is

widely visible. This is the basis of the second understanding of modernity that was referenced in the introduction to this chapter. It seems quite obvious to state that becoming modern is the opposite of not being modern—but it is an important point to consider. For Phnom Penh, and Cambodia more broadly, the poverty, conflict and relative international isolation of the recent past is a strong reference point for what it means to *not* be modern. As such, peace, decreasing poverty rates and increasing international connectivity are all signs of a modern present.

But as I argued in the Introduction, this trend has not been homogenous. Poverty still exists throughout Cambodia, and when considered with reference to other places in the world, contemporary Phnom Penh seems far less modern. Through increasing wealth, and associated increases in the mobility of people, objects, ideas and images, more successful and desirable modes of living from various foreign ‘elsewheres’ increase Phnom Penh residents’ awareness of what is lacking in their city and their lives. Ferguson’s identification of ‘global disconnect’ as an integral aspect of contemporary Zambian imaginings of the modern remains relevant even in this period of rapidly increasing connectivity. There are many, perhaps the majority, who are largely excluded from the new modern spaces of contemporary Phnom Penh, and from experienced or imagined modern spaces that lie outside of Cambodia. Further, as I will argue later in this thesis, for the groups of Cambodians who are increasingly connected, overcoming a sense of global disconnect contributes to individual and collective confidence in being modern.

Overcoming Tradition or Establishing Wealth and Status?

Modernisation, its Obstacles and its Points of Departure

In the most rigid accounts of modernisation theory, modernity and tradition were seen as antithetical. For Rostow, countries began at the stage of traditional society, passing through three transitional stages before becoming a modern consumer society (Rostow 1960; Kiely 2006). While not necessarily cast in such rigid terms, modernity has

commonly been seen as the opposite of tradition. Becoming modern has been understood as a more or less linear progression from tradition to modernity. This idea of historical progress has come to be viewed as a universal unfolding of time, and the norm against which all experiences of time and being are to be judged (Fabian 1983; Goh 2002). Numerous authors have challenged this binary, arguing that apparently 'traditional' practices are profoundly influenced by engagements with 'modernity' (Escobar 1995; Piot 1999; Piot 2010).

As we saw near the beginning of this chapter, the marginalisation of societies outside of Europe has long played a role in the discourse of the modern project. Following Johannes Fabian, James Ferguson argues that academic accounts of African societies have understood their relationship with the West as a kind of dated relic. These societies—less advanced on the prescribed path from tradition to modernity—are seen as 'backward' and somehow not of the present (Ferguson 2006, p. 184). Ferguson elaborates on this understanding of difference, arguing that the narrative of modernity reconfigured a spatialised global hierarchy as a temporalised historical sequence. Poorer countries and their citizens were not only at the bottom, but also at the beginning, and wealthier countries in Europe were at the top because they were more advanced on the path to modernity. Thus 'postcolonial nations were condemned to live in the 'not yet' shadow land of other societies' already realized history, as belated arrivals to a Eurocentrically conceived modernity' (Ferguson 2006, p. 178).

In contemporary Cambodia, the notion of an unchanging culture, positioned with reference to the Angkorean era, has been seen as an obstacle to the social and political reforms desired by Western donors (Hughes & Öjendal 2006; Springer 2010).

Tradition, or at least the aspects of tradition that relate to political power, have been seen as inhibitors of modernisation. In a 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Caroline Hughes, Joakim Öjendal and their co-contributors seek to 'avoid a teleological notion of political change as involving a march away from the constraints

of “tradition” towards the opportunities of “modernity” (Hughes & Öjendal 2006, p. 419). Hughes and Öjendal draw on Achille Mbembe’s observations of postcolonial Africa and on his claim that social theory has been concerned with either accounting for Western modernity, or detailing the shortcomings of the non-European world in replicating it (Mbembe 2001, p. 16).

The idea of tradition standing in the way of social and political reform is usefully illustrated by the experience of capitalist growth in Western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But on the other hand, it is countered by the experience of capitalist growth in East and Southeast Asia from the latter half of the twentieth century until today. Modernisation theorists saw ‘traditional societies’ as ‘marked by inequalities based on kinship ties, hereditary privilege and established (frequently monarchical) authority’ (Bendix 1967, p. 293) and argued that their destruction was a hallmark of modernisation. Many European transitions to capitalist society were rooted in opposition to absolute feudalism, involving efforts to establish individual property rights against the state. In Asia however, Robison and Goodman argue that the state has played a vital role in the emergence of capitalism. They continue, ‘it has not been in the freedom of laissez-faire but in the incubator of dirigiste regimes that the chaebols and zaibatsu have flourished’ (Robison & Goodman 1996, p. 4).³¹ Where laissez-faire capitalism is now emerging, they posit that it is the state that provides the political conditions for this process. Certainly in Cambodia, the modernisation of the last two decades has seen a reconfiguration and strengthening of traditional patron-client relationships rather than their replacement (Springer 2011; Slocomb 2010). The experience of Cambodia adds further weight to the recognition of the precariousness of privileging Western modernity in understanding processes that are popularly seen as modernisation in the non-Western world.

³¹ Chaebols and zaibatsu refer to Korean and Japanese business conglomerates respectively. Examples include Hyundai, Samsung, Mitsubishi and Mitsui.

Ferguson offers a different reading of the teleological understanding of modernisation as a pathway from tradition to modernity. He argues that modernity is no longer thought of as an expected endpoint but rather, as we saw above, modernity is framed in terms of status. The 'not yet' aspect, or the expectation of modernity's arrival, has given way to detemporalised statuses which see people who are not modern 'not as "less developed" but simply as less' (Ferguson 2006, p. 189). Cooper takes a similar position, arguing that modernisation, both as policy and as theory, situated countries within a global hierarchy. At that time, in the 1950s and 1960s, it was expected that all countries would follow the same linear progression to the modern plateau, and that there would be an upward convergence of material standards (Cooper 2005, p. 131). In many African cases, this hierarchical categorisation has become relatively static—they now seem to be positioned permanently at the lowest levels. Its proliferation by much of academia and through influential international organisations has classified countries primarily according to the strength of their economies.

The economic growth and rising standards of living in today's Phnom Penh are the source of widespread optimism. The recent past, against which modernisation is viewed, is not marked by the constraints of traditional modes of rule, but of by a disastrous revolution, internal conflict and poverty. The UN intervention which prompted the country's modernisation program was a peacekeeping operation, designed to end decades of civil war. For many Cambodians, becoming modern has meant moving beyond war and want, with tradition positioned as inspiration rather than obstacle (Winter & Ollier 2006). As we will see in the second half of this thesis, in recent years, becoming modern has often been seen in terms of increased economic, political and cultural engagement with the rest of the world. But as Cambodia's international marginality decreases, convergence still remains a distant mirage. Cambodia's economic growth from 1998-2007 took place at rates far higher than the average in both Europe and North America. But over the same period GDP per capita in Europe and North America grew by approximately \$PPP10,000 and \$PPP14,000

respectively. During that time, Cambodia's GDP per capita rose from \$PPP737 to \$PPP1,802 (World Resources Institute 2011). In dollar terms, the growth taking place in Europe and North America exceeds that of Cambodia by an order of magnitude. If growth in GDP per capita in Cambodia took place at a constant 8% and we were to assume a constant of 4% for Europe and North America, convergence on this measure would take the better part of a century. Of course these figures are unrealistic, but so too is the expectation of broad convergence of material standards, which has largely dropped out of use in development discourse (Ferguson 2006, p. 182).

Convergence does happen in places like Cambodia, but it occurs only in a relatively modest number of individual cases. There are increasing, but still small, numbers of people living in Phnom Penh whose level of wealth and standard of living rivals that of most people in Western Europe and North America. But these privileged groups—who have, in an odd sense, realised the goals of early modernisation theorists—are rarely seen as exemplary subjects of modernisation or development. Throughout Africa, Ferguson observes that the new rich are not typically understood as being 'early examples of a soon-to-be-generalized societal destination' but rather as figures of 'luck, ruthlessness, or even criminality' (Ferguson 2006, p. 187). The same is true of Cambodia where the mainstream English-language press, reports from NGOs and some recent academic publications have described Cambodia as being run by a 'kleptocratic elite' (e.g. Global Witness 2007; Global Witness 2009; Springer 2009a; Springer 2011).

In line with Ferguson's observations (2006, p. 187), these elites are *not* seen as being further along the path of modernisation, nor as proof of the virtues of education, and development. But locally they are often seen as having higher status in a hierarchy of being modern. Many are simultaneously at the peak of local imaginings of a modern hierarchy, and at the same time, they are obstacles to the realisation of Western modernity. Their wealth facilitates greater opportunities for consumption, education and travel, which as we will see in chapter seven, are common components of local

imaginings of what it means to be modern. For Ferguson, modernity in this sense constitutes global status, being 'first class' and a full member of the global ranks of modern consumers. While this can be understood at the level of the city or the nation—as a collective imaginary to which modern status can be ascribed—it can also be understood on much smaller scales such as the suburb, the household or the individual. The fact that the status of a nation is very low, does not preclude its nationals from participating wholly in wider understandings of modernity. Building on the link between modernity and status, the following section addresses modernity and its inclusions its many scales.

Modernity, Networks, Membership and Scale

Arif Dirlik is one of many authors who have observed the 'appearance of "first worlds" in the capitals of the formerly Second and Third Worlds, and of "third worlds" in the capitals of the First' (2004, p. 139; see also Hardt & Negri 2001, p. 335). For Dirlik (2003; 2004; 2007), these changes are part of a new era in the proliferation of capitalism, in which capital occupies a transnational space, an era that Dirlik describes as 'global modernity'. Dirlik's observations are mirrored in the those of a number of authors including Hardt and Negri (2001), for whom capitalist power is increasingly located in a 'smooth world', without fixed boundaries or barriers, and no centre of power. This might seem to be far removed from the vernacular understandings of modernity advanced in the previous two sections, but at its core are similar issues of status—in the form of power relations on a global scale. While Cambodia as a whole may be toward the bottom of a global hierarchy of modern status, there are people within Cambodia who can make an assertion to being close to the top. Dirlik's argues that 'global modernity' 'is not a thing but a relationship, and being part of the relationship is the ultimate marker of the modern' (2003, p. 279).

Apart from Dirlik's quite specific global modernity, a more general 'global modernity' is a useful concept. In a recent book chapter (Paling 2012a) I examine the representation

of Cambodia at the largest celebration of modernity and urbanism in history—the 2010 Shanghai Expo. Here Cambodia’s exclusion from the expression of modernity was almost complete, with the nation represented to the public almost entirely through its past. But at that same event, for just one day, a host of Cambodian business and political elites—including Eric Tan, an informant in this study and the son of Lim Chhiv Ho, one of Cambodia’s most powerful women—came to strengthen economic ties with their Chinese counterparts. They could be seen to be members of Dirlik’s global modernity, or of Leslie Sklair’s transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2001). While the country as a whole was all but excluded, this small group of Cambodians were in attendance as members of a different modernity, defined not by nationality, but by wealth and power. With this group in mind, we could conceive of singular, decentred modernity based significantly in capitalism, existing at the apex of a global hierarchy that underpins modern status.

Evidence also exists of an imagined global modernity on a larger scale. Ferguson observes that the new forms of worldwide interconnection that have taken place in recent decades have conceived of ‘the global’ as a planetary network of interconnected points—a network that ‘Africa’ is marginal to. The experience of this marginalisation takes place on smaller scales—Ferguson argues that connection to the electricity grid is seen as a metaphor for providing links into variously constituted grids of modernity on scales ranging from the national to the global (Ferguson 1999). Ferguson cites the example of health care in demonstrating uneven access to these networks—disease is managed for wealthier patients, but the poor are informed that it is economically more rational for them to die. Graham and Marvin (2001) cite the use of water pipes as footways for transportation by the residents of informal settlements in Mumbai—where those same residents have no access to the water carried by these pipes, and have to buy bottled water at high prices. Ferguson draws parallels with education, public space and gated communities which all ‘increasingly undermine the promise of a universalistic “public”’ (Ferguson 2002a, p. 138). Ferguson’s observation

of increased privatisation and segmentation of services echoes Graham and Marvin's position of a 'splintering urbanism'. For Graham and Marvin, this is represented in a widespread abandonment of the ideal of providing drinkable water and sewerage services in many developing cities.

Is it then useful to conceive of modernity in terms of a privileged relationship with various networks that facilitate the operation of the city and its constitutive processes? Graham and Marvin assert that 'infrastructure networks are the key physical and technological assets of modern cities' (2001, p. 10). These socio-technical networks create bonds across, within and between cities, nations and regions. Certainly in Phnom Penh, privileged access to electricity, Internet, international travel, automobility, knowledge, and other networks and network services play a significant role in being modern. This privileging of connectedness in understanding the modern broadly excludes Cambodia's rural populations from this category. Graham and Marvin argue that the construction of these spaces of mobility and flow involves the construction of barriers for the less privileged. The physical mobility of both people and capital do not reveal an increasingly smooth and contiguous pattern, but rather the lumpiness of cross-border connections. If this bundle of flows across networks can be thought of as a significant constituent of an imagined global modernity, it is a conception that has the potential to significantly account for the exclusion that is felt by those who see themselves or their surroundings as non-modern.

Some of these networks represent the wholesale exclusion of large numbers of people from aspects of life that are considered to be modern. But even some of the most unjust exclusions have not precluded enthusiasm for modernity.³² As Jennifer Robinson reminds us, while modernity itself has been exclusionary, so too has its theoretical

³² As referenced in the introduction to this thesis, Jennifer Robinson has described a number of black Africans living in apartheid South Africa whose wholesale exclusion from the modern city did not preclude their excitement at its wonder.

imaginaries, excluding large numbers of people from expressing their accounts of the excitement and potential of modern city life (Robinson 2006, p. x). Recognition of this point is important, as it is all too easy to develop a polarised account of these exclusions. Hardt and Negri's opposition of *Empire* and *Multitude* is a case in point, as Cooper has observed, they 'seem unable to distinguish someone trying to get into a capitalist system of production or a state system of citizenship from someone trying to get out' (Cooper 2004, p. 253). To be excluded from modernity does not necessarily produce resentment of modernisation itself.

Conclusion

Modernity remains a slippery term and as we have seen, attempting to rid the word of its Eurocentric origins in the social sciences does little to counter its ambiguity. But the continued use of the term 'modern' in the vernacular highlights the importance of establishing an understanding of what it means. Throughout this chapter I have sought to establish a more limited understanding for use in this thesis, one which relates to the way in which the term and its indigenous equivalents are used and understood in Cambodia. Local understandings are both influenced by, and at odds with, more conventional, Eurocentric understandings of modernity and modernisation in the social sciences. These understandings have played a strong role in Cambodia over the last few decades due to the large scale of Cambodia's engagement with Western donors. But I maintain that they should not be given primacy in understanding the meaning of modernity, and the process of becoming modern. In Phnom Penh modernity cannot be understood solely through the variance or conformance with the parameters of this ideology. Rather, the influence of this ideology is one of many factors that shape Cambodian imaginings of hierarchies of modernity and the efforts of Phnom Penh's residents to improve their status by becoming more modern.

To understand the recent process of rapid modernisation in Cambodia requires an understanding of the country's imagined position with relation to the rest of the world.

As Ferguson has argued, contemporary understandings of modernity as a native category exist in terms of status, where being modern roughly equates to being better. In my discussion of modernity, modern and modernness as they exist in the world today, I have repeatedly stressed the contemporary importance of increases in connectivity. It is partially through this connectivity that modernity has come to exist on multiple scales. While Phnom Penh is marginal in most international understandings of modernity, many of its residents are coming to see themselves as increasingly modern. Further, there are particular people in Cambodia who experience lifestyles that could be seen as modern in almost any hierarchy of status and are intensely connected to wider transnational networks that are seen to be markers of the modern. With this wide variability in scale and context it is easy to demonstrate exceptions to most generalised accounts of modernity.

Ananya Roy's (2009a) recent work in exploring urban modernity in Asia may offer a way forward. Roy argues for the existence of new geographies of city knowledge, reflecting the imagined geographies of urban modernity. The rise of skylines in cities such as Dubai, Shanghai and Kuala Lumpur has shifted the imaginaries of urban modernity such that these Asian locations are now strong reference points. I will return to Roy's arguments in more detail in my exploration of urban theory in chapter four, but at this point it is useful to consider how these Asian urban modernities can be understood in attempting to theorise a more general understanding of modernit(y/ies). It is important to recognise this claim is based in a much more limited *urban modernity* which is not necessarily connected to or even located in the same city as the reference points for modern political institutions, education programs, economic policy, or everyday expressions of modernity in fashion, consumption and popular culture.

Returning to the idea of multiple or alternative modernities, Phnom Penh is certainly becoming modern with partial reference to a range of Asian urban modernities rather than emerging as a variant of an original European modernity. As we will see in chapter

four, Asian capital and knowledge plays a major role in the modernisation of the city. But at the same time, the strong influence of development ideology—a direct descendent of modernisation theory—has meant that many aspects of the discourse of European modernity have played a strong role in Cambodian policy making over the past few decades. These are just two examples that demonstrate the limitations of understanding multiple modernities as variants of an original modernity. If we are to understand modernity as multiple, produced with a society with reference to existing examples of modernity, then by now it is surely necessary to also acknowledge the existence of a multiplicity of modern reference points. Further, given the existence of a multiple reference modernities, it is useful to acknowledge that within a city, society or nation, modernity is made of many components. The modernisation of these components may each reflect a different geography of modern status.

In short, modernity can be understood to be multiple, but it is of limited utility to position this multiplicity in terms of societies or nation-states, each developing their own unique modernity with reference to a European original. Rather, modernities exist on all manner of scales, and are by no means contained solely within cities, societies or nation-states. On a scale such as the city or the nation—both of which can be understood as a specific modernity within wider international hierarchies—modernity is itself multiple, comprised of many components, each of which look to their own set of modern reference points—sites of perceived prominence in particular aspects of being modern. I will return to these concepts throughout this thesis, and explore related and analogous approaches that have been taken to understanding increased connectivity and movement, and the correspondent changes in the meaning of scalar concepts such as locality. These developments will help to conceptualise the geographies and spatiality of modernity, including its relationality and its many scales.

3 The Era of Globalisation? Territory and Connectivity, Mobility and Locality

Globalization is the un-depleted potential for development. Without globalization there will be no progress, no modernization nor prosperity. So far, globalization has made our region grow very intensively either in the field of science, technology and telecommunication and human resource development. Globalization is the modern era of civilization, materiality and spirit.

Hun Sen, keynote address at the fourth Asia Economic Forum, 14 October 2008³³

Many of the changes that have been seen to represent the modernisation of Phnom Penh over the last two decades could be—and have been—framed as the results of globalisation. In his speeches, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has frequently referred to the present as the ‘era of globalisation’, a phrase that is just as common in the social sciences and in reports on Cambodia produced by NGOs and international financial institutions. Certainly, this has been a period of intensification and diversification of international economic connectivity. Foreign direct investment has increased from \$US33 million in 1992 to a peak of \$US867 million in 2007 (World Bank 2011). Cambodia’s borders have become increasingly pervious to flows of capital, and integration into transnational networks of finance, development aid, communications, public policy and popular culture has increased dramatically. Engagement with global markets has meant that the incomes and job security of everyone from recycling collectors, to garment factory workers, to white collar development sector workers, are now affected by changes that take place on a global scale.

³³ ‘Keynote Address at the 4th Asia Economic Forum 2008’ Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2008_releases/14oct08_economic_forum_speech.htm

But to characterise the present through this global terminology risks losing sight of intensification of connectivity taking place on smaller scales—within the household, the suburb or the city, throughout the country and in the region. As we saw in the previous chapter, the global is just one of many scales on which hierarchies of modernity exist. Modernisation of national and civic infrastructure has enhanced Cambodia’s internal connectivity. The road network has improved dramatically, communications networks have been established throughout the country and banking services are now present in every province. These are infrastructural developments that facilitate mobilities *within* Cambodia to a much greater extent than beyond Cambodia. Changes that are intensely linked to global processes are often equally intensely linked to local processes. The growth of Phnom Penh’s garment sector—in factories commonly funded by Chinese investors, producing clothes primarily for the US market—has transformed the social fabric of rural Cambodia. It has greatly increased the migration of rural women to Phnom Penh to the point that twenty per cent of Cambodian women between the ages of 18 and 25 are now working in the garment sector (ADB 2004). In seeking to understand these changes, neither the local nor the global provides an adequate object of analysis (Korff 2003)—so what are we to analyse?

Phnom Penh could be understood as a node within global or regional networks, as the central hub of a national network, or the nation’s central point of connection with international and transnational networks, as a politically defined territory within the nation of Cambodia, or even as the confluence of the Mekong, the Tonle Sap and the Bassac rivers. It can be understood as Cambodia’s political and economic centre, through which the nation represents itself internationally. For this thesis, the concern is not only with the place that is Phnom Penh—which is permeated by numerous translocal process—but with its position in the world, and the way in which this position is produced and maintained. Accordingly, this chapter seeks to analyse the vocabularies and ontologies required to understand the complexity of Phnom Penh and

its position in the world. The ontological position advanced in the latter half of this chapter adds clarity to the relational understanding of modernity, its scales and its geographies that was advanced in the previous chapter.

Globalisation and the Global

We have all witnessed how 'globalization' has become a watch-word and a catch-word in the past few years. But ... it has also come to connote different meanings to different groups, participants and observers. On this occasion, therefore, it is better for all of us to get to grips with what we all mean by this word. For most part, 'globalization' is talked, in economic terms, of free trade without borders which we all heartily subscribe to. However, in practice, this free trade has been acting mainly in favor of those who seek abundant resources, markets and profits [*sic*].

Hun Sen, Bangkok, 2000³⁴

In this brief excerpt from a speech given at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Bangkok, the Cambodian Prime Minister touches on two of the problems with the term 'globalisation'. While Hun Sen is not an academic—his numerous doctorates are all honorary—his criticism of the term 'globalisation' resonates strongly with comparable academic arguments. Firstly he identifies the lack of clarity and consistency in its use, and secondly, the contrast between the imagery of a global space of freely flowing capital and the inequalities that exist in its actually existing configuration. The ambiguity of the term makes establishing working vocabularies and ontologies for this analysis of Phnom Penh all the more difficult. Ultimately I will argue for the treatment of increasing mobilities and connectivity, and

³⁴ 'Address by Samdech Hun Sen to the Tenth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)' Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/cnv_html_pdf/cnv_26.PDF

their ontological effects, through a more specific vocabulary. However it is important to address and understand the concept of globalisation, as that is the most common way that these changes have been framed, and the most common characterisation of the specificity of the present.

As the term has come into everyday use—in political rhetoric, reports from international development agencies and NGOs, and in English-language media—its application has been loose and inconsistent. Its component processes, its geographies and its temporality remain vague (Conversi 2010; Urry 2003; Cooper 2005; Ong & Collier 2005; Collier 2006; Gills 2000). Speaking of the present, globalisation has been the source of grand statements about macro-processes such as the emergence of 'global cities' (Sassen 1991) and of 'network society' (2000a; 2004; 1996). It has been posited as a dominating external force against which local forces have exerted resistance—avoiding the negative consequences that have been attributed to globalisation such as the loss of local culture or traditional modes of living (Burawoy 2000), or the threat of being pushed out of, or losing access to urban space and its economic possibilities (Berner & Korff 1995). It has been seen to be responsible for the emergence of new social forms—global culture (Featherstone 1990), global modernit(y/ies) (Featherstone et al 1995; Dirlik 2007; Dirlik 2003) as well as more specific framings of transnational flows through cultural networks (Appadurai 1996). For both critics and enthusiasts, globalisation is seen to have immense power over an exceptionally wide range of outcomes (Urry 2003; Cooper 2005).

The most prominent and consistent use of the term 'globalisation' has been in an economic sense, referring to the breakdown of barriers to international trade and the emergence of a world market following the dissolution of the Soviet dominated economic bloc (Cooper 2005; Cooper 2001; Bhambra 2007a, p. 57). This same view is shared by those who see globalisation process as a positive development, as well as by those who view it as a project that produces social marginalisation and ought to be

challenged. There is a strong link here to the re-emergence of modernisation theory that was discussed in the previous chapter, in particular, the claims of the universal applicability of liberal democracy and neoliberal economic policy. As we saw in the previous chapter, these claims formed the basis of attempts to realise the universal implementation of the latter, through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) designed by the World Bank and IMF, as has been the case in Cambodia (Dasgupta 1998; Springer 2010).

Much of the writing on globalisation used to be top-heavy (Favell 2001)—discussion frequently took place at the level of the 'global' rather than addressing situated and specific experiences. The local was often cast as the polar opposite of the global, a position that Ruediger Korff (2003) argues is comparable to similar differentiations 'like modernity—tradition, first world—third world, universal—particular' and so on. The problem with these differentiations is that they only make sense with reference to each other. For Korff, the most significant problem in the distinction between global and local is the vagueness of each of these terms. Local, Korff argues, 'can stand for places, indigenous people, villages, cities, quarters within cities, factories, regions, nations or places' and these physical spaces are contrasted with a vague abstract notion of global, 'in terms of flows, ideas, virtual realities and images' (2003, p. 4). It is too often assumed that both of these concepts are inherently meaningful, and as such, neither is thoroughly elaborated.

Globalisation has been associated with a number of sweeping assertions. Amongst the most significant and widely debated have been claims of deterritorialisation, declaring the end of local cultural identities and the nation-state, and the emergence of a 'borderless world' (Omae 1995; Omae 1994). Proponents of this position see the present as a distinctly global age, marked by its difference from a past in which social and economic relations were effectively contained within nation-states or empires. The strongest proponents have argued that the very survival of the nation-state is

threatened by increasing international interdependence and diminishing significance of borders (Omae 1994; Omae 1995; Guéhenno 2000). Similar claims have been made in terms of culture and media where it has been argued that both viewers and content are no longer bound within any geographic space (Appadurai 1996). These claims have since been met by powerful counter-arguments that demonstrate the ongoing importance and significance of the nation-state and of local identities (Ong 2006).

As Cooper and many others have demonstrated, claims of the end of the nation-state have been greatly exaggerated, and the role of governments in controlling resources has never been higher (2005, p. 95). The movement of people and capital across borders does not reflect diminishing power of the nation-state, but rather it has seen a reconfiguration of the role of the nation-state, and effective adjustments in the way in which states and their institutions exercise control over people, capital and commodities (Ong 2006). The location of poverty within specific nation-states further weakens the image of a seamless, borderless world. Peter Andreas has argued that while the global transformations of recent decades have reduced the economic and military importance of borders, particularly for advanced industrialised countries, borders are increasingly criminalised and policed—impermeable to people who are seen as undesirable (Andreas & Snyder 2000). A similar position is taken by James Ferguson who argues that from Africa, the 'global' is 'a patchwork of discontinuous and hierarchically ranked spaces, whose edges are carefully delimited, guarded and enforced' (Ferguson 2006, p. 49).

This reconfiguration of power of the nation-state is important in the context of Phnom Penh, which as a primate city, is at the centre of Cambodia's political and economic power. Its ongoing development reflects a broader pattern in the region where governments recognise that the status of their national economies is tied to the position of their largest and most powerful urban regions (Douglass 1998, cited in Bunnell 2002, p. 287). While Cambodia's transition from a centrally controlled

economy to a free market economy represents a significant reduction in the regulation of macro-economic processes, the globally-oriented development in Phnom Penh expresses the rising power of the current state, as has been the case in Malaysia (Bunnell 2002) and in many cities throughout Asia (Roy 2011b). Of course this expression of Cambodia's power and its position in the world is much weaker than that of Kuala Lumpur, reflecting Cambodia's relatively small role in global flows of capital.

The small role that Cambodia and many other poor countries play in global economic flows has been positioned as evidence for the characterisation of vast areas of the world and large populations as excluded from the globalisation process (Bauman 2003; Castells 2010; Smith 1997). An understanding of globalisation in this sense has seen Phnom Penh, and other cities in poor countries throughout the world cast as part of a 'fourth world', comprising of 'the black holes of informational capitalism' (Castells 2010, p. 166). They have been seen to be excluded from mainstream economic processes and on the undesirable end of a process of increasing inequality, social polarisation, rising poverty and misery. With specific reference to Phnom Penh, Gavin Shatkin has challenged this characterisation, arguing that city's treatment as excluded from the global economy overlooks, rather than explains, the impact of the bundle of changes so often described as globalisation (Shatkin 1998). The significance of cities or nations to the global economy says little about the significance of international economic involvement in those places. The following maps offer a crude sketch of this variability:

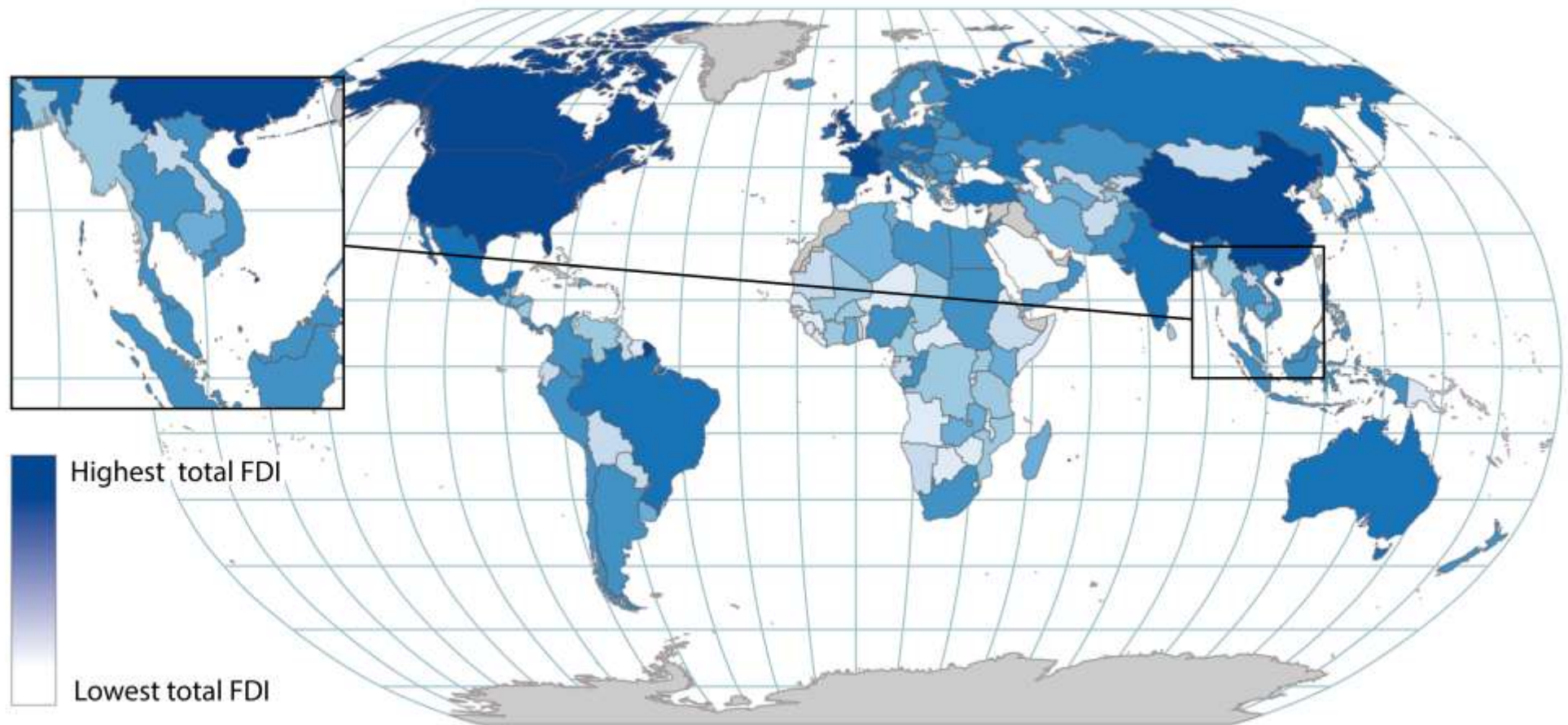


Figure 5: Worldwide foreign direct investment. Image by the author.

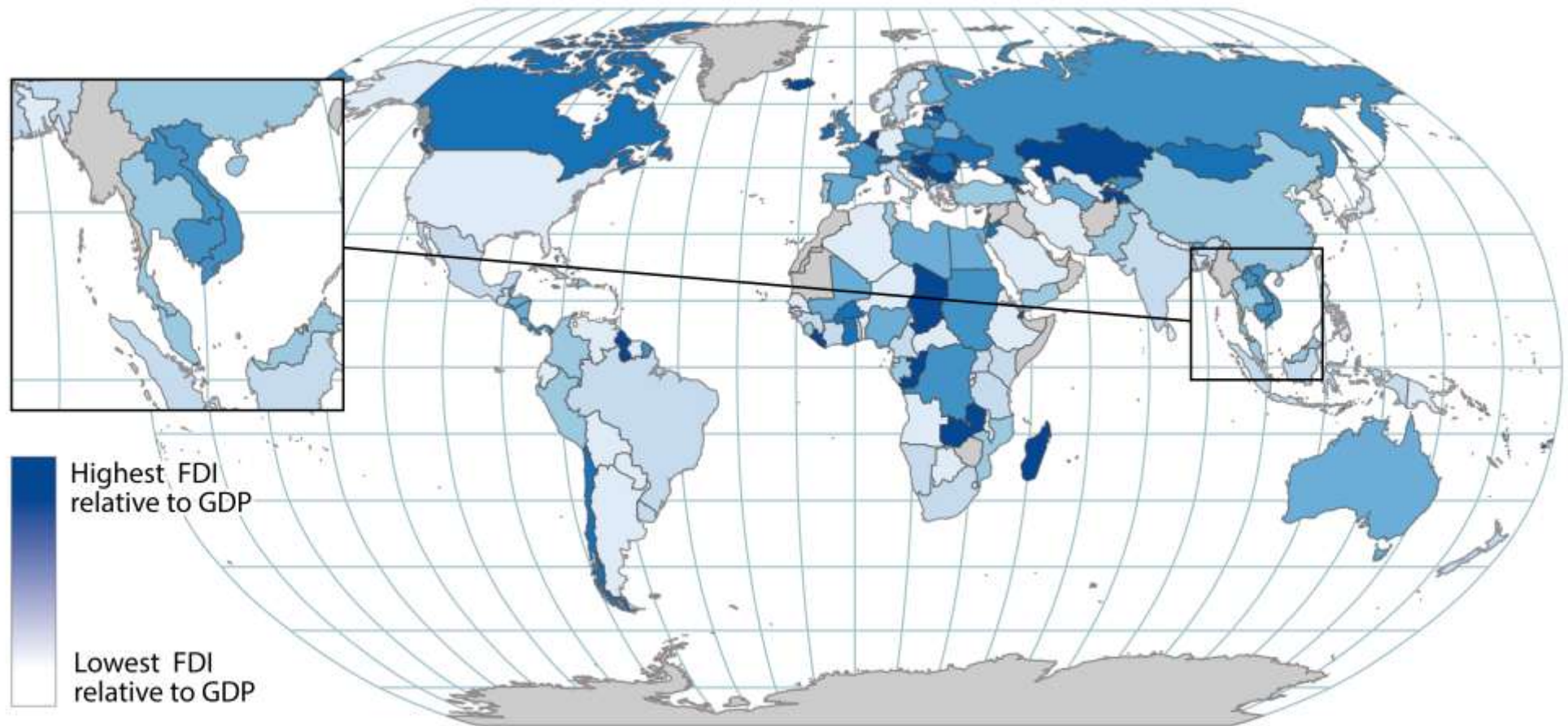


Figure 6: Worldwide foreign direct investment relative to gross domestic product. Image by the author.

The first represents the absolute values of foreign direct investment inflows throughout the world, with darker colours indicating higher values. We can see clearly that the highest levels are found in Western Europe, North America and East Asia. The second map represents foreign direct investment relative to gross domestic product, giving an indication of the significance of international capital in the national economy. It shows that Cambodia has above-average levels of international investment relative to its GDP. As Ferguson has argued with reference to Africa, characterising entire nations as excluded from the process of globalisation risks ignoring the specificity of situated institutional, political and economic contexts (2006, p. 29).

It must be stressed that this has been much more than a change in economic policy. New technologies have made it possible for capital, information, images, ideas, people and objects to move more rapidly across greater distances and in greater volumes—bringing significant social and cultural changes along with the aforementioned economic and political changes. Richard Grant's (2009) nuanced exploration of the transformation of Accra, Ghana demonstrates the pervasiveness of global connectivity in that city. Through its conceptualisation as a site of engagement between local and global agents, Grant explores Accra as a globalising city, from the obvious involvement of foreign corporations, to the role of transnational workers and repatriated funds, to the active role played by slum dwellers in the city's transformation, and the global connections that they forge. Macro-economic analyses offer little texture to these ordinary, everyday engagements with the global, and the diversity of associated social and cultural transformations.

Through a cultural focus, the globalisation process has been described in terms of 'coca-colonisation' (Wagnleitner 1994), 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer 1993) or 'Americanisation'. That is, the replacement of cultural diversity throughout the world with a global monoculture based significantly on Western (particularly US-based) consumer culture (Wunderlich & Warriar 2007; Pieterse 1994). The limits of this view

have been demonstrated by many authors including Steven Flusty (2004), who explores the diversity of cultural forms produced by increasing international engagement. Flusty argues that even where local cultural forms are disappearing, they cannot be seen as evidence of cultural homogenisation, but of complex, polyvalent articulations.

While it is problematic to argue for a generalised global response to these changes, it is clear that with the increased movement of images, ideas, people, and objects it is no longer useful to locate social life wholly within bounded localities (Appadurai 2001; Appadurai 1996; Morley 2000; Savage et al 2005; Urry 2000; Sheller & Urry 2006). Rather, we must recognise that territorial social and cultural formations—including various scales of modernity—are increasingly subject to the effects of wider processes. But this does not mean that it is useful to think of these more local scales as being completely superseded by the global over the course of the few decades. As we saw in the previous chapter, cultural imaginings of modernity are produced on a multiplicity of scales, each influenced by numerous connections on scales ranging from the city to the globe.

The Time of Globalisation and the Specificity of the Present

The internationalisation of economic relationships that has taken place over the past few decades has a number of historical precedents, most notably in the period from the mid nineteenth century up until the First World War (Hirst & Thompson 1999; Bairoch & Kozul-Wright 1996). As Frederick Cooper observes, 'historical analysis does not present a contrast between a past of territorial boundedness and a present of interconnection and fragmentation, but rather a back-and-forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies' (2005, p. 105). Within the globalisation paradigm, attempts have been made to take account of these historical precedents. The present has been considered as the latest in a series of globalisations, with each being progressively more inclusive. This can be seen in history of Southeast

Asia—and Cambodia is no exception—which attests to the ongoing establishment and evolution of economic and cultural connectivity within and beyond the region (Olds 1999, p. 10). Numerous authors have sought to qualify claims of the specificity of the present by exploring the extended history of international connectivity. The ‘first globalisation’ has been positioned as early as the twelfth century (Weatherford 2004) based on claims that Genghis Khan’s far-reaching empire represented the beginning of the globalisation pattern (Conversi 2010). But more often, it has been positioned in the intensification of international economic integration that took place over the latter half of the nineteenth century (Davies 2005).

For Cooper, this temporal lack of clarity is a key weakness of the term ‘globalisation’, but this is not the only weakness that he identifies. He sees major problems in the implications of the word itself, arguing that ‘there are two problems with the concept of globalization, first the “global”, and second the “-ization”’ (2005, p. 91). The problem with ‘global’ is its totalising implications, that it represents the entire globe with little regard for exceptions. And the problem with ‘-ization’ is its implicit teleology—that the ‘global’ is an inevitable state, and that the present represents the transition towards this state. Comparisons can be made with earlier emphasis on modernisation, with both being universally applicable, ongoing processes named by their endpoints (Cooper 2005; Dirlik 2003). Both of these terms draw their strength from their unification of diverse phenomena into a singular process of change, but in doing so have often produced analyses that generalise rather than clarify historical processes (Cooper 2005).

More specific definitions of globalisation have been advanced by authors including Arif Dirlik who argues that ‘if globalization means anything, it is the incorporation of societies globally into a capitalist modernity’ (2003, p. 274). Similarly, Barry Gills argues that the broad scope of the term ‘globalisation’ can be usefully clarified by referring to ‘neo-liberal economic globalisation’ (2000, pp. 4-5)—this is a position

taken by Simon Springer in his analysis of Cambodia. While acknowledging that the concept is vague, Springer argues for an understanding of globalisation that gives due attention to the increasingly uneven development between states, and recognises the role of globalisation in reducing the ability of states to control, plan and regulate their economies (Springer 2010). Globalisation is to be understood not as a scalar concept, but rather as a scaling process that exists with relation to other scaling processes such as localisation, regionalisation and so on (Brenner 2004).

This understanding of globalisation is primarily economic, and such a limited definition gives significant clarity to the term. Recognition of the relationality of geographic scales is a useful and necessary counter to the lack of attention given to the variability in economic integration and connectivity in many discussions of globalisation (Therborn 2007; Cooper 2005). But even with this useful definition it is difficult to see how the term 'globalisation' adequately describes these processes. The term 'global' implies a single homogenous system of connection which derives its imagery from the World Wide Web (Cooper 2005, p. 96)—a global network of communications linking every locale to every other locale and facilitating the free movement of capital. But such an inclusive image fails to account for the lumpiness of its constituent flows and networks, and the multiplicity of uneven political and economic relations (Cooper 2001; Cooper 2005). While Brenner and Springer both attempt to account for the nuances of increasing connectivity and uneven relations, the retention of the term 'globalisation' is not strictly necessary.³⁵ While there is merit in Brenner's definition of globalisation as one of many scaling processes, its use in this context may be confusing due the plethora of alternative definitions used in the vernacular, the media and in political rhetoric.

³⁵ In most of his work, Springer uses the more temporally and conceptually specific vocabulary of neo-liberalism.

Of course, the discourse of globalisation will remain in use in everyday language as well as in the media, in political debate and of course, in academia, and as such the term cannot be completely discarded. Cooper acknowledges the existence of the political discourse of globalisation as a worthwhile object of study. With specific relevance to this thesis, the influence of the term is evident in the recent coining of a new Khmer term in response to the English language term globalisation.³⁶ As we shall see in the later chapters of this thesis, 'globalisation' or its Khmer language equivalent arose as a causal factor in interviews with a number of key figures. As such, while it is not the focus of this thesis, analysis of the discourses of globalisation would be useful in Cambodia at the present moment.

The term may have more utility in cities such as Hong Kong, Singapore or New York, where the scale and diversity of financial flows is such that they are considered to be 'global cities' (Sassen 1991).³⁷ Many of the processes that are given primacy in global cities analyses are relevant to Phnom Penh, however, Phnom Penh is not a place that is characterised as 'global' and fails to register on any of the global or world cities rankings.³⁸ When 'globalisation' is referenced in political rhetoric, or in reports by international financial institutions or NGOs, globalisation is typically cast as external to Phnom Penh. Numerous reports from these sources refer to the 'challenges of globalization' and propose solutions in response to this seemingly inevitable and

³⁶ The term សាកលភាវូបនីយកម្ម (literally *universalization*) came into use around 2005, but has not yet been approved by the National Commission of Khmer Language and is not included in any mainstream dictionaries (Sor Sokny, Buddhist Institute Representative at the National Commission of Khmer Language, Pers. Comm. 2011).

³⁷ Even then, the primacy given to economic processes neglects many diverse aspects of urban life (Robinson 2002).

³⁸ Major ranking systems include the Global Cities Index, The Global City Competitiveness Index, Global Power City Index, World City Survey, and the Global and World Cities Research Network rankings. These ranking systems are usefully summarised on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_city.

unidirectional process to which Cambodia must respond (Salinger 2006; Ministry of Planning 2007). It has not been cast as a framework through which we can understand the diversity of Phnom Penh's increasing engagement with the world and its assertions to modern status.

With this in mind, following Frederick Cooper, I am positing that a more nuanced vocabulary is necessary to describe the ways in which particular places are connected and bounded and to understand the limits of these processes and their form(s). Cooper does not deny the uniqueness of the present, but rather the usefulness of the term 'globalisation' in describing what is unique. As we have seen, it often falls short in attempting capture the variability of connectivity across the globe in economic relations or in any other context. Cambodia's transition from a command to free market economy, massive influx of foreign tourists, exponential increases in FDI, sustained rapid economic growth and growing assertions to modern status could all be analysed through the lens of globalisation—and indeed, this is often how these processes are popularly understood. As such, I am not arguing for the abandonment of the term, but for the analysis of what is popularly understood as 'globalisation' through a range of more specific framings, and place-specific links and processes.

Interpreting Increased Movement

Alternative vocabularies for describing issues of movement have been developed by numerous theorists both within and outside of globalisation paradigms. Many of these allow for more specific description of increased movement and the significance of networks and flows in contemporary social and cultural relations. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has described a fast-moving liquid modernity, characterised by instability, movement and impermanence. Manuel Castells (1996; 2000a; 2004) has articulated a new social morphology in which key social structures are organised around information and communications networks. Hardt and Negri (2001) have detailed a global system of decentred and deterritorialising power facilitating the movement of

capital, people, information and goods across national borders with increasing ease. On a smaller scale, Graham and Marvin have argued that infrastructure networks are the most important aspects of modern cities, and that contemporary city development involves the development of a 'splintering urbanism'—construction of spaces of mobility and flow for the most privileged, and the construction of barriers for the poor (Graham & Marvin 2001).

In the work of these authors we can find a wealth of alternative terminology to 'globalisation' for describing and analysing the contemporary period of increasing movement and connectivity at various scales. Most of these authors made ambitious propositions of larger ontologies such as 'network society' (Castells 2000a), 'liquid modernity' (Bauman 2000) and 'Empire' (Hardt & Negri 2001). These are all useful, and productive research has been, and continues to be produced utilising these concepts. But in analysing a locale like Phnom Penh, which is less connected, less modern and less integrated into the 'global' economy, these particular abstractions—much like globalisation—can highlight more of what is not in Phnom Penh than what is present. While the city is peripheral to large-scale international economic flows, it is a site of rapid growth in economic, infrastructural, cultural and social connectivity. International arrivals in the period from 1993 – 2009 increased by an average of just over twenty per cent annually (Ministry of Tourism 2010). Over the same period, mobile phone subscriptions rose from just under five thousand to well over five million—more than one for every three Cambodians—and in the period from 2000—2009 Cambodia had the world's highest rate of growth in electricity use per capita (World Bank 2011).³⁹

³⁹ A visualisation of this data is available at <http://vis.willempaling.com/global-electricity-use-and-growth/>

A lighter alternative is offered by the new mobilities paradigm which provides a framework for analysing increased movement without insisting on a new grand narrative of the global condition, or a generalising ontological position on any scale. It suggests 'a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising description of the contemporary world' (Sheller 2011, p. 2). It is somewhat ambiguous in its lightness, and has been seen to be 'a most elusive theoretical, social, technical and political construct' (Uteng & Cresswell 2008, p. 1). However, its utility has been demonstrated in a wide range of applications in sociology, anthropology, geography, architecture, urban studies and media and communications theory (Sheller 2011). Such accounts include analyses of automobile travel and associated infrastructure (Featherstone et al 2005; Sheller & Urry 2000), travel and tourism (Adey 2006; Winter et al 2008; Larsen et al 2006), migration and transnationalism (Conradson & Latham 2005) and more recently, on the mobility of urban policy and knowledge (McCann 2010; McFarlane 2010)⁴⁰.

Driven primarily by John Urry (Urry 2007; Urry 2000; Sheller & Urry 2006; Urry 2002) the mobilities paradigm has developed over the last decade in recognition of and in response to the social significance of increased movement. Urry asserts that social science has often been overly sedentarist, treating stability, meaning, and place as normal, and distance, change, and placelessness as abnormal. This sedentarism 'locates bounded and authentic places or regions or nations as the fundamental basis of human identity and experience and as the basic units of social research' (Sheller & Urry 2006, p. 208). But all places are tied to networks of connection that stretch beyond the individual place. Places, and particularly cities, do not exist as islands, but are important for the concentration of connections that take place within them. The mobilities paradigm aims to go beyond the notion of spatially fixed containers. Instead

⁴⁰ Also of note is Sheller's account of the consumption of the Caribbean in the West through foods and stimulants, slaves and other workers, cultural products and tourism (Sheller 2003).

it seeks to draw attention to the ways in which people are mobile, as well as the ways in which people mobilise various objects, and how technologies—themselves either fixed or mobile—facilitate movement.

This focus on movement at all scales, and in all contexts—rather than primarily at the scale of the global and with an economic focus—is particularly important for the analysis of recent changes in Phnom Penh. Apart from the mobility of private capital, flows of international development capital continue to grow, as do flows of popular culture (Peou 2009; Mamula 2008), internal and regional migration (CDRI 2007; Derks 2010), banking networks (Clark 2006), remittances from the Khmer diaspora and internal and international travel and tourism (Winter 2008). This has been more than Phnom Penh's increasing its connectivity with the world, this period has seen increased connectivity within Cambodia, within the region, and with the Khmer diaspora. Moreover, the international flows of both private sector and development capital are geographically specific, with the former primarily located in East and Southeast Asia, and the latter dominated by China, Japan, Europe and North America (Paling 2012b). To account for these varied increases in movement and connectivity, the mobilities paradigm provides a strong framework for a situated analysis.

For Urry, the technological and social innovations which have occurred in the last few decades represent a historical change of epochal significance. The growth of the Internet has taken place with unprecedented rapidity, mobile phones have quickly exceeded land-lines in number, and the number of international journeys that are taking place each year has grown dramatically. The scale of transnational business and foreign exchange is immense, and the world's largest corporations employ staff across the globe, and control budgets that dwarf those of many individual countries. Urry compares these changes to others that took place around a century ago, including innovations in transport such as steamship travel, cars, bicycles and aircraft; in telecommunications—the telephone and the telegram; and in the standardisation of

global time (Urry 2003). A similar view is taken by Manuel Castells, for whom these changes are seen primarily through recent technological developments and constitute a greater change in the history of technology than those represented by both the Industrial Revolution, and the Information Revolution that came with the spread of the printing press and movable type in Europe (Castells 2000b).

According to Urry, these changes have 'dramatically reorganized and compressed the very dimensions of time and space between people and places' (2003, p. 1). Following from Castells' trilogy, *The Information Age* (Castells 2010; Castells 1996; Castells 1997), Urry advances the idea that the emergence of global networks, constituted significantly by the aforementioned technological developments, transforms the nature of social life. The social sciences have focused 'upon ongoing geographically propinquitous communities based on more or less face-to-face social interactions with those present' (2007, p. 47). But today more than ever, numerous social connections exist with people and others who are not in close proximity. Urry argues that all aspects of social life—work, family, education and politics—involve relationships of intermittent presence and modes of absence which partly rely on the technologies of travel and communications that facilitate movement.

Early work utilising and advancing the mobilities paradigm was criticised for its lack of attention to the physical sedentarism that continues to be the dominant experience for the bulk of the world's population (Morley 2000; Savage et al 2005)—this will be further explored in the following section. Like much work in the social sciences, mobilities research has predominantly focused on the developed world. This has been countered to some degree in more recent work which has more explicitly acknowledged the uneven access to movement, and has highlighted distinctions between a 'kinetic elite' who move very freely, and a less privileged, low-speed, low-mobility majority (Hannam et al 2006; Wood & Graham 2006). But this two-speed framing of mobilities only tells us part of the picture. Annuska Derks has shown how

male Cambodian migrants working on Thai fishing boats are both highly mobile and intensely immobile. They move between jobs and cross the Thai-Cambodian border with relative ease, but may be 'immobilised' on a particular fishing boat for up to two years at a time (Derks 2010). In more recent articulations of the mobilities paradigm, Urry, Sheller and Hannam have argued that 'mobilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities' (Hannam et al 2006, p. 3).

Territories, Borders and Geographies of Difference

While the present period is marked by increasing movement and connectivity across national borders, as we have seen, historical analysis shows that the nation-state is at one of its strongest points in history (Cooper 2005). A porous border does not amount to an insignificant border, and the permeability of borders varies for different types of people, goods and capital. While Cambodian migrant workers might travel across the border regularly, its significance is strongly felt, as it typically represents their personal transition from citizen to illegal immigrant.⁴¹ Within Cambodia, people are free to move between provinces, and many do—according to the most recent general population census, more than one in four Cambodians are internal migrants (NIS Cambodia 2008) with just over one in six being labour migrants (NIS Cambodia 2010).⁴² While internal territories are still meaningful for individuals and their relationship with the state, in that it is difficult to register to vote in a new province, internal migrants are not subject to restricted access to social services such as education, as is the case with China's Hukou household registration system. Migration,

⁴¹ Recent policy initiatives in Thailand have sought to establish a degree of legality for unskilled foreign migrant workers. However many Cambodians still cross the border and work in Thailand illegally.

⁴² Reliable statistics on the numbers of international migrants are difficult to obtain due to the illegal or semi-legal status of many migrant workers.

which represents just one type of movement, interacts with and changes the meaning of borders and territories.

As has been evident in Urry's more recent writing (Sheller & Urry 2006; Urry 2007; Urry 2010), a focus on mobilities requires rethinking, but not discarding, territorial and scalar narratives of social, political and cultural processes. Recent debates in human geography have focused on the assertion that scalar vocabularies might be replaced with a focus on networks, mobilities, or flat ontologies (Marston et al 2005; Jonas 2006; Escobar 2007; Leitner & Miller 2007; Jones et al 2007). However, as Colin McFarlane has argued 'refusing to use scalar concepts is a fruitless strategy given the prevalence of scalar narratives of political, economic, social and environmental relations that we encounter as researchers on a daily basis' (McFarlane 2009, p. 564). While the production of localised place may be approached through discourse analysis, and demonstrated to be socially constructed, such analyses alone are insufficient (Dovey 2010). As Cooper reminds us, 'scholars do not need to choose between a rhetoric of containers and a rhetoric of flows' (2005, p. 125). Rather than positing the end of territories such as the nation-state, we can analyse how various territorial spaces are both bounded and linked.

Historical analysis of regional connections—which took place primarily through trade and religion—requires an understanding of the geographies of power, and this is as true for the present as it has been for the past. Quantification of the movement of people, capital and telecommunications data, reveals a grossly uneven distribution of flows throughout the world. Cooper argues that more attention ought to be paid to the study of areas where capital does not go, and to the specificity of structures and connections in real-world scenarios (Cooper 2005). He observes that there are many resource-rich areas that international investors do not go, and in African countries, it is not deregulation, but the establishment of structure, of institutions and networks, that would facilitate access. Cambodia presents a similar case as informal networks of

political patronage serve as barrier to Western investors. The necessity of unofficial and/or illegal payments is typically at odds with company policy, or more significantly, could result in prosecution within the legal structures of their country of citizenship.⁴³ On the Cambodian side, the weakness of formal state structures often prevents investment in accordance with the legal structure of the investors' home country. While these barriers remain, it not the removal, but the strengthening of state structures, that came with Cambodia's accession to the WTO that has contributed to increased foreign direct investment. At the macro-level, relatively stable structural forms, including the nation-state, continue to play powerful roles and are not subsumed by the rising significance of networks and connectivity, but nor are they not unchanged by it.

A shift to a decentred and mobile life is also elusive at the level of the individual. The decreasing significance of physical sedentarism for people is, according to Morley (2000) 'not a truly global experience'. Rather, voluntary, physical mobility, is only accessible to a small proportion of the world's population (Savage et al 2005; Morley 2000; Skeggs 2004). While mobility has increased, for the vast majority of the population physical sedentarism has remained the dominant mode of being. Morley argues that physical mobility is an important characteristic of globalisation for only some categories of people. More significant, and for Morley (following John Tomlinson), more truly global, is the destabilisation of locality through the permeation of global processes. The 'paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people...is that of staying in one place, but experiencing the "dis-placement" that global modernity brings to them' (Tomlinson 1999, p. 9). Urry's more recent work (Urry 2007; Sheller & Urry 2006) acknowledges the uneven access to travel and addresses the criticism by Morley, Skeggs, and others who have argued that mobility is not evenly experienced. Urry proposes that the 'new mobilities paradigm' does not attempt to privilege a 'mobile

⁴³ Doug Cooper, CEO, Leopard Capital, Pers. Comm. 24 August 2010.

subjectivity' but rather, attempts to track 'the power of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis' (Sheller & Urry 2006, p. 211).

While international travel is only accessible to a small percentage of the population, physical mobility is still important for the majority of Phnom Penh's residents—for whom physical mobility typically takes places within national boundaries. This mobility is most visible during the Khmer New Year and Pchum Benh holidays, during which most of the population leave the city to return to provincial locations where they hold family connections. These movements are key to the imagining of modernity throughout the country as friends and relatives relate stories of urban life to their rural peers, and bring back the fruits of consumerism. While these are sub-national movements, their significance in contributing to social and cultural change is deeply linked with wider transnational mobilities of other people, and of objects, information, capital and images. They include groups of people such as the garment factory workers who produce clothing for the European and North American markets, and white collar development-sector workers who implement development policy devised on the other side of the world. While scales such as the village, the province or the nation remain meaningful, they are increasingly affected by processes that reach far beyond their geographical boundaries.

Morley's criticism of Urry is not the first time that declarations of the end, or of the diminishing importance, of locality have been called into question. Roland Robertson (1995) brought the term glocalisation into the vocabulary of the social sciences almost two decades ago. Writing in response to claims that globalisation was overriding locality, Robertson sought to highlight the various forms of locality produced through processes that had been described as globalisation. Importantly, this is not as simple as a reactive reaffirmation of the local in response to its perceived loss to globalisation. While Robertson argues for the existence of the local in a wide range of spatial formations and scales, it is common, even when citing Robertson and using the term

glocalisation, to regard the global-local problematic as a dichotomy, where globalising trends and local assertions exist in opposition. Though it may not have been the original intention, all too often the use of 'glocalisation' falls victim to the same opposition—albeit an interconnected opposition—of global and local that Korff (2003) has identified as a major weakness of globalisation debates.

In the context of this thesis's concern with the understanding of modernity in Phnom Penh, an understanding of geographical scale and variation in the importance of borders and territory can be drawn on to refine the multi-scalar understanding of modernity that was advanced in the previous chapter. Modernity is neither global nor is it contained within the Cambodian state. It is not enough to think of modernity on a single scale whether that is as a global modernity or multiple modernities contained within nation states. Rather we need to acknowledge the co-existence and interconnection of a much wider range of scalar configurations.

Ontologies of Urban Analysis

While the full range of scales from the household to the planet are relevant to this thesis, my focus is on a specific territory—the city of Phnom Penh. Cities, social life, classes and nations, can be seen as located within bounded localities, or through mobilities or networks. For this thesis, the concern is not only with the place that is Phnom Penh—which is permeated by numerous translocal processes—but with its position in the world, and the processes that have produced and maintained that position. With its focus on a place rather than on networks and movement—which have been the focus of much of the work in mobilities (McCann & Ward 2011)—the concern of this thesis is predominantly territorial, albeit a territory that is internally diverse and is permeated by far-reaching networks that play host to many extra-territorial relationships.

To date there is very little agreement over the ontological definition of the city, where the 'urban' begins and ends, or of the essential social and spatial features of the city (Brenner et al 2011). But we don't necessarily need to define these characteristics, rather, we need to explore and analyse the various territories and processes associated with the city and the relationships that exist between them. Cooper's argument is pertinent here, in that it is not necessary to decide whether Phnom Penh is part of a universal trend or trends, or whether it is an exception. He argues that we should be seeking to uncover what is actually new, and to understand the limits and mechanisms of ongoing changes, and above all, to develop a differentiated vocabulary that encourages thinking about connections and their limits (Cooper 2005).

Urban analyses that focus on networks and movement have gained momentum over the last two decades. This focus has been useful in a range of applications, from analysing the role of influential cities in the global economy, to the emergent segregation of urban spaces based on access to various sociotechnical networks, to the production of policy knowledge. World and Global City theorists have advanced an understanding of cities as nodes in global networks—sites that function as centres of command and control in the global economy (Castells 1996; Sassen 1991; Sassen 2002). Graham and Marvin (2001) argue for a critical focus on networked infrastructure in the study of cities. These networks are constituted by mobile interactions across scales ranging from the body to the globe, highlighting modern urbanism as a complex sociotechnical process. They describe the idea of a 'splintering urbanism' guided by profitability, where the enclaves of the wealthy are increasingly interconnected and serviced by high-quality infrastructure while the rest of the city are largely excluded. Finally in the analysis of the production of urban policy, numerous authors have turned to the concept of 'urban policy mobilities', analysing the multiplicity of flows that contribute to the localised production of policy in cities (McCann 2010; McCann 2011; McFarlane 2010; Clarke 2012).

But everyday conceptions of cities are as distinctive places (Amin & Thrift 2002; Dovey 2010), with their particular names generally referring to an area contained within a geographically and politically defined boundary. Phnom Penh, as a politically defined municipality, is popularly understood to possess clear physical boundaries, the expansion of which is determined by the central government. But its bounds are permeated by commuters from the surrounding provinces, who work in the city on a daily basis. An understanding of Phnom Penh necessarily includes people and processes that are primarily located beyond the borders of the municipality.

Particularly as a primate city, Phnom Penh extends its influence throughout Cambodia, its presence is unevenly felt throughout the countryside and other urban locales. It is central to transport networks, government, economics and to flows of media, people, and commodities, as well as the networks of patronage that underwrite the power of the ruling party, and the broader image of the nation and the national economy.

While the idea of place can be reduced to discourse (Dovey 2010), existing only as a social construction, most social entities—from communities to nation-states—exist almost entirely in collectives of human minds. It follows that if human minds ceased to exist, so too would the bulk of social entities (de Landa 2006). The importance of a spatial understanding of Phnom Penh is demonstrated through its role as a destination for provincial populations, for—amongst other things—medical care, tourism, commerce, education and work. Its centrality to networks also demonstrate its importance as a place—it is the physical centre of the nation's road network, it is proposed that it will be at the centre of a future rail network, and it is the centre of Cambodian commerce. It is a major site of connection with international actors, the site of international manufacturing operations and the country offices of important international organisations including the World Bank and various UN agencies.

Amin and Thrift argue for an understanding of cities that moves away from 'systems, which so often imply that there is an immanent logic underlying urban life' instead

promoting an understanding based 'in the numerous systematizing networks which give a provisional ordering to urban life' (2002, p. 3). As spatial formations cities can be thought of as sites of high density—of people, things, architecture and institutions; sites of juxtaposition of diverse forms of living; and as the central node of various networks that expand across and beyond the city (Amin & Thrift 2002; Massey et al 1999). Importantly this spatiality does not exist in opposition to the relationality of the city but rather it is a product of interrelations (Massey 2005). The identities of places—including their assertions to modern status—are relationally formed with reference to their history and their relationships with other places.

Global Assemblages: Towards the City

The notion of urban assemblages in the plural form offers a powerful foundation to grasp the city anew, as an object which is relentlessly being assembled at concrete sites of urban practice or, to put it differently, as a multiplicity of processes of becoming, affixing sociotechnical networks, hybrid collectivities and alternative topologies.

(Farías & Bender 2010, p. 2)

Responding to the need for analyses that give due attention to both the connectivity and territoriality of cities a number of social scientists, geographers and urban theorists have described city-based processes through the vocabulary of assemblage theory (McCann & Ward 2011; Brenner et al 2011; McFarlane 2011a; McFarlane 2011b; McFarlane 2009; Farías & Bender 2010; McFarlane 2011c). Through the notion of assemblage we can acknowledge Phnom Penh as a place, while also accounting for other understandings of Phnom Penh—as an administrative territory, as an urban region extending into the province that surrounds it and as the central hub of Cambodia's political and economic power. It also allows for the integration of all scales of mobilities discussed throughout this chapter, which 'dis-place' these territorial understandings, and for an understanding of modernity in the plural—situated in

various configurations within Phnom Penh, and in a range of international core-periphery relationships.

Assemblage theory has been utilised by McCann and Ward (2011) in capturing the production of urban policy as simultaneously mobile and territorial. It has been advanced by Farías as the basis for understanding the city as 'a difficult and decentred object, which cannot any more be taken for granted as a bounded object, specific context or delimited site' (2010, p. 2) and as an object that is endlessly being (re)assembled in tangible urban locations. Assemblage has been proposed as a means of describing the configuration of 'global forms' of expert knowledge (Ong & Collier 2005; Collier 2006), and by Dovey in arguing for an assemblage-based understanding of places in a continuing process of 'becoming' (Dovey 2010). Indeed it has been employed in such a range of uses that it cannot be linked to any singular usage or theoretical tradition (McFarlane & Anderson 2011).

The use of assemblage theory is not without its pitfalls. John Allen (2011)—a proponent of assemblage—argues that assemblage lends itself easily to 'thin description', a simple joining exercise that traces connections and shows the world to be heterogeneous, multiple and contingent, while saying little of substance. In other words, it can be used to show how the world is unable to be explained rather than offering useful explanation. Much of the use of assemblage, beyond its use as a descriptor, stems from a re-engagement with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their concept of *agencement* (Deleuze & Parnet 2007; Deleuze & Guattari 1986; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Primarily advanced by Deleuze, this theory of assemblages was intended for a wide range of wholes produced by the interrelationship of a multiple heterogeneous parts (de Landa 2006). It could be applied to entities ranging in size from atoms and molecules to cities and the nation-state, all of which, as assemblages, are objects that are the product of historical processes. Though they can be seen as totalities, they do not form a seamless whole and

are inherently unstable and emergent—however this recognition of instability and impermanence does not preclude the possibility of analysis (de Landa 2006).

Deleuze and Guattari have argued that social formations, which today exist in a world of flows and movement, emerge from ‘rhizomatic’ connections that link diverse practices and things (1987). The ‘rhizome’ is used by Deleuze and Guattari to move away from what they describe as ‘arborescent’ or root-tree conceptions of knowledge—with vertical and linear connections linking a single object from an origin to a conclusion. In contrast, a rhizome connects multiple points to other points—it does not have a start or an end, but, they argue, it always has a middle. Deleuze and Guattari do not privilege the points, nor binary relations between them, but rather, they argue that the ‘the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis’ (Ibid.: 21).

Two other related Deleuzian ontological concepts serve as useful background to an understanding of assemblage: ‘the body without organs’, and deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. ‘The body without organs’ refers to the underlying reality of a whole that is constructed from fully functioning parts. It is not an empty body that has had its organs removed, but rather, it is opposed to the idea that a set of organs, together compose a body (Ibid.: 30). Deleuze and Guattari use the example of a wolf pack or a swarm of bees—both coherent wholes that when divided, do not cease to function, but instead, transform. Changes in connectivity serve to ‘deterritorialise’ a body without organs, but can also serve to ‘reterritorialise’ and create a new, transformed whole. In the case of Phnom Penh these concepts help to understand the continuity of the city across a period of near-complete abandonment in the late 1970s, in addition to a number of other drastic changes at other points in the latter half of the twentieth century.

With respect to this chapter, the use of assemblage is most closely related to its contemporary use in geography as a means of understanding the relationship between territoriality and relationality in Phnom Penh. Anderson and McFarlane's recent work in *Area* brings together the disparate uses of assemblage within geography and their commentary begins to make sense of what is common to these uses (Anderson & McFarlane 2011; McFarlane & Anderson 2011). They argue that there is no coherent and unifying understanding of assemblage, but broadly speaking, assemblage thinking functions as a means of conceiving of unity across difference, for describing a whole which is constituted of a diverse set of actors and processes (McFarlane & Anderson 2011). This allows us to better understand the situated social, economic and political changes in Phnom Penh, and how they interact with, rather than being subject to, wider processes including those that might be more commonly understood as 'global'. Importantly, it enables us to address these extraterritorial processes while retaining the reality of the city as an object. It allows for abstract properties of the city, such as modernity, to be acknowledged as coherent objects while allowing for internal contradictions, a lack of cohesion and an array of external connections and reference points.

Anderson and McFarlane identify four interrelated sets of processes that they see as emphasised by assemblage. First, it emphasises gathering, coherence and dispersion. This relates to the process of assembling and re-assembling as relations form, take hold, endure or are disrupted. This allows for the persistence of an assemblage as its spatiality transforms across time. Like a body without organs, an assemblage is not stable, but is always temporary, holding together for a finite time—though this may be a very long time. Second, assemblage implies groups, collectives and by extension, distributed agencies. This is not to say that the components of an assemblage are part of some higher unity, but that the assemblage possesses distributed agency, where its effects are produced by a distributed array of human and non-human actants (Bennett 2005). Third, assemblage is associated with emergence rather than resultant

formation. Cities can be thought of as being in a constant process of ‘becoming’ (Dovey 2010) with due awareness afforded to the fact that the process will never end.

Reflecting back on Cooper’s problematisation of the teleology implicit in terms such as ‘globalisation’ and ‘modernisation’, such an approach emphasises the importance of the present process and its trajectory rather than the existence of a result and its end-point. With regard to power, it emphasises its multiplicity, plurality and transformation. Fourth, emphasis is placed on its fragility and contingency, on the gaps and points of weakness involved in the continual reconstitution of the assemblage (Anderson & McFarlane 2011).

I will diverge briefly at this point in order to relate some of these relatively abstract concepts to the realities of urban development and the modernisation of the built environment in Phnom Penh—this process is covered in much more detail in chapter five and in a forthcoming article in *Urban Studies* (Paling 2012b). This process of modernisation is significantly aimed at enhancing the status of Phnom Penh in the region and the world. Development takes place through an interaction of Phnom Penh’s formal bureaucracy, which is producing policy influenced by international development sector actors (particularly from France and Japan), various other levels of the Cambodian government,⁴⁴ and private sector developers from Cambodia and throughout East and Southeast Asia. This assemblage of actors all contribute to the development of the city, and its efforts to modernise and enhance its position in the world. Through its treatment as an assemblage, we can acknowledge the singularity of this process without losing sight of its fragmentation and of the diversity of interests through which its effects are produced. Additionally, it allows us to acknowledge modernity as a whole, while allowing for wide variation in reference points for the development of particular aspects of becoming modern.

⁴⁴ On the Cambodian side, this is more than just the formal government, but also the informal networks of patronage that underpin the bureaucratic veneer.

As a whole, this assemblage of actors shapes the development of the city, producing and implementing policy and zoning regulations, planning and constructing buildings and gated communities, and improving infrastructure—with much social upheaval in the process. What is important here, and what the notion of assemblage allows, is to recognise the reality of this object that is developing Phnom Penh and its location *in* the city, without assuming its internal coherence, long-term stability or the persistence of the involvement of any particular actors. Accepting the reality of an object—albeit a complex object, allows us to do more than simply describe the complexity of urban development. The flexibility of assemblage thinking offers a means of reifying spatial forms while at the same time avoiding their characterisation as fixed forms or as possessing some essential trait(s). The spatio-temporal composition and position of an assemblage is unstable and infused with movement and change (Marcus & Saka 2006). It allows for the reconfiguration, strengthening and complete breakdown of relationships within an assemblage, and the redeployment of elements of the assemblage into new arrangements and assemblages (McFarlane & Anderson 2011). It allows for the existence of scale, while avoiding strong scalar distinctions. Importantly, assemblage does not exist as 'local' in opposition to the 'global' but—at least for MacFarlane (2009), who advances the use of the translocal prefix—assemblage blurs the boundaries of scalar distinction.

It is worth acknowledging that this is not a particularly radical break with some existing territorial/relational understandings of space, notably in the work of Doreen Massey (Massey et al 1999; Massey 2005). For Massey, the identities of places are relationally constructed with reference to their history and their participation in relations with elsewhere. Cities exist within geographies of economic, political, social and cultural relations, with their character produced as the product of this relationality. Significant overlap also exists with the work of Urry and other mobilities theorists who focus on (im)mobilities as well as attending to the spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings which shape and configure mobilities. However assemblage

theory allows an ontological unit of analysis that is beyond the scope of Sheller and Urry's 'new mobilities paradigm.' In analysing the city and its relationship with modernity—as is the aim of this thesis—focus is not only on networks, but also on place, for which the language of mobilities is useful, but a focus on the constitution and production of networks and infrastructure that facilitate or channel mobilities is not all that is required. While assemblage transcends the scalar distinctions that mobilities seeks to overcome (Hannam et al 2006), it also allows more scope for the reification of place (Dovey 2010).

Conclusion

Phnom Penh is a rapidly changing, increasingly connected metropolis where the meanings of territory, of the city and the nation-state, are being destabilised by the permeation of mobilities—of people, images, objects, capital and ideas. These changes, often understood through the broader framework of globalisation, are not frequently the subject of detailed, situated analysis—in Phnom Penh, or in other comparable cities with low levels of influence in global flows of capital. The questions that these changes pose and their implications for our understanding of cities, of the nation-state and of all territorial scales, need to be understood from a position that privileges Phnom Penh rather than more abstract and totalising concepts such as the global. To understand Phnom Penh and its position in the world requires an analysis that gives due attention to both territorial and networked ontologies and accepts the co-existence of the two. As we have seen, this understanding clarifies the relational, multi-scalar understanding of modernity that was advanced in the previous chapter.

This chapter has analysed a range of approaches to thinking about movement and place, in the present context of intensified connectivity on all manner of scales. The analytic utility of the term 'globalisation' has been brought into question, with particular emphasis on the need for an understanding of increased movement that gives due attention to the unevenness of flows, and to the places and populations that

do not move freely or are less connected. Instead, following Urry, a focus on (im)mobilities and moorings has been posited as a means of better understanding the diversity of the contemporary world. I have acknowledged the persistent importance of territory in spite of widespread claims of its diminishing significance. The importance of borders and territories have been highlighted as ongoing contributors to geographies of difference. As Ferguson reminds us, poverty is intensely located within particular nation-states. Urry's early claims of the ubiquity of corporeal mobility have been shown to be unique to a small, privileged portion of the world's population. While the majority of people in the world lead sedentary lives, their local existences are destabilised by the permeation of global processes.

With specific focus on the scale of the city, it has been argued that it is necessary to recognise the significance of Phnom Penh as a place rather than solely through a focus on a network or process ontology. Still, the definition of this place is unclear and unstable, characterised by impermanence of its components and shifting extraterritorial relationships. The ontology of the assemblage has been put forth as a useful tool of analysis for understanding these relationships. In spatial terms, it avoids the uneasy categorisation of a tangled web of relationships between heterogeneous entities into a singular form. At the same time it allows for thinking about this form rather than discarding it for its incoherence. Thus this thesis employs a treatment of Phnom Penh—and of modernity—as assemblage(s), with a focus on the mobilities and moorings that contribute to the transformation of social life in the city.

4 Urban Theory for a World of Cities

Often imagined as unruly megacities, the urban formations of the global South can thus be described, diagnosed, even reformed and fixed, but rarely do they become the evidentiary material for theory, for a universal system of generalizations.

(Roy 2011b, p. 9)

Much has been made of the fact that sometime in 2007 or 2008, somebody, somewhere, moved to a city and tipped the balance of the world's population in favour of an urban majority. This moment was cited as justification for the city-based theme of the most recent world expo in Shanghai and was noted in the opening lines of numerous reports from large international organisations such as UN-Habitat and UNDP, it was referenced in the call for papers for a host of academic conferences, and in the opening lines of numerous books and book chapters, journal articles and theses. Recognising the geographies of this demographic transition, a number of authors have noted that as much as this is a global shift toward urban living, it is a shift that is taking place primarily in the developing world. In the coming decades, urban growth is predicted to be strongest in the global South (Roy 2011b) and particularly in Asia, which is already home to approximately half of the world's urban population (UNFPA 2007). With this in mind a number of authors have argued for a shift in the geographies of urban theory and for positioning the global South at the centre of urban knowledge (Robinson 2006; Roy 2009b).

The spectacular rise of skylines across Asia has been seen to symbolise the remarkable growth of Asia's cities (UNFPA 2007)—Asia is now home to approximately half of the world's urban population. The fact that a number of cities in the global South have

come to be included in the mapping of world cities makes some contribution to a more globally inclusive understanding of the world's cities. But this inclusion—and the symbolism of the city skyline—reflects economic geographies, where cities are considered important for the scale and diversity of their role in global economic processes (McFarlane 2010). But as we saw in the previous chapter, a focus on formal economic processes can overlook vast areas of the world. These few Asian 'world cities' are exceptions, as are the megacities that are often imagined to represent the urbanism of the global South. Less than ten per cent of the world's urban dwellers live in cities with populations of 10 million or more, compared to almost 25 per cent living in cities with populations of between one and five million. The majority of the world's urban dwellers live in cities with less than one million inhabitants (UNFPA 2007, p. 10). As Malcolm McKinnon (2011) has observed, these smaller cities have been home to some of the highest rates of urban growth in many Asian countries. In recent years, David Bell and Mark Jayne (2006; 2009) have been strong proponents of increasing the focus of urban research on small cities. They note that 'small cities are typical in a quantitative sense' (2009, p. 695) and argue that small cities—measured by population, but also by their influence and reach—are key to understanding the diversity, difference and connectivity of the world's cities. The economic and cultural importance of the larger cities notwithstanding, a better understanding of smaller cities, including cities like Phnom Penh, is crucial in developing a more inclusive understanding of the diversity of global urbanism.

It is only very recently that urban theorists have seriously challenged the assumption that innovation occurs only in the cities of the West, and imitation takes place amongst the rest. While urban scholarship is making strong and consistent progress in producing a more inclusive knowledge of global urbanism, it remains uneven. Analysis of cities in the global South is increasing, but has seen more attention given to the spectacular economic and physical transformations of cities such as Shanghai and Dubai. More recently we have seen a wider range of cities come into view, particularly

those that have sought to emulate the success of other cities in the region (Bunnell & Das 2010; Roy 2011b; McKinnon 2011). But Phnom Penh is smaller, poorer and less populous than the majority of these cities and a Shanghai or Shenzhen-like transformation seems particularly far-fetched. As such, there are few theoretical reference points for understanding the transformation of cities like Phnom Penh and their claims to modernity and enhanced world status. So where does Phnom Penh fit within the world of cities, and from what theory can we draw to understand its transformations and its emergent urban form?

This chapter begins with an exploration of the geographies and mobilities of urban theory and policy knowledge. It explores the relationship between the generalisations of theory and the specificity of individual cities. This is followed by a review of urban theory that is pertinent to the contemporary development of Phnom Penh, and a discussion of its strengths and limitations. This is focused on recent work led by Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (2011), who analyse assertions to enhanced world status that are being made in Asian cities—a process they refer to as ‘worlding’. As we will see later in this thesis, similar claims make up a large part of the assertions to modernity that are made in Phnom Penh. While the context of Phnom Penh is unique, characteristics of worlding processes identified in other Asian cities are highly pertinent. These include the privatisation of planning (Shatkin 2011b), speculative investment (Goldman 2011a) and the strong influence of a ‘world-class’ aesthetic in the decisions made by those in power and in popular imaginaries (Ghertner 2011).

Bringing the City Back in: Uneven Geographies of Urban Knowledge

The case of Phnom Penh can make important contributions to ongoing debates that seek to unsettle existing geographies of urban theory and policy knowledge. As we will see in chapter five, intra-Asian processes are highly important in the contemporary transformation of the city, and have contributed to the failure of Western donors’ attempts at master planning. A multiplicity of Asian cities serve as reference points for

the development of Phnom Penh, and are particularly appealing for the speed at which they developed in the recent past. A theoretical understanding of these developments must draw on cities beyond Europe and North America. It requires an understanding of the region's most influential cities and their appeal, and of other less influential cities that are similarly seeking to improve their position and influence in the world.

Jennifer Robinson's (2002; 2006) critical intervention is a useful starting point. Robinson challenges the geography of urban knowledge, whereby cities in the 'first world' are seen as models for the generation of theory and policy, and those in the 'third world' are seen as problems to be diagnosed and resolved. Moreover, when policy initiatives are being undertaken in poor countries, it is often assumed that these solutions have been developed elsewhere (Robinson 2011b). This understanding has reinforced a long-standing division in urban studies whereby urban theory is broadly focused on the West, and development studies focuses on the 'third world'. As a result of this narrow theoretical scope, 'understandings of city-ness have come to rest on the (usually unstated) experiences of a relatively small group of (mostly Western) cities' (Robinson 2002, p. 531). This is particularly problematic for the study of cities, where it has been observed that 'many of the core concepts of urban studies "travel" poorly' (Seekings & Keil 2009, p. vi). Assumptions based on the experience of Western cities, such as the divide between public and private space, or the role of the state, render many Asian cities as 'broken' or dystopic (Hogan et al 2012), when they are probably more usefully understood as being different.

Much of this uneven geography of theory that is being challenged is labelled with one of the ostensibly inclusive terms 'global' or 'world.' Robinson (2005, p. 757) argues that over the past two decades, urban analyses have been dominated by global and world cities approaches. Broadly, these approaches see cities from a formal economic perspective, focusing on the conduits that connect cities, and the scale of their role in global economic processes. A small handful of the wealthiest cities in the global

economy—most notably London, New York, Tokyo and Paris—feature prominently, occupying the top positions in world cities indices. Less influential cities are relegated to lesser categories or excluded entirely, as has generally been the case for Phnom Penh. Gavin Shatkin (2007) has observed that many of the developing world's largest cities do not even qualify as third-tier gamma cities within world cities hierarchies. As Bell and Jayne remind us, small cities are the norm throughout the world, but are frequently overlooked as 'urban theorists have been too dazzled by the spectacular urbanism of big cities to notice them' (Bell & Jayne 2009, p. 695).

There are a number of key problems with the global and world cities approaches. Firstly, the methodology of groups who produce these hierarchical indices, such as the Globalization and World Cities Research Network, focuses primarily on formal economic connections between cities. This occurs at the expense of a diverse range of other connections, economic and otherwise, as well as the situated local processes that occur within cities (Robinson 2002; Robinson 2005; Shatkin 2007). Secondly, as studies often begin with paradigmatic cases such as New York and London, other cities are measured by these pre-given standards. Through this process, an ethnocentric teleology is produced whereby it is assumed that other cities will follow the trajectories of these (mostly European and North American) cities. In doing so, this approach neglects the situated social, political and economic environments that shaped the development of particular cities (Shatkin 2007).

Far from the spectacles of New York and London, Phnom Penh exists in a space that has been described in literature on global cities as 'fourth world'—a space that is seen to be 'excluded and "structurally irrelevant" to the current process of global capital accumulation' (Shatkin 1998, p. 378). Cities like Phnom Penh, situated on the periphery of global financial flows are generally not deemed worthy of consideration as a 'global city'. Speaking of Phnom Penh in the late 90s, Shatkin has argued that such a perception, found in much of the global cities literature, is overly simplistic, and

inaccurate. As Singerman and Amar (2006) have argued with reference to Cairo, dismissing cities that are peripheral to mainstream financial flows as non-global fails to take into account the tremendous impact of flows of global networks in these locations—as was illustrated through the economic mapping in the previous chapter. Looking outward from Phnom Penh, its interaction with global capitalism is far more apparent than its exclusion. Robinson (2002) has observed that global and world cities approaches have often rendered a wide range of cities as 'off the map'.

This has been countered to some degree in recent developments in global and world cities analyses which have been increasingly inclusive. A more cosmopolitan approach to urban studies has been arising as the recognition of common globalising features in cities throughout the world has brought a wider range of cities into the same field of analysis (Robinson 2006, p. 93). But this cosmopolitanism has been limited. A range of poorer cities such as Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Bangkok, Mumbai, Shanghai and Jakarta, have come to be incorporated into global and world cities analyses insofar as they are integrated into the transnational global economy (Gugler 2004; Scott 2001). This approach is more inclusive, but continues to offer little understanding of the diversity of urban experience throughout the world's cities. As Colin McFarlane observes, 'world city theorists are not attempting to understand cities per se, but the nature and extent of international connections between cities' (2010, p. 6). With this in mind, it is more important to identify and recognise the limited scope of these approaches than it is to discredit them. In explicitly attempting to understand cities, it is clear that a broader approach is necessary, an approach aimed at 'bringing the city back into urban studies' (Robinson 2006, p. 117).

The approach taken to the production of knowledge for cities like Phnom Penh, and other poor cities throughout the world often takes place through what Robinson identifies as developmentalism (following Escobar 1995)—aligned with institutionally promoted efforts to improve life in poor countries. This approach focuses on

'community participation, housing, land tenure, service provision, governance capacities, infrastructure, informal sector and so on' (2006, p. 122). In short, a focus on issues that are seen as important to improving the livelihoods of those who are most in need. Like the global and world cities approaches, studies that occur under a developmentalist lens focus on only part of the city. The entire city is thereby characterised by a partial account focusing on the aspects that are most lacking.

In more generalised accounts of urban theory, these cities are usually analysed under the label of underdevelopment—'that last and compulsory chapter on "Third World Urbanization" in the urban studies textbook' (Roy 2011b, p. 308). The analysis of cities that fall into this category broadly lacks the authority and legitimacy to be generalised as theory. Universal knowledge is associated with the West, and the rest of the world is seen as particular. To counter this dualism, Robinson has proposed that all cities be treated as 'ordinary cities' and fixed categories such as 'third world', 'global' and 'world' cities discarded. To do so would allow for 'an urban theory that draws inspiration from the complexity and diversity of city life, and from urban experiences and urban scholarship across a wide range of different kinds of cities' (Robinson 2006, p. 13).

Toward New Geographies of City Knowledge and Urban Modernity

In the discussion of modernity in chapter two, I referenced Robinson's advancing of an imagining of modernity that is 'more truly multiple so that the "west" is no longer a necessary referent in the creation of ways of being modern' (Robinson 2006, p. 78). To this day, it is too often assumed that the West is the sole originator of urban modernity—and indeed, many other aspects of modernity. Through this assumption, all other modern urbanisms are considered in relation to an original Western referent (Robinson 2006; Roy 2011b). It has been observed that in Western cities, novelty has been embraced as innovative, while elsewhere in the world it has been considered to be imitative. By way of example, the modernisation of New York's built environment placed the city at the centre of many imaginaries of twentieth-century modernity. But

this innovation took place through dispersed processes of referencing a multiplicity of geographically and historically situated places. Similarly dispersed processes beyond the West have commonly been understood as imitative (Robinson 2006, pp. 65-92).

Robinson's links contemporary thinking about cities to the fantasy of a Western urban modernity. The dynamism and modernity of Western cities is identified through positioning other places as lacking these qualities—rural, traditional, primitive, or otherwise deficient (Robinson 2006, p. 13). This thinking about urban modernity has paralleled the wider discourse of modernity that was explored in chapter two. In cities, as with other aspects of modernity, the West has been frequently positioned as the primary reference point for all experiences. Robinson argues that we need to actively dislocate the privileged relationship between modernity and the West in order to post-colonialise urban studies (2006, p. 17).

Ananya Roy (2009a) has argued that the centre of urban theory must move from Europe and North America to the global South, where the majority of contemporary urbanisation is taking place. Roy seeks to start mapping out a new more worldly geography of urban knowledge, disrupting existing geographies of core and periphery, instead positing multiple cores and peripheries including within the global South. This shift is necessary to account for both the imagined geographies of urban modernity, and the geography of the world's urban population. The former, mediated through architectural spectacle, has arguably been most dynamic in Asia in recent decades, and the latter is unambiguously centred in the global South, and particularly in Asia. It is this image of urban knowledge—and by extension, urban modernity—that served as partial inspiration for the understanding of modernity that was advanced in chapter two. The image of a modernity as a multiplicity of scales existing within wider hierarchical configurations and with a multiplicity of reference points draws on Roy's geography of multiple core-periphery relationships.

With Robinson, Roy and others having established the need for this new geography of theory over the last few years, a number of authors have begun to respond. Notably, Roy and Ong's recent edited volume *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global* (2011) articulates a new theoretical framework of worlding—a process by which projects and practices situated in cities represent a vision of the world and attempt to enhance their position within it. Through situated experiments that involve modelling and inter-referencing between cities, aspirant cities in Asia are reinventing urban norms that are considered to be 'global.' Ambitious visions are formulated in a context of inter-city rivalry, seen to better the position of the host city on the world stage—speculative experiments that often fail. Much of this transformation takes place through the visual symbolism of the built environment, where skyscrapers and 'world-class' spaces are planned and constructed in order to project national and civic claims to global significance.

The concept of worlding is posited by Roy as a counterpoint to the global and world cities frameworks. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these frameworks position certain key cities—predominantly located in the West—as embodying 'a successful formula of urban entrepreneurialism ... which guarantees a place on the global map of investment, development and economic growth' (Roy 2011b, p. 9). But of course, economically marginal cities like Phnom Penh, and even some of the largest cities in the global South, are excluded from these analyses. The worlding framework seeks to 'recover and restore the vast array of global strategies that are being staged at the urban scale around the world' (Roy 2011b, p. 10). This makes a significant contribution to filling in the geographical voids in urban studies that have been identified by Robinson (2002).

Roy and Ong (2011) advance an approach that bypasses the overarching principles of globalisation, and is sensitive to geopolitical shifts and the rapid growth of cities through Asia. This approach involves a shift from the analytics of structure, to that of

assemblage, as outlined in the previous chapter. This approach allows for a close reading of the practices through which cities are made, remade and communicated, as well as allowing for recognition of connections and intervention on multiple scales and from a wide range of sources (Ong 2011b, p. 4). Focusing on the ongoing 'art of being global', Roy and Ong do not seek to reference any established criteria of city achievements, but instead seek to shed light on 'an array of often overlooked urban initiatives that compete for world recognition in the midst of inter-city rivalry and globalized contingency' (Ong 2011b, p. 3). These practices aim to enhance the status of cities in international hierarchies, and in doing so, they destabilise the established criteria of global urban modernity (Ong 2011b, p. 5). These initiatives take the form of experimental responses to urban situations that have been perceived as problematic. Such situations include ageing or overburdened infrastructure, a lack of foreign investment, a low international profile and neglect of the urban poor. Ong argues that the solutions to these problems draw on global forms that are locally appropriated and may subsequently serve as referents for other cities.

For Aihwa Ong (2011b) the study of cities has typically taken place through the two defining parameters of the political economy of globalisation, and a postcolonial focus on subaltern agency. With both approaches bearing a Marxist pedigree, capitalism is often seen as the only cause of urban problems and class struggle as the only solution. Acknowledging that there have been many excellent studies using these approaches, Ong argues that focusing on a singular causality in global capitalism, or the single category of postcolonial actors, tends to render significantly different sites as part of a singular, unified global economic system. Such an approach can lose sight of the complexity and particularity of urban engagements with the global, and offers little understanding of how specific 'global' cities come into being (Olds & Yeung 2004). Ong observes that 'besides the volatility of global markets, emerging nations and planetary threats variously exert influences on the roles, rankings, and achievements of particular metropolises' (2011b, p. 3).

While supporting Ong's argument for particularity, Roy states that her call for new geographies of knowledge is not 'a call for studying the diversity of urban modernities' (Roy 2011b, p. 309). Recent work by the global cities theorist, Saskia Sassen, has called for attention to the diversity of spatial forms and economic trajectories through which cities and regions are globalised (Sassen 2008). Such an approach does not necessarily challenge dominant economic, political and cultural maps in the same way that a vocabulary of alternative modernities, as discussed at chapter two, does not challenge the position of Western modernity as an authentic original. Roy argues that her worlding approach is not an effort to list and reveal the diversity of Asian urbanisms, but rather it is 'an analysis of the social technologies through which claims to an Asian century are made' (Roy 2011b, p. 309). Importantly, these claims are not being made in order to advance an egalitarian geography of urban knowledge, but rather, they are tied to the interests of particular cities and/or nations.

The Aspirant City in an Ascendant Asia

Emerging nations exercise their new power by assembling glass and steel towers to project particular visions of the world. Once again ... 'the skyline rises in the East,' as cities vie with one another, and regional aspirations are superseded by the new horizons of the global.

(Ong 2011b)

The rise of Asia over the past few decades has seen the assertion of claims to modernity that do not seek to mimic Western modernity, or indeed any specific original version of modernity. A notable Southeast Asian example is the development of the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur. This was part of a project to articulate state-visions of a modern Malaysia to the world, and to its citizens (Bunnell 1999). In line with Robinson, Bunnell argues that beyond the West, progress has been understood primarily as mimetic. However the development of the Kuala Lumpur City Centre and in particular the construction of what was briefly the world's tallest building, is a statement far

greater than any mimicry of the West (Bunnell 2004). These developments are appropriations of a globalised modernity that is constructed and imagined through transnational connections and flows (Robinson 2006). This transformation of Kuala Lumpur City Centre, along with the peripheral urban developments of Cyberjaya and Putrajaya, were part a claim that positioned Malaysia on a global map of circulating capital. Following the development of the twin towers in Malaysia, a host of other skyscrapers were planned and built throughout the Asia Pacific region (Bunnell & Das 2010; King 1996). Since their completion in 1998, the towers in Kuala Lumpur have been surpassed in height by buildings in cities such as Taipei, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Dubai and Mecca. This display of vertical architectural spectacle asserts the position of 'Asia' or particular countries within Asia at the forefront of urban modernity.

In addition to being the site of so much dynamism in these spectacular expressions of urbanism, as we have seen, Asia is home to the majority of the world's urban dwellers. The world's urban population increased by a factor of 10 in the twentieth century, with the majority of this growth taking place in the global South. Asia and Africa account for three-quarters of the world's fastest growing cities. In contrast Europe has none of the world's fastest growing cities, but is home to most of the world's cities with the slowest growing or declining populations. Over half of the world's urban population live in Asia (Satterthwaite 2007) and ten per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2010). In this light, it is obvious that there is a strong need for an understanding of cities that does not privilege Europe and North America and better accounts for the majority of urban experiences that are taking places outside of these regions.

This involves more than a more internationally inclusive analysis of the world's largest cities. As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, to account for the location of the world's urban population also requires analysis cities on a much wider range of scales. Historically, Asia's urban growth has been centred in smaller cities (McKinnon 2011) and this pattern is expected to continue over the next few decades (Cohen 2004).

Analyses of these smaller cities are key to understanding the state of urbanism throughout Asia and the world. This void is partially filled by a recent special issue of *Planning Theory* (Roy 2011c), which begins to shed light on worlding practices in smaller cities such as Kabul and Bogota. But still, the contemporary development of cities of this size, and particularly smaller cities in Southeast Asia's poorest nations, remains under-researched—a gap in our knowledge of cities to which this thesis seeks to contribute.

Urban analyses have increasingly moved beyond the West and considered a much wider range of the world's cities as sites of innovation. However, studies have continued to focus on exemplary cities that are home to the fastest and most spectacular urban change. Economically powerful Asian cities such as Dubai, Shanghai, Singapore and Mumbai have been the focus of scholarly analysis far more frequently than Phnom Penh or other comparable cities. In her argument for rethinking the geographies of urban theory, Ananya Roy positioned Phnom Penh on the periphery of a 'dynamic Pacific Rim urbanism' (Roy 2009a, p. 828), describing Cambodia as a 'labour and outsourcing hinterland' in an urbanism centred on the east coast of China. This is a useful description, as Cambodia's commercial importance to China and the United States lies significantly in the labour provided in the garment factories on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. But Cambodia, and Phnom Penh in particular, is much more than the hinterland of a 'Pacific Rim urbanism'. Phnom Penh is the site of an emergent built environment that is the pinnacle of modernity within Cambodia, but does not register as spectacular beyond Cambodia's borders.

This peripherality was highlighted at Expo 2010, Shanghai, China, which I have written about more broadly in a forthcoming book chapter (Paling 2012a). While official statements resonated with the egalitarian approach to city knowledge advanced by Jennifer Robinson in *Ordinary Cities* (2006), the event privileged established sites of urban modernity in the West, and also positioned China as a new site of exemplary

urban modernity. Taken at face value, Expo 2010, with its 'Better City, Better Life' theme, appeared to be an inclusive and geographically diverse presentation of city knowledge and urban modernity. The event was cast as an inclusive global forum for sharing urban knowledge. Public statements to this effect led me to believe that this would be a site where contemporary Phnom Penh would be on display to the world, thanks to an egalitarian approach to city knowledge on the part of the organisers. I had assumed that the Cambodia pavilion would, at least in part, attempt to highlight the city's rapid development, and its growing economic significance. But it was not to be—rather than presenting an opportunity to observe an official discourse of the city's modernisation, my visit to Expo highlighted the persistent absence of ordinary cities like Phnom Penh, even as the geographies of city knowledge and urban modernity are recast through an Asia-centred—and firmly China-focused—lens (Paling 2012a).

As was evident at the Expo, and as we will see in chapter six, Phnom Penh's claims to global significance are far weaker than the exemplary cases of cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai and Singapore. But Phnom Penh is a visibly aspirant city, and many aspirations have been realised over the last decade. This has taken place while other cities in the region make their own assertions to modernity, most notably in China, but also throughout Southeast Asia. These referents—and as we shall see, the presence of urban actors from some of these cities—significantly discredits the idea that Phnom Penh's modern transformation is a case of mimicry of an original Western modernity. While assertions of modernity in Phnom Penh rarely attempt to position Cambodia at the forefront of global urbanism, they do seek to position Phnom Penh within a vision of the world that is increasingly centred in Asia.

'Worlding Cities': Modelling, Inter-Referencing, New Solidarities

In their edited volume, *Worlding Cities*, Roy and Ong (2011) identify three distinctive styles of metropolitan transformation in the claims to enhanced world status that are made in contemporary Asian cities—modelling, inter-referencing and new solidarities.

Broadly, modelling involves the adaption of packaged innovations in urban policy or planning that have become detached from their city of origin. Concepts such as the 'garden city', or policy innovations in areas such as housing and zoning are drawn from cities such as Singapore, and Shanghai. This process cannot be seen as an attempt to copy the original city, but rather an effort to reproduce some particular aspect, character or essence of the referenced city. In contrast, inter-referencing more explicitly seeks to emulate another city, this practice is typically incomplete and takes place through citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison and competition.

Through inter-referencing, cities that are deemed to be regional pace-setters are cited as representing the future of another city, thus Mumbai is slated by its leaders as the next Shanghai and Shenzhen is Hong Kongised. In other cases inter-referencing takes place through the citation of, and comparison with a wide range of cities throughout Asia and beyond. Such allusions help planners and developers to convince the population of the value of controversial projects that might contribute to the greater good of the city—a necessary process given that many of these projects involve mass relocations and/or forced evictions. Lastly, Ong describes the associations, or new solidarities of city politics involved in the planning, development and financing of worlding projects. This includes the establishment of new international ties and public-private partnerships in the development of urban industries, and also in shaping new modes of urban governance that are not restricted by established social divisions.

The focus on inter-referencing and modelling follows an increased focus on the mobilities of policy and urban form. Amongst a growing number of studies that have theorised and documented these transnational mobilities, an increasing number of intra-Asian cases have been examined. In a handful of studies, transfer has been shown to be explicit, with particular cities directly seeking to emulate others. Examples include policy transfer from Kuala Lumpur to Hyderabad (Bunnell & Das 2010), Mumbai's efforts to establish itself in the model of Shanghai (Huang 2008) and the

replication of urban form in parts of Vancouver, Hong Kong and Dubai (Lowry & McCann 2011). Such cases contribute to the ongoing unsettling of the assumption that innovation and policy originates in the West and is imitated elsewhere. These direct, explicit cases of inter-referencing—from one city to another—are less common than policy-making and urban development that draws less explicitly from a wider range of cities. In the case of Phnom Penh, and as has been documented in many other cities such as Kabul (Calogero 2011), Hanoi (Labbé & Boudreau 2011), Khartoum (Choplin & Franck 2010) and many Indian (Roy 2009b) and African (Simone 2001) cities urban development is influenced by a range of local, regional and global actors. This takes place in government as well as in the private sector and the development sector, and gains traction through political, economic and cultural power.

As we saw in the previous chapter, in recent years a number of authors (e.g. McCann & Ward 2010; Robinson 2011a) have argued for an understanding of cities that gives due attention to their relationality while simultaneously acknowledging their territorial nature. As we have seen, such an approach highlights the connections that exist between cities beyond the economically significant, formal, international connections that are the focus of the global and world cities approaches. These connections exist in tension with fundamentally territorial processes such as policy-making which takes place in local political, historical and geographical circumstances. In response to these tensions, numerous authors have turned to the concept of assemblage in understanding contemporary urbanism. In the previous chapter I detailed an understanding of cities as variable and emergent objects that are being continuously assembled through a multiplicity of processes. The city is not a fixed locality, but 'a particular nexus of situated and transnational ideas, institutions, actors, and practices that may be variously drawn together for solving particular problems' (Ong 2011b, p. 4). The production of urban space is deeply linked with flows of capital, not simply the flows of finance capital that enable the development of skyscrapers and edge-city projects, but

also the flows of development capital that finance infrastructure projects, which often come tied with associated conditions and reforms (Roy 2011a, p. 12).

Many worlding projects have taken place at breakneck speed, leading Ananya Roy to characterise contemporary postcolonial urbanism in terms of 'speed, hysteria [and] mass dreams' (Roy 2011b, p. 307). Roy argues that the practice of worlding is inherently unstable—it involves the 'speculative urbanism' of information technology, finance capital and large scale real-estate development. In this context, worlding projects such as private cities are funded through what Goldman describes as a 'new architecture of investment capital' (Goldman 2011a, p. 231). Goldman details the financial backing of a range of projects throughout Asia in order to argue that speculative investors expect increasing rates of return, but also expect liquidity. The capital involved in urban developments in Asia is often highly mobile, moving rapidly in and out of, and between projects. The managers of large-scale developments are often required to package a string of deals throughout the life of a project in order for different investors to gain in different ways. This 'culture of liquidity' (Ho 2009) effectively intensifies the volatility of speculation in worlding projects, with related impact on urban governance and management. Early investors are seen to take the biggest risk, as many projects never break ground, and as such, expect the highest profits. But delays and cancellations often occur much later in the project. While many worlding projects never make it past the planning stage, those that do break ground often proceed with stalled construction efforts and the scaling back of plans (Shatkin 2011b). In the case of large-scale worlding projects, speculation frequently goes unrewarded, or fails to meet original expectations—as we will see in chapter five, Phnom Penh is no exception to this trend.

But Roy also asserts that worlding is much more than global economic functions, it is 'also the anticipatory politics of residents and transients, citizens and migrants' (Roy 2011b, p. 313). It involves the practices of people who are marginal to the new

economic practices that facilitate this 'speculative urbanism'. As Simone has argued using examples from a range of African cities, worlding can take place 'from below' and involve new far-reaching connections that may be the result of being 'cast out' into the world (Simone 2001). These connections have facilitated Simone's research engagement with the same African woman first in Douala, Cameroon, and then eight years later in an informal settlement on a Phnom Penh rooftop (Simone 2009, pp. 311-313).

In the case of Phnom Penh the size of its economy and the state of its infrastructure and built environment mean that it is far from being able to assert itself at the apex of global urbanism. While there is no overarching and explicit worlding strategy in place, such transformations—or at least desires for such transformations—are evident in the marketing and design of many large private development projects in Phnom Penh. In a familiar pattern, many of these have been promoted by developers and the government as representing Phnom Penh's emergence as a modern, connected city in the realms of international finance, or to establish a 'global standard' of living for prospective residents.

The first half of this chapter has argued that Phnom Penh needs to be understood in the context of an ascendant Asia, and its urban transformation must be considered at least partly in terms of ambitions to better the city's position within a decentred and unstable imagining of the global. In the second half of this chapter I will turn to some of the specifics of urban development that are important in contemporary Phnom Penh. These include the significance of a rising skyline, the strong symbolism of post-conflict urban development, and finally the process of evictions and displacement that frequently accompanies rapid urban transformations. The image of the skyscraper in particular holds strong symbolic importance for Cambodia's leaders and the general population. As we will see in the following section as well as in chapter five, in

Cambodia, as in many other places, the image of a 'modern' or 'world-class' city invariably involves tall buildings.

City-Image, Modernity and the Built Environment

Urban dwellers in Asia's big cities do not read spectacles as a generalised aesthetic effect of capitalism, but rather as symbols of their metropolis that invite inevitable comparison with rival cities

(Ong 2011a, p. 210)

Anthony King considers that the categories of nation, city, architecture and building exist simultaneously, and in significant overlap. King argues that it is in the building, that 'the ideology of all "imagined communities" [...] and "imagined environments" is contained, materialized and symbolized' (2004, p. 1). In the news media, it is most frequently through buildings that the image of a nation is mediated to the world. Through design, most notably of built forms, the future is both imagined, and produced, resulting in transformations in the framing of life (Dovey 1999). The more embedded these forms of the built environment become, the more effectively they work in the production of identity. The public display of spectacular architecture is a strong and visible confirmation of a consciousness of inferiority. It represents a strong desire to present as modern and powerful, and to position a city or nation on the global stage.

Historically, powerful architecture has often been constructed as part of a globally competitive display of political power. It has been associated with authoritarian rule in contexts such as Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, China, ancient Egypt (Ong 2011a) and indeed in Angkorean Cambodia and more recently in the early years of independence. The skyscraper in particular, has been a symbol of economic power for particular corporations as well as cities and nations. This is particularly strong in developing countries, where the symbolism of iconic architecture is strongly linked to the city and the nation. Recent developments in many Asian cities have been focused on winning

inter-city competition for international investment (Douglass 2009). These have included skyscrapers, but also private megaprojects that involve the redevelopment of large areas of the city, supported by government through incentives, subsidies and assistance with land acquisition. Through these megaprojects, large areas of land are redeveloped in a manner intended to speak to imaginings of the global, to enhance consumption and to provide 'world-class' architecture and urban infrastructure.

The image of 'world-class' architecture can be traced to the development of the skyline of Manhattan, which established the image of a vertically extruded city that would become the reference point for a global system of architectural signification (McNeill 2005; King 1996; King 2004). These developments began in the United States, primarily in the period from 1870-1935. The powerful and sudden emergence of a new region onto the world stage, was visibly symbolised in the spectacular urban architecture of US cities, and Manhattan in particular (van Leeuwen 1988). National pride and the strengthening of national identity were perhaps the most significant and lasting outcomes. However, the process was driven by a complex web of domestic interests—personal egos, corporate competition, and competition between US cities. In many cases the development of tall buildings was a largely symbolic act, with corporations and individuals seeking to impose their branding on the city. Blocks such as the 47-storey Singer building were almost entirely leased out to other professional and commercial interests, and of little functional use to their corporate developers (King 1996, p. 109).

This zealous period of skyscraper construction has waned in the United States and throughout the West, the romance of the skyscraper has faded as the building type has been established as common (Dovey 1999). But from the mid-1990s this Western apathy toward tall buildings has been replaced by an enthusiasm that has been located primarily in Asia. In 1996, with the topping out of one of the Petronas Twin Towers in Malaysia, for the first time since 1311, the world's tallest building was located outside

the Western world. The Petronas Twin Towers were promptly eclipsed by Taiwan's Taipei 101 in 2003, which has since been surpassed by Dubai's Burj Khalifa in 2009. Today, nine of the world's ten highest buildings are located outside the US, with eight of those located in East Asia. Cesar Pelli, the architect who designed both London's Canary Wharf, and Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Twin Towers observed that London's attitude to skyscrapers was largely negative, whereas 'the Petronas Towers are for a city that embraces them wholeheartedly' (cited in Bunnell 1999, p. 7). A similar attitude has been observed more broadly throughout Asia where architectural commentators have observed that 'the Chinese as well as many other Asians, tend to want buildings as tall as possible and in an ostentatiously Modern style as can be found' (cited in King 1996, p. 98).

Separated by nearly a century, there are strong contextual similarities between this recent emergence of the skylines of urban Asia and those of New York and Chicago. Both correspond to a period of rapid economic growth and increasing international significance for cities and their nations. The nationalist sentiment behind these sorts of projects in newly modernising countries is often clearly stated. In the case of the Petronas Twin Towers, the development of spectacular vertical architecture was directly proclaimed 'to advertise the country's arrival as a modern industrial nation' (Bunnell 2004, p. 70). Further, in the context of Asia's rapidly developing 'tiger' economies, the development of the Petronas Twin Towers, was intertwined with regional competition for visibility on the world stage.

Aihwa Ong (2011a) has argued that this largely positive and aspirational association with nationalism and modernisation contrasts with some Marxist analyses where more broadly, the spectacle—including spectacular architecture—has been associated with all aspects of capitalism (e.g. Debord 1995; Lash & Lury 2007; Jameson 1991). It is seen as part of a set of technologies aimed at maintaining hegemony, alienating much of the population and preventing social change (Ong 2011a). There is room for such a reading

in Phnom Penh where, some of the city's most spectacular spaces are distinctly unwelcoming, and prime commercial spaces aim to attract a privileged minority who have the capacity to spend. But many of these spectacles, whether they are skyscrapers observed at a distance, or modern shopping malls experienced through window shopping and escalator rides, are a source of inspiration and national pride for a large proportion of the population. Asher Ghertner (2011) has detailed how similar developments Delhi are valued for, and legitimised by their 'world-class' aesthetic, and simultaneously celebrated and contested by the urban poor. As Ong has observed:

In developing countries, the critical spaces of the nation trump those of purported class mobilisation. Indeed, the glittering surfaces of global capitalism are added value to the political emergence of the nation on the world stage, rather than the sign of their imminent replacement by a disembedded corporate-capitalist process.

(Ong 2011a, p. 210)

Over time, as plans become reality, these optimistic and aspirational readings can be lost. Not necessarily to feelings of alienation and the commercialisation of public space, but to the apathy and despair associated with the failure or limited success of these ambitious projects. The development of the Petronas Twin Towers, and the larger urban redevelopment projects that took place in Malaysia at the same time, illustrate both the power and limitations of these endeavours. The state-ascribed meanings of these towers are accompanied by a range of alternative meanings, including their association with the over-zealous and significantly unrealised ambitions of their leaders (Ong 2011a). The associated development of the Multimedia Super-Corridor in the edge cities of Cyberjaya and Putrajaya similarly took on alternative meanings. The former, intended as a regional centre of information technology has confirmed Malaysia's global peripherality in its failure to counter the dominance of Indian IT firms (Ong 2011a). The latter became a 'metasymbol of a state capitalism synonymous with

self-legitimation, lavish monumentality and lack of transparency' (Bunnell 2004, p. 147). In other cases in the Southeast Asian region, the concrete hulk of Bangkok's *Sathorn Unique* stands as a 49-storey monument to unrealised ambition, along with a host of other abandoned skyscraper projects in the city and the massive *Muang Thong Thani* (MTT) development on the city's outskirts. Marshall has described MTT as epitomising 'the blind faith invested in the Asian miracle and the volatility of development in the global market place' (Marshall 2003, p. 68). Shatkin (2011b) has observed that—with the exception of China—even the most successful privately planned mega projects have failed to realise their ambitious goals.

Private Planning and Provision of Infrastructure

This form of urban development reflects the imperative of the private sector to seek opportunities for profit by cutting through the congested and decaying spaces of the 'public city' to allow for the freer flow of people and capital, and to implant spaces for new forms of production and consumption into the urban fabric.

(Shatkin 2008, p. 384)

Throughout Southeast Asia and beyond, elite privately developed urban spaces have been proposed and built, insulated from the disorder of the existing city. These megaprojects typically share a worlding ambition with skyscrapers and other iconic architecture, but occupy much larger land areas—they represent a more tangible reconfiguration of urban space. These projects vary in size from tens to thousands of hectares and often contain residential, commercial, office and industrial space, and in many cases, services such as schools, universities, hospitals, and exhibition spaces. Residents of these developments are drawn in by the promise of 'first world', 'global' or 'international' standards of living. A promise which includes reliable and orderly networks of roads, water, electricity and telecommunications—these are services

limited to populations with elite political and/or financial means (Shatkin 2008; Shatkin 2011b).

As a consequence of developing these ambitious visions, these projects often involve mass displacement and forced evictions of existing residents, and the privatisation of previously public land. In recent decades, these have taken place on an unprecedented scale, and have been seen by numerous authors as part of a shift toward urban planning and development being increasingly driven by private sector actors (Shatkin 2008; Hogan et al 2012; Watson 2009; Douglass & Huang 2007). This has taken place in the development of large urban regions (Shatkin 2011b) as well as smaller, traditionally public spaces such as airports (McNeill 2011), parks, playgrounds and performance spaces (Hogan et al 2012) and more broadly in terms of urban infrastructure networks (Graham 2009; Graham & Marvin 2001). While these developments reflect a privatised model of urban planning, this model is typically linked to state goals of international economic integration (Shatkin 2011b).

The relationship between privatised services and hierarchies of status associated with 'being modern' was discussed in chapter two. Perceived membership in a 'global modernity' involves access to 'world-class' services and spaces which are increasingly provided by private sector actors. The 'modern infrastructural ideal', which involved universal access to city-wide network services such as water and sewerage, is disrupted by privately planned developments. For Graham and Marvin this shift relates to neoliberal questioning of the efficiencies of public service provision (Graham & Marvin 2001, p. 91). They position the growth of private service delivery with reference to the decline of the Keynesian welfare state, along with the collapse of Soviet and East European communism and the difficulties faced by developing nations in building modern infrastructure. Graham and Marvin have argued that at the crux of this shift, is the prominence of neoliberalism, and associated decline of state power and

responsibility in the contemporary age of globalisation (Graham & Marvin 2001, pp. 96,407).

A number of authors have questioned the centrality of capitalism in this process and have criticised the assumptions about the homogenising effects of globalisation (Ong 2011b, p. 7). Hogan et al cite Roger Keil in questioning the meaning of 'neoliberalism' in the global South, where 'the public sector's role in service delivery has rarely amounted to pro-poor decommodification and the extension of private sector involvement in service delivery may have entailed real benefits to the poor' (Seekings & Keil 2009; cited in Hogan et al 2012). Certainly, in Cambodia, the years since the neo-liberal structural adjustment program have seen increases in measures of quality of life such as health, life expectancy, participation in education and income (World Bank 2011). In the context of Southeast Asia, the idea of 'privatisation' is arguably less meaningful, as it presumes the existence of previously public urban forms. Hogan et al (2012) argue that 'privatisation' is typically linked to a generalisation of the specific context of Western liberal democratic cases and the historically specific normalisation of conceptions of urban space, particularly in the Keynesian welfare states of the 1960s (Brenner 2004). With this understanding of the public-private divide 'the preponderance of private space in much of Asia resembles an urban nightmare' (Hogan et al 2012, p. 3). However, the source of this nightmare is a focus on the failure of Asian cities to live up to ideals of a historically, geographically and politically specific understanding of urban space.

Shatkin observes that in Asian cities private developers and individuals have historically owned most of the urban fabric, and as such, the involvement of private sector actors in city-building is not new (Shatkin 2011b). However, the scale at which it is taking place in the aforementioned megaprojects is unprecedented. Where in the past, private developers owned buildings or even a city block, today some Asian urban megaprojects occupy thousands of hectares of previously public space. The breadth of

their functional role is also expanded, and now involves wider responsibilities in planning, design, regulation and service delivery. In Asia, Shatkin sees a shift in the role of the state, from 'imposing modernist visions for the transformation of cities' to 'facilitating private-sector development as a means of capitalizing on the economic opportunities presented by globalization' (Shatkin 2011b, p. 78). While linking these changes to wider global changes in statehood and citizenship, Shatkin provides an account that details the specifics of successes, challenges and failures in megaproject development throughout Asia. Far from being part of a singular, unstoppable capitalist juggernaut, these projects encounter particular and often local obstacles—'actually existing urbanisms' (Shatkin 2011a). These include difficulties in financing and land acquisition, popular and political opposition and legal controversies.

Importantly, Shatkin includes the visions of these projects in his analysis—many of them never break ground, and many more fail to realise the full extent of their goals. But in all these cases, in advertising and other promotional communications from government partners and the private developers themselves, projects are cast as representing an idealised urban future. The appeal of these projects, representing the 'glittering surfaces of global capitalism' (Ong 2011a, p. 210), is used to garner popular and political support for the project of creating a new global urbanity in the city. This 'global' vision is often linked to regional success and the rhetoric of the Asian century (Roy 2011b). This is used in discrediting or at least softening opponents, as has been the case in Cambodia, where critics of megaprojects have been cast as being 'against development'.⁴⁵

The privatisation of development and creation of new spaces for economic growth has been seen by governments and international institutions such as the World Bank and

⁴⁵ This idea is explored in more detail in chapter five of this thesis. See also "Community Media Statement (full text)," Save Boeung Kak Campaign, accessed January 20, 2012, <http://saveboeungkak.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/community-media-statement-full-text/>

International Monetary Fund as a means of accomplishing development goals with limited resources (e.g. World Bank 2002).⁴⁶ In Chinese and Indian cities, local governments are no longer receiving their budgets from the central government, meaning that in many cases they generate their public resources through the sale or long-term lease of public land (Goldman 2011b; Goldman 2011a). Goldman argues that this has resulted in an environment where selling land and displacing residents in order to finance government functions is one of the primary roles of urban governance for developing cities. Particularly for those that are seeking to better their status in the world. The poor tend to be obstacles to these new developments and their 'unplanned' spaces have little place in the broader 'global' city visions of which they are a part (Roy 2011b; Shatkin 2011a; Watson 2009; Ghertner 2011). Popular opposition to these developments is common, not least because projects often involve the forced relocation of existing residents. Governments have often assisted with land acquisition, and moral and political support.

Protests over evictions associated with land acquisition for private development projects have halted numerous such projects in India, and it has been observed that the success of these projects often depends on the framing the value of the project in terms of poverty alleviation, social inclusion and the protection of human rights. In India, compromise has been more successful than brute force in bringing projects into fruition (Shatkin 2011b). The power of popular opposition is dependent on the degree to which elections actually matter—that is, the ability to actually prompt the loss of political power (Shatkin 2007). In parts of India such as Kolkata, this is quite high, and urban developments that involve mass displacements of the urban poor ultimately have resulted in political setbacks. In contrast, strong states such as China and Singapore offer little space for political mobilisation outside of the ruling party, and in

⁴⁶ The cited example, a World Bank report on *Private Solutions for Infrastructure in Cambodia*, is one of many similar reports produced for developing countries.

others such as Thailand and the Philippines electoral results are strongly influenced by vote buying and patronage politics. The political environment in Cambodia has much more in common with these latter cases—elections have never prompted a change of national government, and while protests over forced evictions are common, they have not been responsible for the cancellation or failure of large private development projects.

As the poor are dispossessed of their land, and of their claims to a place in the increasingly privatised city, it is difficult to see how these projects involve anything more than social division and economic polarisation. In a country like Cambodia, where the poor represent a significant portion of the population this is seemingly at odds with the argument advanced in the previous section, that these modern developments are a source of inspiration. But these sentiments co-exist, as we shall see in chapters five and six. Asher Ghertner's (2011) observations of similar processes in Delhi are informative. Ghertner explores the often contradictory ways in the residents of slums—who typically stand to gain the least from the development of 'global' spaces—participate in the project of making the world-class city. While 'world-class' developments often displace the residents of slums, their aesthetics play into everyday aspirations to become 'world-class'. Pride in the emergence of a modern city is held even amongst many of those who are apparently marginal to, or excluded from this process.

Conclusion

This exploration of urban theory and its relevance to the cities of the global South and of Asia in particular is necessarily brief. There are many important issues associated with Asia's rapid urban growth, perhaps most importantly the sustainability of worlding ambitions in the context of global climate change and issues of energy access and security. With the majority of urban theory focused on the cities of the first world, much of this chapter has focused on the need for a geographical diversification of theory. What it has shown is that the cities of the global South need to be understood

'on their own terms'. An appreciation of the relations and comparisons that take place between cities within Asia and beyond is crucial to this task. Processes of inter-referencing and modelling between Asia's cities are key to understanding contemporary Asian urbanisms. These planning and implementation processes often take place through new solidarities such as alliances between government and private sector actors.

Roy and Ong's advancing of the concept of 'worlding' goes some of the way to filling this gap in urban theory. Elite actors in Asia's emerging cities, including smaller cities like Phnom Penh, are making concerted efforts to enhance their status, and to establish 'world-class' urban spaces that are competitive in attracting transnational investment. These take place through speculative experiments, which reconfigure imaginings of what it means to be 'global'—particularly in economically dominant cities such as Shanghai, Singapore and Dubai. In smaller and less influential cities like Phnom Penh, development takes place with reference to this shifting 'global' urban imagery and often involves people, knowledge and capital from more influential Asian cities.

We have seen that a key component of this process is the increasing role of private sector actors and the privatisation of urban space and infrastructure, partly associated with the global dominance of neoliberal ideology. The ideal of universal access to infrastructure, and of geographically even and regulated economic growth and development within a state, or spatial Keynesianism, has been seen to be largely absent from the history of Asia's cities. As such, the increasing private involvement in the planning and development of Asia's cities is not usefully cast against this geographically, historically and politically specific context. It must be understood with relation to the particularities of the city in which it is occurring, and with relation to the broader changes taking place in the region which serve as referents for policy and planning initiatives. Rather than casting these processes with reference to abstract

ideals, it is important to understand the diversity of actors, alliances, networks and flows through which they take place.

An understanding of the city of Phnom Penh as a site of worlding, ties together the three theoretical threads that underpin this thesis. As we have seen in this chapter, the process of worlding typically occurs through an assemblage of actors and networks centred in the city, but reaching far beyond its political boundaries. These connections reach out to cores of urban modernity, but also to other cores of modernity—sites that are prominent in areas such as popular culture, technology and education. Increased international connections and mobilities have dramatically changed Phnom Penh, but have not supplanted its role as a place—the site of Cambodia’s strongest expressions of modernity. While the term ‘world-class’ differs from the ‘modern’ terminology that I have employed throughout this thesis, it represents a strongly related desire for improved status, and to be ‘up to date’. Viewing these claims in terms of ‘modern status’ rather than ‘world class’ allows for status-making claims made on smaller scales to be included as part of the same broader process. This is particularly important for Phnom Penh, for which assertions to superiority over other cities are rarely made. Importantly, it brings the ordinary, everyday status-making claims made by groups and individuals within the city, into the same frame as those made at the level of the city and the nation. As we will see in the chapters that follow, assertions to modern status at all these levels are strongly linked, and are usefully considered as part of the same process.

5 Staking a Claim to Modern Status: Urban Planning and the Modernisation of the Built Environment

Koh Pich before was a jungle of reeds, but now it has become a development area which indicates the speed of development in the country, especially in Phnom Penh. It clearly illustrates that Phnom Penh is the Capital that is full of proper infrastructures, resorts and entertainment sites awaiting to welcome national and international visitors, and the development at Koh Pich making this area become an international standard hub for economics, commerce, culture and tourists [*sic*].

Kep Chuk Tema, Governor of Phnom Penh, 31 January 2011⁴⁷

As we saw in the Introduction, the transformation of Phnom Penh's built environment has been positioned by the Cambodian Prime Minister, Hun Sen, as evidence of Cambodia's emergence as a 'modern society in the modern world'. The above quote from Kep Chuk Tema, the mayor of Phnom Penh, makes a similar assertion with reference to a development project at Koh Pich (diamond island)—an island close to central Phnom Penh. The area, he claims, has been transformed from a 'jungle of reeds' to become an exemplar of the presence of 'proper' infrastructure in contemporary Phnom Penh. Becoming modern, or developing a 'proper', or 'world-class' city, is a recurring theme in statements from the Prime Minister, from the Phnom Penh Municipal Government, and in the marketing of private development projects. That is not to say that a coherent modernisation plan has been articulated for the city, but the

⁴⁷ 'The Twin Bridge to Connect from Samdech Hun Sen Park to Koh Pich,' Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed April 24, 2012, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-the-twin-bridge-to-connect-from-samdech-hun-sen-park-to-koh-pich-746.html>

broader desire to establish a modern city is clear. It is not only about improving the living conditions of the city's residents, but of proving the city's modernity to the nation and the world—to 'national and international visitors' or 'Cambodians and foreigners alike'.⁴⁸

Hun Sen and Kep Chuk Tema's concern with the development of the built environment has increased over the past decade. Since 2004 the Cambodian Premier has repeatedly claimed that he will award a medal to whoever builds the tallest building in Phnom Penh.⁴⁹ Skyscrapers, edge city projects and other large-scale developments are being touted as 'world-class' urban spaces that enhance the city's international status. These ambitious projects—which include Grand Phnom Penh International City, CamKo City, Diamond Island City, Boeung Kak Town and Chruy Changva City—have been variously proposed, financed, implemented, and in many cases aborted, by a range of South Korean, Indonesian, Chinese and Cambodian investors and developers and generally supported by the municipal and national governments. While these patterns of intra-Asian investment and private planning are now familiar in the region, they take place alongside the continued involvement of Western donors in urban planning—most notably, in the development of the 2020 master plan, an ambitious French-funded project intended to guide both public and private urban development until 2020.

⁴⁸ 'Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh' Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

⁴⁹ Vong Kokheng & Don Weinland, "Premier pushes skyscrapers", The Phnom Penh Post, accessed 20 May 2012, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2012021054423/Business/premier-pushes-skyscrapers.html>; "Selected Comments at the Diploma Conferment for Graduates of the Build Bright University", Cambodia New Vision, accessed 20 May 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/04aug10_bbu_graduation_comments.htm

Strong parallels can be drawn between this building boom and that which took place in the early years of independence. The symbolism of the built environment visually confirms the success of the current Cambodian government in modernising the city, and by extension, the nation. In contrast to Sihanouk however, Hun Sen and other members of the government have not sought to position this growth with reference to the grandeur of Angkor. As we will see in the next two chapters, Hun Sen has not sought to position Cambodia as a dominant or leading nation in the modern era. Rather, he has made much more limited claims of membership amongst the modern cities of the region.

The built environment is just one aspect of modernity in Phnom Penh—it is analysed in this chapter as a case that gives depth to the multiple core-periphery model of modernity that I have advanced in the preceding chapters. As we will see, this is a relatively localised drive to modernise parts of Phnom Penh, but it takes place through transnational connections some of which are involved directly in the process, while others contribute to imaginings of urban modernity. Actors from a number of geographically specific cores of modernity beyond Cambodia's borders contribute to the modernisation of the urban built environment. This process is driven by various forms of international finance capital, development capital and local capital which vie for influence amongst a loose assemblage of alliances and conflicts linking elements of the Cambodian government, international donors, and Cambodian and intra-Asian private sector actors.

The Modern City, the Industrial City: Emergent Urban Form

Over the past decade, Phnom Penh's administrative area has more than doubled, and the city has seen the proposal and partial development of numerous 'world-class' mega-projects, many skyscraper proposals and a much smaller number of actual skyscrapers, the further growth of the garment industry, and the beautification and greening of parts of the central city. The outer districts of Dangkao and Porsenchey

have been at the centre of the city's industrial development. Russei Kaev, the district to the north of the central city, has been proposed as the site of modern development and convergence with other cities in the region. With all these development proposals—many of which have not broken ground—this past decade has also seen many people moving into or within the city, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes by force. Intense land speculation and urban redevelopment has often involved forced and sometimes violent evictions, with rights groups such as LICADHO (2009) estimating that as much as ten per cent of Phnom Penh's population has been displaced since 1990. They have not typically been moved outside the city, but to resettlement areas on its outskirts—areas within Phnom Penh's administrative bounds, but outside the country's premier space of modernity in the central city.

As we saw in the Introduction, there are nine major administrative divisions (khans) in Phnom Penh. The central city is comprised of Tuol Kouk, 7 Makara, Doun Penh and Chamkar Mon—with population densities ranging from around 17,000 people per square kilometre in Doun Penh and Chamkar Mon to over 44,000 in 7 Makara.⁵⁰ According to data provided by the PPMG, these four central khans are home to just under forty per cent of the city's population, and take up just over five per cent of its land area. The central city is home to the vast majority of Phnom Penh's skyscrapers, public and private universities, government buildings, shopping malls, up-market restaurants and modern office spaces. Its status as the pre-eminent space of modernity in Phnom Penh and Cambodia comes from its role as the site of wealth, consumption, white collar work and tertiary education, as well as political and economic power. It is these districts that are the focus of the city's beautification campaign, that has seen numerous gardens and parks restored and the development of new public facilities such as playgrounds and exercise areas (Hughes 2003). The other face of this drive for

⁵⁰ 'Districts,' Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed April 24, 2012, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/district.php>

a better image is the diminishing presence and visibility of the urban poor. The eviction of residents of informal settlements in the central city has played a significant role in this process, as have night-time sweeps of Phnom Penh's streets that have sought to 'clean' the city of 'undesirables' (LICADHO 2008; Human Rights Watch 2010).

The official population of Phnom Penh is 1.3 million (NIS Cambodia 2008), though this is a conservative figure—unofficial estimates are often as high as two million. The PPMG forecast a doubling of the population of the city over the next 20 years (Chhay & Huybrechts 2009), with much of this growth expected to take place in the much larger, poorer and more sparsely populated outer khans of Russei Kaev, Sensok, Dangkao, Porsenchey and Mean Chey. As is evident in the satellite image below, density in these outer khans is highly variable, with pockets of industrial and commercial activity and supporting residential developments focused around the two major roads that extend west from the city towards the airport. The growth of industrial estates in these outer khans has been accompanied by the development of low-budget accommodation catering to the huge, predominantly female, garment factory worker population and a large ancillary consumer economy (Simone 2008).

To some degree, the modernity of the central city is encroaching on these outer khans through the development of private communities, many of which house middle class families, including white collar workers who commute to the central city. Around ninety of these have been developed, gated and otherwise,⁵¹ including projects consisting of large numbers of identical shophouses ranging from one to four storeys, many of which remain vacant. Russei Kaev in particular—the khan extending north from the central city—is home to a particularly high concentration of 'world-class'

⁵¹ 'Capital Hall Disseminates "Borey" Management in Phnom Penh,' Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-capital-hall-disseminates-borey-management-in-phnom-penh-1081.html>

developments and proposals including Grand Phnom Penh International City, CamKo City and Chruy Changva City. Kep Chuk Tema, the governor of Phnom Penh, has claimed that Russei Kaev will 'become a modern satellite city' and that it will be home to 'proper and rich of infrastructures such as public buildings, schools, hospitals, sportive stadium as well as super marts...etc. [*sic*']'.⁵² At this stage it is unclear whether these ambitious plans will become reality, but what is clear, is that beyond the central khans, efforts to develop a 'proper', 'modern' city are focused on Russei Kaev.

It is worth acknowledging the scope of these large projects in the broader context of property development in Phnom Penh. Labbé and Boudreau (2011) have observed that in Hanoi, similar large-scale projects represent just part of the privately planned developments in the city. A similar pattern can be seen in Phnom Penh where according to the PPMG there are 90 integrated communities currently approved or under construction.⁵³ The larger projects are exceptional, and largely unrealised, yet they garner more significant interest in the mainstream press and academic accounts, including in this thesis. These are particularly important, as through their promotion and press coverage they take a prominent position in popular and political imaginaries of the future of the city. However it is important to acknowledge the presence of less spectacular private developments, which are more likely to be successfully completed, and appear to offer more affordable housing options for the city's growing population. Their development, the associated changes in Phnom Penh's urban space, and the

⁵² 'Khan Russey Keo to Become a Modern Satellite City,' Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed May 21, 2012, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-khan-russey-keo-to-become-a-modern-satellite-city-1071.html>

⁵³ "Capital Hall Disseminates "Borey" Management in Phnom Penh," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed August 22, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2011081050948/National-news/world-bank-fund-halt-irks-officials.html>

social implications of these unheralded private communities are important questions that ought to be addressed by future research projects on the city.



Figure 7: Satellite image of Phnom Penh taken in January 2010 administrative boundaries reflect the city at that time, and do not include Porsenchey which was established in January 2012. Satellite image from Google Earth, overlay by the author.

For many people, the central khans *are* Phnom Penh, with the outer khans absent from many accounts of the city. For example, Milton Osborne's recent history of Phnom Penh includes a single map of the city that is limited to Doun Penh, 7 Makara and parts of Tuol Kouk and Chamkar Mon (2008, p. xvii). This is not entirely unexpected, as until quite recently the administrative borders of the city did not extend far beyond the bounds of Osborne's map.⁵⁴ In early 2006, the administrative area of the city was doubled (Simone 2008), and further expansions have taken place since. Over the past year, the new district of Porsenchey was established from the northern half of Dangkao, while the southern half—which remained as Dangkao—was expanded to include areas of Kandal province. The expansion of the city was partly motivated by the need to maintain the impression that resettled communities were not being expelled from the city as well as inflating the value of land in these areas. These unofficial motives existed alongside the need to rationalise infrastructural development and urban planning (Simone 2008, p. 197).

Transnational Mobilities and Urban Development

In a recent journal article (Paling 2012b), I argued that the current development of Phnom Penh is notable for the particularly high level of involvement of both foreign development assistance and foreign direct investment and that the ability of the state to guide, restrict and integrate these processes with reference to a broader urban vision is highly limited. The drive to modernise Phnom Penh is not guided by an overarching vision, but is loosely located in the networks of political and economic power that control development in the city. As we saw in the Introduction, the local and regional processes and references that inspire and drive the modernisation of Phnom Penh remain under-researched. As Gavin Shatkin (1998) argued more than a decade

⁵⁴ 'Geographical Extensions,' Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed May 21, 2012, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/phnom-penh-city-geographical-extensions-165.html>

ago, international connectivity has strong economic, social, political and cultural impacts in Phnom Penh. Accordingly, recent shifts in the orientation of Phnom Penh's transnational connections have played a strong role in the development of the built environment and the city's changing urban form. As mentioned above, the strongest symbols of Phnom Penh's emergent modernity are its skyscrapers and other 'world class' developments such as edge-city projects—all of which are linked to East and Southeast Asian knowledge and capital. The same applies to the much less iconic, but no less significant industrial developments in the city's west. While not popularly understood as symbols of modernity, they facilitate engagement with the modern city and enable modern consumption practices for huge numbers of rural migrants (Derks 2008).

While their influence in Phnom Penh is readily apparent, these intra-Asian flows of capital and knowledge have significant consequences for our understanding of urban modernity. As we saw in chapter four, it is increasingly clear that urban knowledge, including that of what it means to be a modern city, does not travel exclusively from the West to poorer cities like Phnom Penh (Robinson 2006; Robinson 2002; Roy 2009a). Still, in far too many cases, this assumption remains. For example, evidence of such a limited geographical understanding can be found in documents produced by French planners who worked on Phnom Penh's 2020 master plan (Bureau des Affaires urbaines 2007). French cities appear to be their most common foreign reference point for the development of Phnom Penh, followed by North American cities. As we shall see, their attempts at planning have seen only very limited success in Phnom Penh. The largest of these projects—the 2020 Master Plan—has already been partially overridden as privately funded intra-Asian sources have been the primary drivers of urban development in many parts of the city.

Of course, the transnational flow of city knowledge is not new. In colonial Phnom Penh, as in many colonial cities, urban planning and development undertaken by the colonial

administration referenced European models of the city, and in some instances, ideas derived from 'urban experiments' in the colonies were subsequently implemented in European cities (Roy 2011b). Early French efforts to modernise Phnom Penh and establish the city as a 'real' capital took place as Haussmann was making radical changes to the city of Paris in the 1870s (Edwards 2007, p. 42). The lack of urban spectacle in Phnom Penh was a source of motivation for a renovation characterised by the material display of royal and colonial power largely through architecture. Much like today, an imaginary of a 'real' city formed with reference to cities located elsewhere in the world, served as inspiration for the transformation of Phnom Penh's built environment. What is newly significant however, is the number of referenced city-models, and the number of actors seeking to implement these models in Phnom Penh—that is, the multiplicity of urban modernities that play direct or inspirational roles in urban planning, policy making, development approvals and public and private development.

As Stephen Ward has observed in many postcolonial cities, the years following independence typically saw a shift from an 'almost exclusive dependence on the planning approaches and personnel of the colonial powers' to a diverse range of external links and the strengthening of indigenous planning capacity (Ward 2010, p. 47). While this was true in the early years of Phnom Penh's independence, links to France remained the single most significant international influence in urban development, in line with its continued position as the primary reference point for all facets of modernity. As we saw in the Introduction, this first wave of modernisation was disrupted by Cambodia's descent into conflict which saw a decline in urban planning and development that culminated in the near-complete abandonment of Phnom Penh. The repopulation of the city was followed by a period of relative isolation with international connections existing primarily with Soviet-aligned states. In the current post-intervention era, the city is experiencing an unprecedented diversification of external links in urban planning and development. This development mirrors Ward's

observation that in today's post-colonial, post-communist world, where market principles are broadly ascendant, former colonial territories are more diverse than ever (Ward 2010, p. 67).

The constitution of these external links—through which flows of people, information, ideas and capital—reflect complex and uneven geographies of economic and political power. The production of urban space is deeply linked with flows of capital, not simply the flows of finance capital that enable the development of skyscrapers and edge-city projects, but also the flows of development capital that finance planning studies and infrastructure projects, which are often tied to associated conditions and reforms (Roy 2011c, p. 12). With relatively low levels of internal revenue contributing to the municipal budget, the development of public infrastructure in Phnom Penh relies heavily on foreign aid and private investment (Bureau des Affaires urbaines 2007, pp. 167-168).⁵⁵ Since the early 1990s, Japan and France have been the biggest providers of urban-focused aid, and more recently the significance of international private sector actors—most notably involving capital from South Korea and China—has increased dramatically.

As such, government decision-making processes are inevitably influenced by the availability of funding from a diverse range of partners. In the case of the private sector, these include informal partnerships that reach beneath the bureaucratic veneer of government and engage directly with members of the ruling party—either through explicit business partnerships with individuals, or through opaque relationships with members of government. City visions articulated in the context of these partnerships each reference elements of an eclectic array of cities from throughout the region and

⁵⁵ The rebuilding of infrastructure in Phnom Penh from 1992-2005 saw contributions of \$US540,000,000 from international donors (primarily Japan), compared with approximately \$US167,000,000 from private investors and \$US125,000,000 from the Cambodian public budget (Bureau des Affaires urbaines 2007, 167).

the world. In the following sections I will elaborate on the diversity of influences shaping contemporary Phnom Penh, and begin to explore some of the causes and results of the city's disjointed urban planning and development—within government and in the multiplicity of international actors in the development and private sectors.

The Landscape of Urban Governance in Phnom Penh

Cambodia's government and the inner workings of the ruling party are both characterised by opacity. Phnom Penh is no exception to this tendency, and as such it is difficult to establish a thorough understanding of the dynamics of debate in policy-making in the city or how visions of a modern city come into being. At the national level, the opacity of political processes in Cambodia is detailed by Un and So (2011) who describe the Cambodian state as a combination of modern bureaucracy and traditional patrimonial systems, with personal relationships pervading the formal bureaucratic structure. This is supported by Caroline Hughes, who posits the existence of a 'powerful shadow network of patron-client links that underpins the state, party, and military apparatus, while also entailing the superficiality of its rational-legal veneer' (Hughes 2009, p. 157). Both agree that informal, personal-level negotiations play an important role in Cambodian politics, and that they co-exist with a formal bureaucratic veneer. These processes are not effectively challenged by Cambodia's relatively weak political and civil society (Un 2006). As such, a large part of the contest and debate over the future of the city takes place behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny.

Hughes positions the opacity of political processes in Cambodia as—at least from the government's point of view—an effective response to Cambodia's aid-dependence. She argues that 'the Cambodian government saw the intrusions of donors into policy making as inhibiting' and minimised these intrusions by establishing a mode of operation that was 'both opaque to donor scrutiny and highly effective in brokering accommodations with powerful groups politically' (Hughes 2009, p. 156). Hughes notes

that although corruption had been present in Cambodia prior to the influx of aid of the 1990s, it was in this aid-dependent period that it became institutionalised and systemic as the ruling party strengthened its networks of patronage in response to the emergence of electoral competition. Hughes argues that Hun Sen's opaque style of governance has achieved some degree of moral authority in the eyes of donors. While in many areas it is antithetical to development sector notions of 'good governance', it appears to be working in achieving economic and political stability and more recently in the reduction of poverty and improvements in human development indicators (Hughes 2009, p. 163).

Simon Springer (2009b; 2010) describes a similarly opaque system of governance, but considers its emergence to be the primarily the result of an economic system that has been led by donor-led reforms, combined with the co-option and transformation of these reforms by local elites. The staunch refusal of the government to allow any oversight on the part of any non-state actors has allowed political leaders to spend money gained from the exploitation of state resources entirely as they see fit, unimpeded by the restrictions of the law. Both Hughes and Springer agree that this has entrenched the threat of violence as part of the political system, produced broad social and political alienation and increased inequalities of wealth and power. In terms of urban planning and development, this opacity results in a relative lack of public debate. This means analysis of internal government processes in Phnom Penh is partially speculative and anecdotal. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that these processes are disjointed and sometimes contested without being able to conduct a thorough analysis.

With specific reference to visions for the future of Phnom Penh, the opacity of these processes is illustrated by the approval process of the 2020 master plan. The plan envisages the development of Phnom Penh as a multipolar city with growth taking place in secondary centres, connected to the historical city centre by restored

waterways and corridors of greenery (Tricaud 2004; Bureau des Affaires urbaines 2007; Chhay & Huybrechts 2009). This goes some of the way toward restoring Phnom Penh's pre-war image as a city of tree-lined streets, which was held in high regard by Lee Kuan Yew (1967).⁵⁶ However, according to Frederic Mauret, a French technical advisor involved in the master plan, the full restoration of this green image is unlikely, as too much of what was green space in the pre-war period is now privately held (Englund & Rytter 2008, p. 24). The plan recognises the potential of mobilising private East Asian capital to realise its vision, even in social housing in the central city, where it argues that the private sector could fill this void, if facilitated by government incentives. The plan remains unratified by the Council of Ministers and is still unpublished,⁵⁷ with even the previously published summaries no longer available from the website of the Phnom Penh Municipal Government. This is despite having been approved by the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction in 2005.⁵⁸

A similar pattern—where international development assistance in urban design and planning has lost influence after the completion of the project—can be seen in the case of the development of Boeung Kak Town. In order to redevelop the area surrounding what was then a lake in the central city, an international design competition for the redevelopment of the area was organised by the PPMG with assistance from the French

⁵⁶ Lee Kuan Yew was apparently deeply impressed by Phnom Penh's urban form during his visit in 1967 and is reputed to have considered Phnom Penh as a significant reference point for a developed Singapore, even attempting to commission Cambodia's state architects to work in Singapore (Grant Ross & Collins 2006).

⁵⁷ The French agencies involved in the development of the 2020 master plan have published a number of reports that detail the plan (e.g Bureau des Affaires Urbaines 2007; Tricaud 2004), however the full plan in French, English and Khmer remains unpublished.

⁵⁸ Thomas Gam Nielsen, "Low-income housing plan lacking as capital grows," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2009010723505/Prime-Location/low-income-housing-plan-lacking-as-capital-grows.html>

government. The winning entry was partly designed by Meng Bunnarith, then a PhD candidate at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and now the Deputy Director of the Department of Urban Planning at MLMUPC. The redevelopment plan was summarily scrapped,⁵⁹ as the contract for redevelopment was awarded to a private company owned by ruling party senator Lao Meng Khin in partnership with a Chinese state-owned company.⁶⁰ The original plan retained the majority of the lake's water surface, a stark contrast to the current plan which has already seen the reclamation of the majority of the lake.

This pattern of waning support for the goals of Western development projects following the cessation of project funding is common in Cambodia. The size of government budgets and donor-provision of salary supplements to government employees during the project makes post-project financial sustainability a recurring concern (Godfrey et al 2002). At the national level, this is more applicable to technical assistance and capacity building projects that are more commonly the focus of Western donors (Sato et al 2011), and less applicable to infrastructure projects that have been the focus of emerging donors such as China, Thailand, South Korea and India. In Phnom Penh the same applies to infrastructure projects that have been funded by Japanese development finance such as the improvements in drainage and flood protection, construction of schools and government buildings, restoration and construction of bridges, and road upgrades (JICA 2008).

With the project funding having finished in 2005, full ratification of the 2020 master plan now seems highly unlikely, suggesting that senior members of the government are

⁵⁹ Allister Hayman, "City buries Pearl of Asia plan," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/200703096094/National-news/city-buries-pearl-of-asia-plan.html>; Sebastian Strangio, "A Last Opportunity," Southeast Asia Globe, accessed July 2 2011, <http://www.sea-globe.com/Regional-Affairs/a-last-opportunity.html>

⁶⁰ Vanessa Ko, "China firm in lake deal," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2010122845711/National-news/china-firm-in-lake-deal.html>

opposed to the plan or parts thereof. No public criticism of the plan has been made by members of the government, and whatever debate has taken place happened behind closed doors. Wider public discussion has been limited, and is obviously difficult when the plan has never been made public. In an anonymous interview, a senior official at the MLMUPC pointed to a widespread frustration within the Ministry over the failure to ratify the plan due to the fact that those reviewing the plan at the Council of Ministers are not urban planning professionals.⁶¹ A range of alternative views on the non-ratification of the plan were offered by various figures in advisory roles, in government and in the opposition party in Phnom Penh. These ranged from the Council of Ministers simply having other priorities, to there being a need to produce a more detailed plan due to the current plan being too broad and general, and claims of high-ranking government officials blocking its passage due to not wanting restrictions placed on land that they personally own. Whatever its reason, the non-ratification of the plan has resulted in a degree of informality in urban planning in Phnom Penh.

In spite of the plan not being ratified by the Council of Ministers, Ly Saveth, Director of Administration at PPMG, stated that the Municipality 'still follows the master plan, and have done so since 2005'.⁶² But following the unratified, unpublished plan is fraught with difficulty. He went on to state that attempts to place restrictions on land use and land titling are easily contested due to the unofficial status of the plan, and stated that its complete implementation is beyond the capacity of the PPMG. This is partly due to the fact that responsibility for the planning and governance of Phnom Penh is formally split between the PPMG and the MLMUPC. Large projects are explicitly outside the ambit of Municipality, which is responsible for the approval of developments with a footprint smaller than 3000 square metres (The Royal Government of Cambodia 1997,

⁶¹ Anonymous, Pers. Comm. 2 Sep 2010

⁶² Pers. Comm. 2 Sep 2010

p. 3). The MLMUPC is responsible for larger sites as well as large agricultural projects, and areas classified as, or surrounding heritage sites.

City Visions, Personal Desires and Political Power

The influence of these administrative bodies is accompanied by significant influence from powerful individuals—most notably the Prime Minister, Hun Sen. This is evident in the announcement of some of the largest private development projects. Hun Sen has personally announced a number of private projects before official plans have been submitted to the PPMG and the MLMUPC. In a number of cases, private companies owned by members of the government have been awarded large development contracts without going to tender, as was the case with the Boeung Kak development. Such events are confirmation of the interdependence of the ruling party, the Cambodian state and the business elite. The ability of the ruling party to 'get things done' is dependent on large donations from businessmen, who in turn are dependent on the state for awarding land concessions, licenses and contracts (Hughes 2010). A recent case involved the donation of funds by SOKIMEX Group, owned by businessman and ruling party senator Sok Kong, for the purchase of two sewerage trucks by the PPMG.⁶³ In some cases it has been documented that the process of approving development and investment has been directly facilitated by Hun Sen who has personally advised Phnom Penh Governor Kep Chuk Tema to agree to proposals.⁶⁴

The fact that this personal advice is being provided is not, in itself, remarkable.

However, Hun Sen's power is such that Kep Chuk Tema and the PPMG are highly

⁶³ "SOKIMEX, A Model for Other Investors in Developing Phnom Penh," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news--sokimex-a-model-for-other-investors-in-developing-phnom-penh-683.html>

⁶⁴ Khouth Sophak Chakrya and James O'Toole, "Chinese lakeside link confirmed," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/2011010645933/National-news/chinese-lakeside-link-confirmed.html>

unlikely to act in opposition to his wishes. Hun Sen's personal intervention in local issues is not uncommon, as has been documented by Stephen Heder who described the Prime Minister's personal power in 2010 as becoming 'more concentrated, personalized, militarized, regal, and mystical' (Heder 2011, p. 208). Projects that conform to his imagining of the future of Phnom Penh are far more likely to be approved than those that don't—and it has most frequently been the 'world-class' edge city projects and skyscraper developments to which he has lent his personal support. Still, even the power of Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ability to realise his urban visions is limited by availability of funding. Beng Khemro, Deputy Director General at the MLMUPC described one such instance where one of Hun Sen's recommendations was largely unrealised due to a lack of donor interest. Khemro stated that 'very few donors took interest in the National Urban Development Strategy, because they tend to think that the problem in Cambodia is rural, rather than urban'.⁶⁵

The concentration of Hun Sen's personal power reflects a broader pattern of highly centralised government in Cambodia, with lower levels of government having little autonomy. This has been the case with the PPMG, though its autonomy has reportedly been improving since the implementation of a nation-wide decentralisation strategy in cooperation with UNDP.⁶⁶ According to a 1999 UNDP assessment, the Municipality and its budget were then part of the Ministry of Interior. Municipal Departments at City Hall were part of the respective line ministries, co-supervised by a Vice Governor and their parent ministry. As such many decisions affecting the Municipality were made outside of City Hall, at higher levels of government (UNDP & UNHCS 1999). Following the Royal Government of Cambodia's launch of the Strategic Framework for Decentralisation and

⁶⁵ Pers. Comm. 24 Aug 2010

⁶⁶ The efficacy of the broader decentralisation program has been questioned, and it has been seen to contribute to a consolidation of power for the ruling party (Sedara and Ojendal 2009, Ehrentraut 2011). However scholarly accounts have focused on the commune council level and not the Phnom Penh Municipality.

Deconcentration Reform in 2005, the Municipality has reportedly experienced greater levels of political and financial autonomy (Meng 2008; Ministry of Interior 2008; Ros 2008; Khemro 2006). Recent developments, including the establishment of the Phnom Penh Capital Council and the passing of a law on property tax have the potential to give the Municipality significantly more political and financial autonomy.⁶⁷ This autonomy appears to be supported by the recent announcement by Hun Sen that 'the Royal Government has clearly stated that Phnom Penh City Hall is the main player to rebuild and develop Phnom Penh city'.⁶⁸ However his subsequent announcement of the Chruy Changva City project prior to approval from City Hall highlights the limitations of this autonomy due to his continued involvement in recommending the approval of projects before formal submissions have been made.

To characterise the urban governance of Phnom Penh as disjointed may seem at odds with the broader characterisation of political power in Cambodia as highly centralised. However, the centralisation of political power does not translate to unified and integrated governance. Rather, administrative dysfunction has been primarily caused by the maintenance of the patronage system (Sok 2005; cited in Slocomb 2010). Hughes has argued that the ruling party has favoured the retention of bloated, poorly paid and poorly functioning organisations and resisted the rationalisation of the public service which has been encouraged by international donors. Rationalisation of the public service represents a threat to government interests as a culture of meritocracy

⁶⁷ "Property Tax Collection in Phnom Penh Has Began," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-property-tax-collection-in-phnom-penh-has-began-1182.html>

⁶⁸ Hun Sen, "Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh," Cambodia New Vision, accessed July 2, 2011, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

and professionalism might disable the ability of the government to use the civil service as the foundation of its sphere of discretionary action (Hughes 2009, p. 160).

Rationalisation of the public service is further hindered by cases where responsibility for particular areas of administration and policy has been allocated or awarded to a specific client—and with it, the ability to take a share of associated profit. With status, political power and money so closely linked (Slocomb 2010), reform would require a serious shake up of the patronage system.

Power struggles have also been evident within the ruling party, a situation that was detailed by the Phnom Penh Post in July 2011 following the release of leaked US embassy cables.⁶⁹ The visibility of this factional tension was greater throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, when the faction led by Chea Sim—which also included Sar Kheng and Heng Samrin—was the strongest opponent to that of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The most public display of this tension came in July 2004 when, under pressure to sign legislation allowing the formation of government, Chea Sim's residence was surrounded by military forces, and Chea Sim briefly fled the country (Slocomb 2010; Springer 2011). The power held by Chea Sim has seriously diminished and with it the size of the faction that he leads. Still it appears that other divisions have emerged—Deputy Prime Minister and head of the Council of Ministers, Sok An was seen by many informants, including those working at the Council of Ministers, to wield comparable influence to Hun Sen and operate as a top-level patron, while not posing any direct threat to Hun Sen's leadership.

A thorough analysis of the restructuring of political and economic power that has taken place in the Municipality over the last decade is beyond the scope of this chapter, however this brief overview begins to illustrate the limited but improving autonomy of

⁶⁹ "Intrigue in Ruling CPP Detailed" Phnom Penh Post, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2011071350345/National-news/intrigue-in-ruling-cpp-detailed.html>

the Municipality, the disjointed nature of urban governance in the city, and the interaction and alliances between elements of the government and the development and private sectors—all processes that remind us of Roy and Ong's 'worlding' framework that was explored in chapter four. It is in this context that local and internationally funded private development projects are approved, and international cooperation and assistance is established and takes place. The processes involved in the approval of any individual project are significantly opaque with formal bureaucratic processes pervaded by personal relationships. As has been demonstrated, foreign-led urban development assistance can be significantly thwarted particularly in the case of policy development. In this context the ambitious French-led project to create a new master plan for the city has been limited in its impact, the winning Boeung Kak redevelopment plan was scrapped, and the urban policy ambitions of Prime Minister Hun Sen have struggled to find interested donors. At the same time, planning and development of large tracts of land are being undertaken by private developers. It is these private developers who have—or at least claim to have—the funding to both plan and construct their visions. It is the visions of the private sector that display the most potential to enhance the position of Phnom Penh within popular imaginings of the world's cities. A desire held by Hun Sen and other elites as well as much of the city's population.

Worlding the City: Asian Investment and ‘World-Class’ Developments

The government took the first step toward its ambitious plan so as to promote the development and enhancement of Cambodian financial industry in the short run and to bring on Phnom Penh as a financial center of Indochina peninsula in the long run like as Singapore and Hong Kong [...] equipped with global standard infrastructures, but also actively attracting international financial institutions, foreign investors and other related business with a variety of incentives [*sic*].

LandMark Worldwide, 2009⁷⁰

It's like a way of hearing that the US is better than other country...the United States is better than Cambodia, because the US has so many tall buildings...so this makes people have hope, that the country going to be better...if there are tall building, they will have hope for their next generation, that if so the mentality for them now is put the children in the good school, have a good education, in the future, building, their children will work there. So that's part of the mentality of seeing, it's hope. It's the hope of working to get a better life.

Sereyvath, public servant

While there is no overarching and explicit ‘worlding’ strategy in place, as was discussed in chapter four, such transformations—or at least desires for such transformations—are evident in the marketing and design of many large private development projects in Phnom Penh. These developments are funded by private intra-Asian capital, and involve firms from Asian cities that can make much stronger claims to international significance than Phnom Penh. Many of these have been promoted by developers and the Cambodian government as representing the city’s

⁷⁰ “Signing Ceremony for the Agreement on the Development of FDD and Construction of Securities Exchange,” Landmark Worldwide, accessed July 2, 2011, http://www.lmw.co.kr/a_1/list.jsp

emergence as a modern, connected city in the realms of international finance, or to establish a 'global standard' of living for prospective residents. These are patterns that Gavin Shatkin has identified as common in the representation of edge-city projects⁷¹ by government and developers throughout Asia (Shatkin 2011b).

Statements made by politicians indicate that through the development of edge-city projects it is expected that Phnom Penh will be established amongst its ASEAN peers. Coming from such a low base, the city is not making a claim to global significance, nor is it overtly engaging in inter-city competition. The city's economic and cultural influence, and position in broader imaginaries of international significance is well below that of the Asia's strongest urban economies such as Singapore, Shanghai and Dubai which often serve as aspirational models for urban development projects elsewhere in the region (Chua 2011; Choplin & Franck 2010). Further, the same applies to many of the cities that are home to initiatives that aspire to these models, such Bangalore, Sao Paulo (Chua 2011), Hyderabad (Bunnell & Das 2010) and Mumbai (Huang 2008). Phnom Penh appears to be staking a claim to being part of this process, without the overt expectation that it can effectively compete with other cities in the region.

Worlding practices are typically aspirational, experimental and often speculative (Goldman 2011b; Goldman 2011a). Many of these projects exist only as plans, with their location in the city currently vacant. Similar patterns have been observed throughout Asia, as Shatkin has observed, for every one of these projects that breaks ground, 'there are several more which have scarcely advanced beyond the concept stage, and in many cases likely never will' (Shatkin 2011b, p. 78). Many more are under construction, but have been stalled, with the enthusiasm of developers curbed by the global financial crisis and the associated slump in Phnom Penh's real estate market as

⁷¹ Shatkin uses the term "urban integrated mega-projects", a term that includes Phnom Penh's edge-city projects.

well as more recent uncovering of financial scandals in South Korea.⁷² Phnom Penh's skyscraper projects and large edge-city projects have encountered a range of problems from difficulties in financing, opposition from donors, protests against forced evictions and relocations, and a lack of buyers and/or tenants. As such visions of Phnom Penh as a city of skyscrapers and Russei Kaev as a 'modern' edge-city, are tentative and at this stage largely imaginary.

While there are many parallels with the development of cities throughout Asia, Phnom Penh and its private development projects are comparatively small by all conventional measures—of population, land area and budget. CamKo City is the largest of these projects to have broken ground. The entire project—of which just one of six phases has been partially completed—covers an area of just under 130 hectares. CamKo City is dwarfed by projects in neighbouring countries that cover thousands of hectares such as Hanoi North and Saigon South in Vietnam, and Muang Thong Thani in Bangkok, Thailand. They are not significantly integrated in any broader city plan and do not involve any major transport infrastructure linking the projects to the central city, or to each other—a notable shortcoming acknowledged in interviews with staff at both CamKo City and Grand Phnom Penh International City.

At the time of writing, Chruy Changva City was the most recently announced, as well as the most expensive and most ambitious edge-city project slated for development in Phnom Penh. The draft development plan seeks to establish Phnom Penh amongst its ASEAN peers, and features a 60 hectare botanic garden, an 'international standard' stadium, a 45 hectare 'ASEAN Plus 5 Commercial City Zone' and a 162 hectare 'world-class Business Center Zone.' It is Phnom Penh's fifth large edge-city project, the others being Grand Phnom Penh International City, CamKo City, Diamond Island City,

⁷² Song Sang-ho, "Lee's ex-aide denies bribery allegations involving bank," The Korea Herald, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110615000720>

and Boeung Kak Town. The 2020 master plan for Phnom Penh envisages ‘secondary centers’ that correspond to some degree to the location of these edge-city projects. However their integration into the greater vision of the master plan is not readily apparent, a point to which I will return in the following section.

The most explicit ‘worlding’ project came out of an agreement made between the Royal Government of Cambodia and South Korea’s World City Co. Ltd on the co-development of a ‘Financial Development District’ (FDD) in CamKo city. The agreement seeks to establish Phnom Penh amongst the financial centres of the region, with the developers referring specifically to Singapore and Hong Kong.⁷³ This agreement took place at the same time as negotiations between the Korea Exchange and the Royal Government of Cambodia for the joint establishment of the Cambodian Stock Exchange and followed the visit of then President of South Korea, Roh Moo-Hyun. At the time it was decided that CamKo would donate the building for the Cambodian stock exchange, a new building to house Phnom Penh’s City Hall, and fifteen hectares of land for the FDD.

The development is planned as a partnership between World City Co. Ltd, and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Tax incentives are planned in order to attract global firms to take up space in the FDD.⁷⁴ This was the last of three significant changes in the plan of CamKo City. The initial plan was a relatively unambitious shophouse development, which was revised as the developers saw the rapid change occurring in Phnom Penh and predicted that the popularity of shophouse developments would decline in the coming years. This plan was again revised on request from the

⁷³ The referencing of these locations may be indirect, as the South Korean developers involved in the planning of CamKo city noted that they also drew significant inspiration from the Phu My Hung development in Ho Chi Minh City (anonymous, 2010, pers. comm., 25 August), which in turn drew inspiration from Singapore, Hong Kong and the Canal District of Los Angeles. See “Five Urban Complexes Developed by Phu My Hung Corp,” Phu My Hung, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phumyhung.com.vn/eng/introduce.php?id=12>

⁷⁴ Anonymous. Pers. Comm. 25 August 2011

Cambodian government to house the aforementioned FDD and the Cambodian Stock Exchange. This apparently strong government-private sector partnership is showing signs of failing, as it is becoming apparent that the South Korean investors do not have access to the required capital. To date, no progress has been made on any of the aforementioned buildings, and the Cambodian Stock Exchange opened in a tower in the central city in July 2011. Completion of the project looks increasingly unlikely as construction has been stalled since October 2010, and in June 2011 the South Korean bank that financed the project has emerged as the subject of a wide-ranging corruption investigation by the South Korean government which resulted in the jailing of the CEO of World City Co. More recently, the Korean investors were taken to court in Phnom Penh by a South Korean government agency which claimed ownership of the project in the wake of the investigation.⁷⁵

Compared to CamKo City and Chruy Changva City, there is much less evidence of government support and involvement in the development and planning of Grand Phnom Penh International City. This was confirmed by an Indonesian member of the project's Planning and Design Department, Haryanto Ong who stated that only small modifications were made to the plan at the government's request.⁷⁶ As such, it makes a much smaller contribution to 'worlding' the broader city, but is more representative of a desire to provide a 'world-class' standard of living to its residents. Ciputra—the firm behind the project—has similar projects underway in Hanoi and Kolkata, each of which is characterised by near-identical horse-adorned double-arched gates. Its various residential offerings are named after locations in Europe and North America. The reference can be seen to some degree in their facades, however, the design of these buildings feels more comparable to wealthy villas elsewhere in South-East Asia. When

⁷⁵ Simon Lewis, 'Battle Over CamKo City Now in Court', Cambodia Daily, 14 March 2012, available online at <http://sahrika.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/44.jpg>

⁷⁶ Pers. Comm., 13 August 2010

questioned on this issue, Ong, a senior member of the planning and design team made no attempt to support the authenticity of these labels, dismissing the idea by stating that the name, is just a name.⁷⁷ A similar point was made by Ly Saveth of the PPMG, who stated that the 'world' or 'international' city marketing of Phnom Penh's edge-city projects was at this stage, 'just the name'⁷⁸ but expected that more meaningful regional integration was not far off.

The developers of Boeung Kak Town, Chruy Changva City and Diamond Island City are much less approachable and more opaque in their operations than CamKo City and Grand Phnom Penh International City. All appear to involve Cambodian and Chinese finance capital and expertise. In the case of Boeung Kak Town, this is explicit, whereas with Chruy Changva City and Diamond Island City both are being developed by Canadia Bank, a local bank headed by a Chinese Cambodian, Pung Kheav Se. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation, which has been reported by the Cambodian Government⁷⁹ and the Phnom Penh Post⁸⁰ as being a Chinese investment group. The group does not have a website, so it is difficult to confirm these reports, but a Chinese-language brochure distributed at a function organised by the Cambodian delegation to Expo 2010 in Shanghai confirms this link, as well as the Chinese version of the name which translates into English as 'China Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation'.⁸¹ Chinese media have reported that

⁷⁷ Pers. Comm., 13 August 2010

⁷⁸ Pers. Comm. 2 Sep 2010

⁷⁹ "Chinese Firm in talks to Build Market in Phnom Penh Capital," Ministry of Commerce, Trade Promotion Department, Royal Government of Cambodia, accessed July 2, 2011, http://www.tpd.gov.kh/trade_news.php?cid=126

⁸⁰ May Kunmakara, "Chinese firm in talks to build market in capital", Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2008120923110/Business/Chinese-firm-in-talks-to-build-market-in-capital.html>

⁸¹ Translation by Lay Sovichea.

most Chinese investors in Cambodia are clients of Canadia Bank and that it is the first and only bank to lend to developers whose projects involve the relocation of 'squatters'.⁸² Boeung Kak Town and Diamond Island City have involved large scale relocations and forced evictions. Land acquisition for the Chroy Changva City project has not yet taken place, but an order is in place to prohibit new construction and the transfer of land ownership in the proposed area.⁸³



Figure 8: Some of Phnom Penh's many gated developments.

While many of the urban development processes taking place in Phnom Penh appear familiar, the leaders of the city and the nation offer no clear reference as to their aspirations for Phnom Penh, and what its future position in the world could be. Specific cities in the region are often cited as inspiration for particular projects, but

⁸² Te Kan, "Canadia Bank strives to promote brand Cambodia," China Daily, accessed July 2, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2008-04/11/content_6608362.htm

⁸³ "Prohibition on New Build, Additional Construction at Chroy Chang Va Development Zone", Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-prohibition-on-new-build-additional-construction-at-chroy-chang-va-development-zone-947.html>

comparisons are often superficial. As we have seen, the privatisation of planning in Phnom Penh reflects similar patterns in the region, where elite, privately developed urban spaces have been proposed—insulated from the disorder of the existing city. These developments reflect a privatised model of urban planning designed to further state goals of international economic integration (Shatkin 2011b). They also follow the comparable patterns of interrupted and inconsistent progress, often involve large-scale forced evictions, and take place through partnerships between the state and private developers. These processes exist in the context of a fluid and ever-changing environment of foreign models interacting with local politics both visible and opaque (Labbé & Boudreau 2011). The future of these projects is tentative, with the apparent collapse of funding for CamKo City casting doubt over the future of the most advanced project. Shatkin (2011b) has observed that—with the exception of China—even the most successful privately planned mega projects have failed to realise their ambitious goals. It remains to be seen whether the Chinese involvement in three of these edge-city projects will contribute to their progress and to Phnom Penh’s emergence as another exception to this trend.

A Limited Claim: Criticism, Contestation and Failure

I support the idea because to develop the country, but...what I don't support is they make violence to the poor people, they didn't sit down, negotiate, find a good solution...this is why I'm upset. I appreciate the development but please find a good way to do that [*sic*].

Phalla, late 30s

The area should be empty, the people living there are illegal occupants, they don't comply with the law but now people [are subject to] eviction, forced eviction, but because they ask too much and they're living there illegally and now they are being move to a better place, to live in, but they demand more.

Sereyvath, public servant, mid 20s

If the government needs to develop the Boeung Kak area, people are not against development. However, the government needs to open negotiations to solve the problem facing the people in Boeung Kak in order to be fair, transparent and to find a win-win-win solution to the situation.

Media statement issued by residents of the Boeung Kak Lake community⁸⁴

Those mega projects think only about the development in their locations, turning blind eyes on the development of the whole city’.

Frederic Mauret, technical adviser for Phnom Penh 2020 Master plan⁸⁵

The vision of a modern, ‘world-class’ Phnom Penh being established through multiple privately developed projects does not appear to be what the French advisors envisaged for Phnom Penh’s ‘secondary centers’. While pride in the modernisation of the city can be found throughout Phnom Penh, particular aspects of the process come under criticism from a wide range of sources including the French advisors and urban planners and architects, as well as others such as affected residents, members of the opposition party, and foreign and local NGOs. Amongst all these groups, outright opposition to private development projects is rare. The strongest opposition and criticism typically relates to forced relocations of existing residents. In most cases, activists have sought better terms for affected residents rather than seeking to have the project cancelled completely. As is evident in the above statement from the residents of the Boeung Kak Lake community, even affected residents have been careful to clarify that they are not opposed to the idea of ‘development’.

⁸⁴ “Community Media Statement (full text),” Save Boeung Kak Campaign, accessed January 20, 2012,
<http://saveboeungkak.wordpress.com/2011/02/28/community-media-statement-full-text/>

⁸⁵ “Traffic jams, flooding consequences of poor urban planning,” Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011,
<http://phnompenhpost.com/2008100121918/In-focus/traffic-jams-flooding-consequences-of-poor-urban-planning.html>

Amongst those who are not directly involved in urban planning and development criticism has not been targeted at a lack of integrated planning, but on the direct affect that particular development projects have had on existing residents. The challenges that have been advanced by affected residents, concerned members of the public, civil society groups and foreign NGOs have not been strong enough to completely prevent the residents being moved from their land, though they have, in some cases, resulted in improved resettlement conditions. A notable exception came when this general pattern was tested and successfully challenged by the World Bank, which in August 2011 suspended all new lending to the Cambodian government due to land disputes related the Boeung Kak New Town project.⁸⁶ After initial posturing by the government,⁸⁷ the resumption of loans was negotiated in return for a modification of the plan which involved the allocation of 12.4ha of land for the on-site relocation of affected residents.

Elsewhere in the region, Shatkin (2011a; 2007; 2011b) has described the limited efficacy of the state in realising the development of urban mega-projects. In cases that involve the conversion of agricultural land and the off-site relocation of large numbers of residents, popular opposition to state-sanctioned developments may be strengthened by the threat of being punished at the ballot box. This threat is much weaker in the Cambodian context, where the urban poor are greatly outnumbered by rural population, who have consistently returned the ruling party to office with increased majorities. Further, the number of urbanites who are completely opposed to these projects are few, particularly amongst people who are not directly affected by these projects. At least in terms of land acquisition, the strength of the Cambodian state

⁸⁶ "World Bank fund halt irks officials," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2008100121918/In-focus/traffic-jams-flooding-consequences-of-poor-urban-planning.html>

⁸⁷ "World Bank Freezes Loans to Cambodia," Voice of America, accessed August 22, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/khmer-english/news/World-Bank-Freezes-Loans-to-Cambodia--127305013.html>

is such that this incident of compromise is an exception. Further, the action required to bring about this revision was only made possible by the threat of a complete cessation of loans from the World Bank after popular protests and political opposition failed to sway the authorities.

While protests over forced evictions are common, outright opposition to the Boeung Kak New Town project, and other developments is rare, with even the affected residents qualifying their criticism with statements to the effect of 'we are not against development, but...'. For many informants, the positivity associated with the emergence of these developments in Phnom Penh was part of a broader enthusiasm for modernity throughout the country. This is a situation that reminds us of Ong's position that we saw in chapter four—that urban spectacles are not read as a generalised effect of capitalism, but rather as positive symbols of the city and its status. The strength of the 'world-class aesthetic' that Ghertner (2011) has identified in Delhi, is similarly strong in Phnom Penh.

While enthusiasm was widespread, even amongst the many informants who expressed enthusiasm for the modernisation of the city, the approach taken to dealing with the urban poor was often seen to be unjust. For others, particularly those who worked in government, the claims being made by existing residents were seen to be overly demanding, reflecting the official government view that their claims to ownership of the land had no legal basis. Criticism is not limited to the treatment of the urban poor. For other critics, particularly those who work in the fields of urban planning or architecture, have lamented a lack of integration between privately planned developments and the city as a whole. For Frederic Mauret, a French technical adviser for the 2020 master plan, the approval of private mega-projects is seen to come at the expense of the wider development of the city. He has claimed that 'the City Hall cannot allow investors or developers to manage the development of the city. Otherwise, the

future of the development of the city will be over'.⁸⁸ Mauret's views reflect a much broader association of privatisation of cities with urban dystopia (Hogan et al 2012). This dystopian view of privatisation does not appear to be shared by the Cambodian government, who have not heeded Mauret's warnings. Numerous privately planned edge-city projects with their 'worlding' ambitions have been approved, while ratification of the 2020 master plan on which Mauret worked appears increasingly unlikely.

The summary of the master plan, and Mauret's comments on the state of urban planning in Phnom Penh, reflect an assumption that policy makers will mobilise private developers around a coherent and integrated vision of urban development (Chhay & Huybrechts 2009). While the plan envisages the mobilisation of East Asian capital for the realisation of large urban planning and infrastructure projects, it envisages both public and private projects as being guided by its proposed land use and infrastructure plan. This assumption contrasts with reality of urban development in Phnom Penh, where visions are often conceived outside the urban policy sphere by private developers and politically powerful elites. Equipped with an unratified master plan, the capacity of the formal bureaucracy to challenge large-scale private developments or force them to conform to a broader vision is very limited. This lack of conformity means that each of the five edge-city projects is planned with a separate vision limited to the physical territory of the project. It is clear that their approval and in some cases, close alliances with members of the government, represent a desire for 'world-class' urban spaces on the part of the government. But this desire is planned as a series of implanted spaces on the edges of the existing city. Shatkin (2008) refers to a similar process in Metro Manila as 'bypass-implant urbanism' through which a diversified portfolio of

⁸⁸ "Traffic jams, flooding consequences of poor urban planning," Phnom Penh Post, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://phnompenhpost.com/2008100121918/In-focus/traffic-jams-flooding-consequences-of-poor-urban-planning.html>

integrated urban mega-projects are linked by a growing network of rail and toll roads. Phnom Penh lacks the 'bypass' component, resulting in a vision that at this point, only involves a disconnected array of relatively isolated 'implants.'

This shortcoming is acknowledged by the PPMG, which has been actively encouraging investment in public transport in recent years.⁸⁹ Following the introduction of direct flights between Paris and Phnom Penh, the PPMG is working with French donors on a feasibility study for the construction of a tramway between the airport and the central city. A larger study is being conducted in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to revise an Urban Transport Master Plan that was produced by a JICA team in 2001.⁹⁰ The PPMG has indicated that it expects public transport in the city to be privately operated, however they understand that it will not be profitable, and expect that it will need to be subsidised by the Municipality.⁹¹ The willingness of intra-Asian investors to speculate on the development of 'world-class' urban spaces on the edge of the city evidently does not extend to the development of public transportation, where foreign donors continue to play the largest role. To date, public transport within the city remains informal, dominated by moto-taxis and tuk-tuks, and Phnom Penh's edge-city projects remain relatively isolated from the central city.

It is primarily in the limited capacity of these intra-Asian investors that the limits of the apparent strategy to modernise or 'world' Phnom Penh are to be found. As we saw in the case of transport, efforts to 'world' the city are dependent on perceived

⁸⁹ "Seeking Companies to Invest in Public Transportation," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed August 22, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news--1177.html>

⁹⁰ "JICA Observes Capital's Transportation System's need," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed August 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-jica-observes-capital-s-transportation-system-s-need-1382.html>

⁹¹ Ly Saveth, Pers. Comm. 2 Sep 2010

profitability. The halted progress of projects such as CamKo City is associated with financial difficulties rather than with popular opposition. Indeed, there is little evidence of popular opposition to the government's efforts to 'world' the city. The goals of modernisation, 'development' and the establishment of 'world-class' spaces enjoys widespread support with opposition focused on associated forced evictions rather and not the drive for the modernisation of the city.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the contemporary development of Phnom Penh—the capital of one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia—has many parallels in the urban transformations taking place throughout the region, and speaks significantly to the recent developments in urban theory that were explored in chapter four. This chapter has moved against a tendency to position imaginings of urban modernity in Europe and North America, and demonstrated the power of intra-Asian mobilities in the development of Phnom Penh—overriding the French-funded master plan. Far from the cutting edge of global urbanism, we see aspirations and developments that are comparable to those that have been described in recent analyses of cities throughout the Southeast Asia and beyond. But this world of cities is linked with the hierarchies of modernity, and Phnom Penh's imagined position and influence is far below that of the oft-cited exemplary cases within the global South. Phnom Penh's efforts at enhanced status have not been aimed at surpassing the achievements of other particular cities, rather, the drive for enhanced status through the modernisation of the built environment has taken place with abstract and inchoate goals which directly or indirectly involve a shifting array of modern reference points.

Phnom Penh differs from most of the region's capitals and major cities for its small size (economy, population and land area) and for the large scale of financial involvement from both foreign direct investment and Western donors relative to state budgets. State actors negotiate relationships and undertake projects with private and development

sector partners, without any strong coherence to an explicit vision of a modern city. The strength and centrality of the Cambodian state in planning and developing the city is undeniable. But the role of the state is unclear, and this is not simply due to the emergence of privately planned urban infrastructure. Internal power structures are shrouded in ambiguity, overlapping with the private business interests of political elites, financial enticement for both individuals and institutions, and informal networks of political power. These networks lie beneath the formal bureaucratic veneer, facilitating the approval and development of the privately funded mega-projects that seek to improve Phnom Penh's image in the world, while subverting the ambitious master plan that was funded by development capital.

The lack of an explicit city-wide vision and the involvement of such a diverse array of local, regional and international actors simultaneously obscures and clarifies a vision of urban modernity in and from Phnom Penh. While development is not guided by specific reference points, the multiplicity of established modernities is clear, as numerous, predominantly Asian actors are behind development which are seen to enhance the status of the city. The transformation of the built environment is representative of broader assertions to modernity that take place with reference to geographically specific sites of prominence, or cores of modernity. As we have seen, the process of planning and developing the city cannot be seen as being driven by either local or global forces. Rather, it is driven by an assemblage of actors and connections linking people and processes operating within the city to others that are centred beyond Cambodia's borders.

In the exploration of assemblage theory in chapter three, I referenced John Allen's (2011) caution that assemblage lends itself easily to 'thin description'—a joining exercise that exposes connections, multiplicity and difference while saying little of substance. This chapter has sought to expose the multiplicity and ambiguity of claims to modern status in Phnom Penh—but it is much more than just a joining exercise. This

multiplicity has been linked to specific locations throughout the world that contribute to and inspire the modernisation of Phnom Penh. Further, this internationally connected image of modernity underpins the analysis in chapters six and seven—other aspects of modernity can be usefully understood through similar frames.

While it is clear that there is a drive to modernise Phnom Penh, the vision for this drive is ambiguous. Numerous political and business figures are clearly supporters of this drive, and it is popular amongst the general public, but there is no clear vision for the future of the city, and the object of analysis is elusive. Still, a focus on the built environment provides a more tangible object of analysis that can be analysed in more detail than the more abstract and contingent imaginaries of the city, the nation, the self and the world. This analysis of political and economic networks that produce one aspect of modernity is useful in understanding the modernity more broadly. As we shall see in chapters that follow, other facets of modernity are similarly produced through locally grounded, but transnationally connected networks.

6 Hierarchies of Status and the Scales of Modernity

Hun Sen said 'Cambodia can be considered as a successful post-conflict country,' saying the reforms and economic growth plus other development schemes and plans are on right track. With the return of full peace in 1998, a sense of confidence and pride pervades the country, a feeling that bodes well for birth prospects for economic growth and job creation and a concrete vision of a promising future [*sic*].

Xinhua, 2010⁹²

Seventy-six per cent of Cambodians think their country is moving in the right direction, only six points down from a peak in 2008.

International Republican Institute, 2011⁹³

Devastated by decades of civil war, Cambodia remains one of the world's poorest nations. A third of its 13 m people live on less than a dollar a day, and about 8 out of every 100 children die before the age of five.

Marshall, 2010⁹⁴

⁹² "Cambodia considered a successful post-conflict country", Xinhua, accessed 12 June 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-09/04/c_13478429.htm

⁹³ "IRI Releases Latest Survey of Cambodian Public Opinion", The International Republican Institute, accessed 12 June 2012, <http://www.iri.org/news-events-press-center/news/iri-releases-latest-survey-cambodian-public-opinion-0>

⁹⁴ Marshall, A. "Making a Killing in Cambodia", The Sunday Times Magazine, accessed 12 June 2012, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article7023700.ece>

Cambodia is an oddity in that 80 per cent of people who live in the country live in the countryside with no electricity, no clean water, no radio, no television. They live more or less as they did 1,000 years ago. Occasionally somebody might have a cell phone or a motorbike and some people have televisions powered by car batteries but they live in very primitive conditions and that's 80 per cent of the population.

Brinkley, 2011⁹⁵

There is much about Phnom Penh and Cambodia that can be understood through James Ferguson's (2006) description of modernity as a relatively static hierarchy of status. For all its growth, income levels, living standards and the quality of infrastructure remain far below the modern cities of the region and the world, and as we saw in the previous chapter, ambitious 'world-class' development projects have seen limited success. At the same time however, Ong and Roy's (2011) 'worlding' framework allows us to understand many processes that are currently taking place in Cambodia—and particularly in Phnom Penh—as being symbolic of the nation's emergence on the world stage. The above quotes speak to these seemingly contradictory trajectories—Cambodia's relatively static position as one of the world's poorest and least modern countries, and of the rapid emergence of a modern nation. Is it really possible that Cambodia is pervaded with confidence and pride, while remaining one of the world's poorest nations?

⁹⁵"Cambodia's leaders are murderous kleptocrats: author", PM, ABC Radio, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2011/s3269723.htm>. It should be noted that I wholeheartedly disagree with Brinkley's assessment of Cambodia, it is so extreme that it is almost comical. It is included here to reflect the broad range of views on the general state of contemporary Cambodia.



Figure 9: Newly built townhouses and a makeshift construction worker village at CamKo City in August 2010

In the previous chapter we saw the strength of claims to enhanced world status exemplified in the development of the built environment in Phnom Penh. These physical transformations in the city are highly symbolic, but so too are the processes that limit their success—halting progress, funding collapses, illegal financing and protests over forced evictions. More broadly, political stability, the establishment of enduring peace, increasing international connectivity and rising levels of wealth have contributed to widespread optimism in Cambodia and increased engagement with global modernity. But positivity related to Cambodia’s success exists alongside awareness of enduring poverty, rising inequality and the country’s relative economic and political weakness. Adding to the ambiguity and confusion of modernity is a widespread belief in an intrinsic Khmer cultural and racial supremacy which muddies everyday understandings of Cambodia’s position in a world of nations, and Phnom Penh’s position in a world of cities.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the modernity of Phnom Penh—as the pinnacle of *Cambodian* modernity, and also as a city that is peripheral to most understandings of *global* modernity. Drawing on the variation of the city’s modern status on these two scales, the latter half of the chapter turns to understandings of what

it means to be modern for the residents of the city. While the city's position can be usefully simplified through these two frames, the position of individuals is far more ambiguous. The latter sections draw on observation, experience and interview data to illustrate everyday experiences and imaginings of the scales and hierarchies of modernity in Phnom Penh. I will explore the various parameters through which assertions to modern status are made, and compare the value of educational attainment and conspicuous consumption as meaningful indicators of individual modernity. This exploration of the modernity of the city and its residents highlights the multiplicity and ambiguity of modernity in Phnom Penh, and sheds light on some of the hierarchies of modern status that exist on scales ranging from the household to the globe.

Decline, Conflict and Poverty: Background to the Present

The glories of Angkor, the ruined temples at the heart of a Khmer civilization that dominated mainland Southeast Asia between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, have provided the central motif of Cambodian nationalism and, also, in the words of historian David Chandler, its chief burden.

(Hughes 2009, p. 26)

The storm of progress, a rush towards modernity, would find its energy and its momentum by staring back at the country's past, a past that would be contemplated for both its wreckage and its immutable grandeur.

(Winter & Ollier 2006, p. 7)

If we can build Angkor, we can do anything.

Pol Pot (cited in Chandler 1993, p. 6)

A crude snapshot of Cambodia's global significance in international hierarchies of modernity and status was on display at Expo 2010, Shanghai, China—an event that was arguably the largest and most expensive celebration of urbanism and modernity in

history (Winter 2012). As I have detailed in a recent book chapter (Paling 2012a), Cambodia's pavilion was not a highlight of the event—in fact it was probably the least inspiring building in its vicinity. Here in the global snapshot of the World Expo, Cambodia was a curiosity rather than a popular attraction, far from the top of the event's global hierarchy. Largely ignoring Expo's city-focused theme, Cambodia's display was based primarily on the country's Angkorean ruins. This imagery celebrates the glory of the country's past but highlights civilisational decline (Winter 2006), and ignores the relatively unspectacular present, implicitly casting the nation's cities as devoid of modernity.

This lack of modernity in Cambodia's display at the Expo did not come as a surprise—by most popular definitions, Cambodia and Phnom Penh are not exemplars of modernity. As numerous scholars of Cambodia have pointed out, the country is internationally known for the grandeur of Angkor, and the horrors of the Khmer Rouge (Winter & Ollier 2006; Forest 2008). It is not known for its cutting edge urban architecture, its shopping malls, or its hi-tech economy. Being a city that is not known for its modern features, it is difficult to understand exactly how Phnom Penh understood to be modern by its residents.

In part, the answer is obvious, the city is rapidly modernising—Phnom Penh has changed drastically since even a decade ago. The city was all but abandoned in the late 1970s—a period described by informants in this study as 'less than zero'. The city and the nation are now on a rising trajectory of living standards and perceived status which has come in the wake of a national decline that culminated in over a million deaths. Cambodia's current ascendant trajectory moves against an enduring narrative of decline that began well before the conflict in the latter half of the twentieth century. As far back as the mid-nineteenth century, it was positioned as justification for King Norodom's acceptance of protection from the French (Kent & Chandler 2008, p. 5). As numerous accounts of Cambodia have demonstrated, colonial narratives represented

the post-Angkor period in terms of decline and decay, underpinning the morality of French rule (Norindr 1996; Winter & Ollier 2006; Edwards 2007).

These narratives of decline have frequently been paired with narratives of revival and restoration. Successive post-independence regimes in twentieth century Cambodia—up to and including the Pol Pot regime in the late 1970s—saw their predecessors as representing a national decline, and like the French, established their own legitimacy partly through the promise of a return to Angkorean greatness (Hughes 2009; Winter 2007; Chandler 1998). This came at a time when the convergence of living standards between developed and developing countries was prominently foreshadowed in development discourse (Ferguson 2002a; Ferguson 2006). As we saw in chapter two, in much of the world, it was broadly expected that through 'modernisation'—a package including elements such as industrialisation, scientific technology and secularism—'poor countries would overcome their poverty, share in the prosperity of the "developed" world, and take their place as equals in a worldwide family of nations' (Ferguson 2006, p. 177). In these earlier regimes, the resurrection of Angkorean greatness was a key feature of leaders' ambitions to modernise to the point of being equal to, or better than 'developed countries' (Slocumb 2006).

As we saw in the Introduction, this return to greatness was frequently seen in terms of the improvement of Cambodia's world-status. This was a concern for many of the country's twentieth century leaders, most notably the King cum Prime Minister, Norodom Sihanouk. Writing in the 1960s, Laura Summers argued that at least in terms of international relations, Sihanouk aimed to 'devise a specific, highly stylised and exclusive foreign policy of 'neutrality' and 'independence' which set Cambodia apart from other third world countries and invited international status respect' (Summers 1986, p. 16). Newspaper clippings in a collection compiled by Sihanouk (1991) indicate a belief in Cambodia's increasing inclusion in the realms of modern nations. At times these claimed that 1950s Cambodia was lagging behind the developed nations, but

amongst Asia's most advanced (1991, p. 7). Other claims asserted that in particular areas such as education, Cambodia had 'caught up with the most developed nations' (1991, p. 41).

These dreams of catch-up were brutally shattered, as the country descended into a period of civil war that would last for almost thirty years. While conflict plagued the country, Cambodia established itself amongst the world's poorest nations. This was when the more recent narrative of tragedy was established beginning with Cambodia's descent into war that was escalated by the carpet bombing of Eastern Cambodia by US forces that began in 1965 (Hughes 2009). This conflict culminated in the tragedy of the Democratic Kampuchea or Khmer Rouge regime which was led by Pol Pot and ruled from 1975 to 1979. Phnom Penh was evacuated, as the leaders of the regime sought to establish an agrarian utopia. During this period of conflict it is estimated that over twenty per cent of the Cambodian population perished (Kiernan 2008). This extended period of conflict prevented Cambodia from being part of the strong economic growth, rise in consumption and improvement of living standards that took place across Asia over the latter half of the twentieth century (Chua 2002).

The City: Becoming Modern from ‘Less than Zero’

Well a ghost city of Phnom Penh has now been transformed 32 years later into a crowded one...A state of sadness has gradually been replaced by joy and laughter...Let us take a small example (about how life has changed so far). If we were to compare the number of people who used either air-conditioners or electric fans in 1975 to those of the present day I am sure there would be a huge difference. Women beauty salon also has been leading business in Cambodia with so many women clients. These people, who are not used to living without temperature regulation and/or with their cosmetic treatments, would find their lives difficult to live under the Pol Pot's regime [*sic*].

Hun Sen, 10 January 2011⁹⁶

The government always compare to Khmer Rouge regime. If they compare to the Khmer Rouge, I don't like the idea of teaching my children to compare themselves to other people. 'Hey! Okay, you don't need to pay too much attention to your studies because there are people poorer than you'. My son has gone to study in New Zealand, I tell him 'compare yourself to New Zealand not to the Khmer Rouge'.

Yim Sovann, Member of Parliament for Phnom Penh, member of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party⁹⁷

As I have stressed throughout this thesis, today's Phnom Penh is a source of pride for many of its residents based on rapid economic growth, infrastructural improvements and the transformation of the built environment. It is on an ascending trajectory, improving its modern status, and as is the case in many places throughout Asia, the

⁹⁶ "Selected Comments at the Graduation Ceremony at the Vanda Institute", Cambodia New Vision, accessed 24 May 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2011_releases/10jan11_vanda-institute-graduation_comments.html

⁹⁷ Pers. Comm. 30 August, 2010

development of the built environment in particular, is often seen to be a symbol of national emergence (Ong 2011a). The Pol Pot regime offers a point of reference against which the state of the present represents a massive and undeniable improvement. Framed by this reference point, many aspects of the city including the built environment, the visibility of wealth, the reliability and availability of infrastructure, and opportunities for entertainment and consumption all represent an immense and undeniable improvement on its past.

Hun Sen, and other members of his government, frequently cast their achievements with reference to this period. Hun Sen has been at the helm of Cambodia's transition from enduring conflict to enduring peace, and Phnom Penh's transition from 'a scene of utter devastation' (Hughes & Un 2011, p. 1) when he arrived with Vietnamese forces in 1979, to a site of opportunity and growth today. Hun Sen makes a fair assessment in claiming that women who spend a lot of time in air-conditioned beauty salons would have a hard time living under the Pol Pot regime. While it's a humorous comparison—a feature of many of the Prime Minister's speeches—it's probably not the best comparison, as people living on the streets or in the resettlement camps on the outskirts of the city would also find their lives very difficult under the Khmer Rouge.

For the opposition party MP for Phnom Penh, Yim Sovann, comparisons with the Khmer Rouge risk complacency. To some degree this is true in that it is a politically expedient comparison, as there are not many things that could be compared to the Pol Pot regime and come off looking second best. It is not however, solely a political tool, it is a popular comparison that is not only driven by political rhetoric. It is also present in ordinary understandings of the difference between the past and the present-day, which are based on personal experience and stories related by friends and relatives. Similar comparisons were made by numerous informants including moto-taxi drivers, monks, NGO workers and university students. As the following interview excerpts illustrate,

they all positioned their understanding of, and pride in the present-day city against the poverty and conflict of the recent past, and of the Pol Pot regime in particular.

Before is different when we had the war, our country could not be developed, but now the war has stopped and the development is very quick.

Hong, moto-taxi driver, mid 40s⁹⁸

We've grown from less than zero. I'm not talking about politics—as UNDP we have to be neutral—but I'm proud of this country, and this city.

Ros Sokha, Senior Advisor to City Hall, United Nations Development Program⁹⁹

The change is I think that we have many war, but I think it starts from 1975. We had nothing, and we lost a lot since 1975, but now...we have a lot of things...I think that everything has changed and because of the government strategies and they try to lead and have a lot of investors and have a lot of NGOs that they try to support our country.

Rattanak, student, late teens¹⁰⁰

Yes when Phnom Penh grew up quickly, I'm very happy. Before, during the Pol Pot regime, my mother, my brother had so much difficulty.

Sokha, student, late teens¹⁰¹

As we saw earlier in this chapter, narratives of decline have given way to a well-established trajectory of improvement, and this was reflected strongly in statements from many informants. Memories of war and poverty, or the experiences of friends and relatives, cast the present in a positive light. The period of war, particularly

⁹⁸ Pers. Comm. 4 August, 2010

⁹⁹ Pers. Comm. 16 August, 2010

¹⁰⁰ Pers. Comm. 3 September, 2010

¹⁰¹ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

the disastrous Pol Pot regime was often described as 'less than zero' and a time when people had 'nothing'. This same view was held by younger informants who were born in the 1990s such as Rattanak and Sokha, as well as by those who had actually lived through the war such as Hong and Ros Sokha. According to the 2008 population census, around 65 per cent of Cambodians are under 29 years of age, and the same is true for Phnom Penh (NIS Cambodia 2008). For some time now, it has been the case that the majority of Cambodians were born after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in January 1979. For the vast majority, comparisons with the Khmer Rouge are based on second-hand accounts—for Sokha this comparison is based on the experience of her family, while Rattanak points to government-led strategy as the basis of Phnom Penh's emergence from this period.

It is difficult to assess the degree to which these accounts are based on the rhetoric of the Prime Minister, or on directly related experiences from friends and family. What is clear however, is that imaginings of the Pol Pot regime hold a strong meaning for young and old alike, and that this plays into their understandings of the contemporary development of Phnom Penh. As we will see in the latter half of this chapter, for many residents, the perceived modernity of Phnom Penh is enhanced by direct and more recent experiences of life in Cambodia's provinces. For the majority of Cambodians who have never travelled abroad, Phnom Penh is the highlight of their direct experience of urban modernity in both a spatial and temporal sense. The city itself is more modern than any other place that they have physically visited, and its contemporary form is far more modern than their imaginings and experiences of the city's past. In this sense, the city *is* modern—the pinnacle of modernity in the lived experience of many Cambodian people.

However, even though the modern status of the contemporary city is high relative to the rest of the country and relative to its recent past, this has not produced a sense of

complacency. As is evident in the following quotes, there is a strong desire for continued growth and development.

Yes, I observed a lot of change related to security or war...I want more improvement, more development than now but I appreciate now is okay...I'm proud of that but not enough.

Chanda, training manager, early 40s¹⁰²

It's 30 years after the war, and we're proud of what we have right now, but we want to do more.

Sareth, Monk, Wat Ounalom, NGO Director, Raise and Support the Poor¹⁰³

In chapter two I cited Ferguson's assertion that people in poor African countries typically approach the question of modernity from without. For the residents of Phnom Penh, the complexity of the question is exacerbated by the ambiguity of modernity. Modernity is rapidly taking hold of the city and the city is the pinnacle of Cambodian modernity in both time and space. At the same time however, there are many frames through which the city is either lacking, or seen to be *not* modern. Pride in the present, though widespread, often co-exists with recognition of the inadequacy of the present, or is qualified by desires for further modernisation and development. As we will see in the following section, the view that Phnom Penh is not modern is produced partially through increasing engagement with the world, which can highlight Phnom Penh's low position in hierarchies of modern status on regional and global scales.

¹⁰² Pers. Comm. 31 August, 2010

¹⁰³ Pers. Comm. 28 August, 2010

Positioning the Present: Phnom Penh in the Modern World



Figure 10: The site of the Mekong Pharos development on Chruy Changva peninsula

‘Well in OUR country,’ said Alice, still panting a little, ‘you’d generally get to somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.’

‘A slow sort of country!’ said the Queen. ‘Now, HERE, you see, it takes all the running YOU can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that’

Extract from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (Carroll 2010, p. 70)

In evolutionary biology, the *Red Queen Hypothesis* (van Valen 1973) posits that the rapid evolution enabled by the mixing of genes that comes with sexual reproduction allows a species to evolve quickly—but only to maintain its relative status, or ecological niche in the wider ecosystem.¹⁰⁴ The evolution of Phnom Penh is analogous—continued and rapid development is needed simply in order for the city to

¹⁰⁴ This is one of two phenomena explained by the *Red Queen Hypothesis*. The other relates to the extinction of groups of organisms, and is not pertinent to the argument advanced in this chapter.

maintain its relative position in the world. For all the modernisation that has taken place in Phnom Penh, and all the pride that exists in the contemporary city, it would be difficult to argue that the city is moving up in international hierarchies of the world's cities. As we saw earlier in this chapter, during the modernisation drive under Sihanouk in the 1950s and 1960s the Cambodian government made claims that the country had reached the standards of developed nations in particular fields, and that broadly speaking, that Cambodia was amongst the most advanced nations in Asia (1991, p. 7). Today's modernisation drive is nowhere near as ambitious. It is now rare to encounter an expectation—popular or political—that Phnom Penh or Cambodia will reach the standards of modern life experienced in the West, in developed countries, or the most modern parts of Asia. As we have seen, pride in the city's development is positioned primarily with relation to the city's past, but not its position in the world today. James Ferguson's claim that the teleology of development has transformed into a relatively static hierarchy of status (Ferguson 2006) is not significantly challenged, even in this environment of rapid modernisation and growth.

In the previous chapter we saw that there are many assertions to advanced world-status being made with reference to the development of Phnom Penh's built environment. The projected status of these abandoned developments can be seen in a television advertisement for the *Mekong Pharos* project—the site of which is pictured above. The narrator lists waterfront architectural spectacles throughout the world—'Jin Mao tower,¹⁰⁵ Burj Al Arab tower, tall buildings by the river in Manhattan, Sydney Opera House'¹⁰⁶—and goes on to inform the viewer that Phnom Penh will soon join these cities with its own riverside architectural spectacle on the Chroy Changva peninsula. Whatever hope this advertisement might have given, the dream or

¹⁰⁵ The footage of the Shanghai skyline is focused on the Oriental Pearl Television tower, with Jin Mao Tower on the edge of the picture.

¹⁰⁶ The advertisement can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tA6CVM8IY10>

expectation that Phnom Penh might soon be home to modern architecture on par with Sydney, Shanghai, New York and Dubai, is surely waning, as the developers have built only an office which is now partly boarded up, and construction has been halted indefinitely.¹⁰⁷ If developments such as *Mekong Pharos* have produced dreams or expectations of Phnom Penh's rising world status, or its membership amongst the ranks of the world's most modern cities, they have been stifled over the past few years as this, and many similar projects have failed to materialise.

During the course of my fieldwork I found little to suggest that the grand claims made in the marketing of these projects have produced a popular or political perception that Phnom Penh is rising in international hierarchies of modernity. In describing Phnom Penh's status in the world, statements from government are typically more reserved. Their relational descriptions of Phnom Penh often point to emergence, or increasing significance—but not excellence—within the region, and rarely make direct comparisons with any specific cities or countries. Comparisons occasionally use broad terms such as the 'modern world' or 'developed countries', or the more geographically specific categories of Asia or ASEAN.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has transferred this country to be stable in both politic and economy; to particularly, Phnom Penh, the heart of the country has been well developing. In the near future, this charming city will welcome a new comfortable satellite, well equipped city as other cities in ASEAN region [*sic*].

Phnom Penh Capital Hall, 2010)¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ "Strong current for development", The Phnom Penh Post, accessed February 12, 2012, <http://phnompenhpost.com/Real-Estate/strong-current-for-development.html>

¹⁰⁸ "Capital Welcomes Satellite City Project With Botanic Garden, Stadium and ASEAN+3 Zone," Phnom Penh Capital Hall, accessed July 2, 2011, <http://www.phnompenh.gov.kh/news-capital-welcomes-satellite-city-project-with-botanic-gardenstadium-and-asean3-zone-911.html>

At the moment, since Phnom Penh has made a huge progress in socio-economic sector, construction of high rise building, roads and bridges, all of foreign tourists, investors and friends who come to visit Cambodia always deeply admire achievement and development. This makes us feel extremely proud and be strongly committed to the national development process, especially in the capital city of Phnom Penh and other provinces in order to enhance the prestige of the nation as well as attracting investment to transform Cambodia to become a small dragon in Asia in the future [*sic*].

Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, 24 June 2010¹⁰⁹

The two examples above are public political statements and as such, they are very optimistic in claiming that Cambodia will 'become a small dragon in Asia' and that Phnom Penh will be 'well equipped city as other cities in the ASEAN region'. Even these optimistic statements are quite reserved—the city is argued to be moving toward inclusion in modern Asia or ASEAN, and not toward surpassing the achievements of any other specific cities. This could be seen to reflect the fact that Cambodia *is* becoming more modern, but also that the economic disparity between Phnom Penh and even regional capitals like Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur remains wide. Both of these statements point to the establishment of wider significance for the city, without necessarily improving its relative position internationally.

The government speaks about the achievement of the Norodom flyover¹¹⁰ [...] but you look at Thailand they've got thousands of kilometres of skyway? So when

¹⁰⁹ "Speech at the Inauguration Ceremony of Kbal Thnal Overpass", Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 12, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/24jun10_kbal-thnol_overpass_speech.htm

¹¹⁰ The Norodom flyover was Cambodia's first piece of elevated roadway, completed in June 2010.

the people go outside [Cambodia] and compare to what we achieve here it's nothing.

Yim Sovann, Member of Parliament for Phnom Penh, member of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party¹¹¹

We should not have huge developments surrounded by slums, with the poorest of the poor looking up at the skyscrapers.

Mu Suchoa, Member of Parliament for Kampot, member of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party¹¹²

In contrast to the optimistic statements from the Prime Minister and the PPMG, comments and comparisons from members of the opposition party, predictably downplay or dismiss the achievements of the government and of the progress of the city more broadly. Yim Sovann, the MP for Phnom Penh, opined that the development of Cambodia's first overpass—an achievement that was lauded by the government—was insignificant relative to what exists in Thailand. For Yim Sovann, looking at the development of Cambodia's neighbours highlights the inadequacy of present-day Phnom Penh. For another opposition MP, Mu Suchoa, the city's new symbols of modernity such as skyscrapers are seen as inappropriate for Phnom Penh due to the continued presence of poverty.

For those outside of politics, but still playing an active role in the city's development, accounts of Phnom Penh's position in the world are typically less polarised. When comparing Phnom Penh with other cities in the region, informants who worked in urban planning or property development typically saw Phnom Penh as inferior to other cities in the region, either explicitly or implicitly.

¹¹¹ Pers. Comm. 30 August, 2010

¹¹² "Glitzy modern satellite city to be built near Phnom Penh and its poor slums", AsiaNews.it, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9435>

I believe that for now, 'global city' is just a name [for Phnom Penh's edge city developments], but if we look at the region, I think that Phnom Penh will benefit from cities that are close to us...because in the future we aim to be integrated in the region... I'm still optimistic that we will benefit from those two cities [of Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City] when they connect the ASEAN railway and highway systems.

Ly Saveth, Director of Administration, Phnom Penh Capital Hall¹¹³

It's good to see...our city is very modern, it has high-rise buildings, I think like that. But to me high-rise buildings are just normal.

Meng Bunnarith, Director of Department of Land Management, Ministry of Land Management Urban Planning and Construction¹¹⁴

I wouldn't say [Phnom Penh] will be the same [as Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, or Bangkok] but I'm sure we are on the same track as them 30-40 years ago. The easiest way to look at Phnom Penh city is Vietnam, Saigon. We are like 5-10 years behind them.

Eric Tan, Director, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone¹¹⁵

In response to my question of whether Phnom Penh could acquire global significance, Ly Saveth's answer was more realistic than the public political statements above, though as he points out, still optimistic. He hopes that the development of transport networks and regional integration will provide economic benefit for Phnom Penh from increased connectivity with larger Southeast Asian cities. If this connectivity is realised, the city can benefit from, but not compete with, its more successful, more modern neighbours. Meng Bunnarith and Eric Tan, both young professionals who have

¹¹³ Pers. Comm. 2 September, 2010

¹¹⁴ Pers. Comm. 2 September, 2010

¹¹⁵ Pers. Comm. 4 September, 2010

travelled extensively outside Cambodia, put forth a detached but optimistic view. They acknowledged that Phnom Penh is improving, but saw it as still being much less impressive—either lagging behind, or worse than—other cities that they were familiar with.

A similar sentiment was found amongst informants who were not involved in politics, urban planning or real estate development, but had travelled to other cities in the region. For these informants, the experience of urban centres abroad highlighted the inadequacies of Phnom Penh.

When I came back to Phnom Penh I felt upset, because Beijing is very modern, very clean, the road, lifestyle, very different.

Kimleng, pharmaceutical sales representative, mid 20s¹¹⁶

Even in 20 years from now, I don't see how Phnom Penh can compare to Bangkok or Ho Chi Minh City.

Poly, sales representative, mid 20s¹¹⁷

There are limits to this observation in that the majority of Phnom Penh's residents do not travel overseas, and for those who do, the inadequacy of Phnom Penh is unlikely to be a highlight of their experience. As such, in relaying their experiences to others, those who do travel are more likely to focus on the experience of going abroad than the experience of returning. Still, I found little to suggest that in terms of the city, and of being modern, Phnom Penh's residents feel that their city is superior to other cities in the region or throughout the world. While the city is not modern in this sense—it is not 'up to date'—it is a modernising city, and the premiere space of Cambodian modernity. As we saw in the previous section, Phnom Penh's low position in international

¹¹⁶ Pers. Comm. 12 August, 2010

¹¹⁷ Pers. Comm. 10 August, 2010

hierarchies of modern status does not preclude pride in the city, and the belief in the city's emergence on the world stage. This pride in the present period of modernisation co-exists with an awareness of Phnom Penh's relative lack of modernity. When assertions to enhanced world status are made, they are cast as assertions to membership, without necessarily involving a hierarchical reconfiguration, or overtaking any specific cities.

Reflections on the Scales of Modernity: the City and the Individual

I will pause here briefly to reflect on the scales of modernity that I have explored in the first half of this chapter. I have discussed modernity through two frames. The first—in which Phnom Penh *is* modern—extends temporally to the city's lacklustre past and geographically, casting the city with reference to the rest of Cambodia. The second—in which Phnom Penh *is not* modern—positions the city within the international present, measured against the modernity of cities throughout the region and the world.

Reducing the modernity of the city to these two scales is a simplification, but it is useful simplification in that these are the two most prominent ways in which the modern status of the city is judged. In addition to these scales, there are numerous international scales—historical antagonism with Thailand and Vietnam has produced particular scales on which modernity is cast, Cambodia's membership and its chairing of ASEAN in 2012 has produced another, as has the economic rise of Asia and claims of an Asia century. We have seen some evidence that on these regional scales, Phnom Penh is seen to be making a limited claim of membership but not ascendancy. As a hierarchy of status, urban modernity exists on many scales, and as we have seen through exploration of just two scales, modern status is variable—Phnom Penh is simultaneously the pinnacle of Cambodian modernity, and a small peripheral city far from the apex of international hierarchies.

This simplification to two scales is informative for understanding not only the modernity of the city, but also the modern status of individuals in Phnom Penh. It

demonstrates modernity's ambivalence and its often contradictory multiplicity—the city is simultaneously an exemplar of modernity, and of a lack thereof. Analysis of individuals and their modern status similarly reveals ambivalence, but it is a greater ambivalence which means that modernity in this sense cannot be usefully reduced to just two frames. The residents of Phnom Penh are becoming modern with reference to a wide range of international phenomena, and modern status is sometimes judged on international and national scales. But within Phnom Penh, and in the relatively local experiences of most of the city's residents, it is more frequently judged on smaller scales. It is entwined with processes that might be better understood through frames other than modernity such as educational and occupational attainment, consumption, or the generation of wealth. The quest for an understanding of individual modernity is elusive, and the mess of its many scales and multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings, often escapes analytical rigour. Rather than focusing on a subset of scalar configurations, the latter half of this chapter focuses on the parameters through which assertions to enhanced modern status are made. In doing so, I will shed light on many different scales of modernity, and social, economic and geographical obstacles to moving between them.

Becoming a Modern Individual: *Having and Knowing*

Stepping out onto my balcony and observing the small cul-de-sac on which I lived in Phnom Penh's Boeung Keng Kang II, was a regular break from study, work, or the incessant, grating sound of Cambodian television being watched by my housemates.¹¹⁸ But for a period of just a few weeks in 2006, it was also a prime location to view the importance of displays of status for a handful of moderately wealthy families. When one family bought a car I thought little of it. It was mildly amusing that they kept the car

¹¹⁸ A large proportion of Cambodian television is dubbed using just a few voice actors. It is very easy to get tired of their voices.

in their living room, but this was common in Phnom Penh. Within a few days, another car appeared on the street, followed by another, followed by a car purchased by my landlord who lived beneath me. Within a period of about six weeks, approximately half the houses in the street had acquired cars. My landlord and her husband bought their car because he needed to travel to and from Sihanoukville for his job. Another family in the same street said they bought theirs after Navy, who was pregnant at the time, came close to crashing her motorbike. But the trigger for these purchases—the reason that they all occurred within a short period of time—was an intense desire not to be outdone by others on the street. As Phnom Penh engages with global modernity, and used cars are imported from countries such as the United States and South Korea, status making claims take place in small spaces like this cul-de-sac.

In describing people who they thought to be more or less modern than themselves, informants typically referred only to people within Cambodia. These small scales were not so explicit as to point across the street and refer to neighbours as more or less modern than themselves, but it was apparent that initial thoughts on the modern status of people reflected direct experience—which for most people, is predominantly local. For most of the residents of Phnom Penh, lived experience is almost entirely contained within the borders of Cambodia. These local hierarchical scales are partially insulated from wider understandings of modernity. While it was not uncommon for people to describe Phnom Penh as non-modern with respect to international reference points, nobody went so far as to broadly categorise the residents of the city as non-modern.

Modern people, they dress modern...handsome, they have phones and things like computers and internet...they have education and they are fantastic.

Bunna, unemployed, early 40s¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Pers. Comm. 23 July, 2010

Young people now are very modern. If we harvest, there is a machine to husk rice, if we have to plough the fields, we use machines. In my generation, we used buffalos.

Leak, merchant at garment factory accommodation, mid 40s¹²⁰

Rural people are not modern, they don't often own businesses. They know only know how grow rice. They don't have a lot of money like us in the city.

Siep, merchant at Olympic Market, late 30s¹²¹

I think about the way that they speak. Sometimes if they have money or high education, their speech is different from the people that don't know anything.

Ny, shoe salesman and education administrator, early 30s¹²²

The above quotes begin to illustrate some of the imagined parameters of being modern in contemporary Phnom Penh. Modern status was seen in wealth and consumption, in education and knowledge, in personal presentation and speech, in the ability to travel and in generational change. Differentiation between modern and non-modern people was cast in terms of rich and poor, knowing and not knowing, urban and rural, and to a lesser degree, in terms of young and old. While these vectors were typically seen as local in scope, at the same time, the parameters of becoming modern include practices that are seen as foreign, global or Western—I will return to this point in the following chapter.

To a large degree, all the above statements cast modern status in terms of *having* or *knowing*. Modern people *have* money, phones, internet and machines, they *know* more than just how to grow rice, they possess advanced knowledge due to higher education,

¹²⁰ Pers. Comm. 4 August, 2010

¹²¹ Pers. Comm. 20 July, 2010

¹²² Pers. Comm. 30 July, 2010

and they speak differently to people who don't. While *having* and *knowing* are key to status in many contexts, they corresponding to two Khmer language terms *neak mien* (អ្នកមាន) meaning rich people (Headley et al 1997), or literally 'people who have' and *neak ceh dəŋ* (អ្នកចេះដឹង), meaning 'people with knowledge and know-how' (Edwards 2007) or 'capable-informed people' (Harris 2007).¹²³ In their spoken English, a number of informants referred to 'high education people', a term that is often used as a translation of *neak ceh dəŋ*. The above parameters of being modern generally fit either or both of these categories—attempting to improve one's status in imagined hierarchies of modernity means working towards becoming *neak ceh dəŋ*, *neak mien*, or ideally both. For individuals, it is in education and knowledge, and wealth and consumption—or at least the image of these factors—that the strongest claims to modern status are made.

Statistically speaking, Cambodia is making strong improvements across the board in the areas of *having* and *knowing*. GDP per capita has more than doubled in recent years (World Resources Institute 2011) and higher education enrolments have grown exponentially over the same period (UNESCO 2012). But beneath these impressive statistics, there is huge variability in the distribution of wealth, access to education—and reflecting this variability, there are a large number of scales on which Cambodians assert claims to improved modern status.

New Wealth in Phnom Penh: Between Rich and Poor

You can identify the characteristics of certain people by what car they drive.

Those who drive Camrys or Corollas are usually hard working middle class... they earn by working hard. And those who drive the Lexus 480, the big Lexus and the

¹²³ The term *neak ceh dəŋ* has a long history, which has been detailed by Penny Edwards in *Cambodge, the cultivation of a nation (2007)*. The term was initially used to describe secular intellectuals, who the Cambodians who were capable of engaging with the French colonisers.

new Lexus, or usually those in government, they get easy money and they don't respect the road rules. And those who drive older Camrys from the 80s, they are from the provinces, taxi drivers and such. They respect the road rules, yet when they go to the town, they're always pulled over by police. So you can see the growing middle class by people driving Corollas and Camrys.

Savin, accountant, early 30s¹²⁴

We have a few percentage of really, really rich, and we have many really, really poor. So you don't have a middle class in this country.

Ou Virak, President, Cambodian Center for Human Rights, quoted in (Springer 2011, p. 2563)

There is a popular perception that inequality in Cambodia is such that the country can be simply divided into rich and poor, haves and have-nots—as is evidenced in the above quote from Ou Virak, and grounded to some degree in statistical measures of the country's rising inequality. But there is a lot between these two extremes—the visibility of the Camry class that Savin has identified in the above quote is obvious to anyone living in Phnom Penh. A Camry or Corolla does not place the owner amongst the 'really, really rich' nor could they be considered to be 'really, really poor'. They are, as Savin observes above, visible evidence of a growing middle class, who are becoming moderately modern—much less modern than those who drive Lexuses, but typically far more modern than most of the country, and more modern than the older generations of their own families.

In recent years, massive numbers of Cambodians have risen out of poverty and are increasingly engaged with modernity. A small number have come to be immensely wealthy, some have re-established themselves as moderately successful merchants and the booming economy has drawn in significant numbers of upwardly mobile university

¹²⁴ 29 August, 2010

graduates into white-collar wage-labour, as well as much larger numbers of rural migrants into salaried factory work. Many of those who have amassed immense wealth have bought sports utility vehicles from brands such as Hummer, Lexus and Range Rover, while those who have come into moderate wealth are more likely to have bought—as Savin observes above—Toyota sedans, or far more often, with slightly lower levels of wealth, a motorcycle. A much larger number of people have not experienced this success, but the numbers who have are statistically significant and continue to rise.

From 1990 to 2008, the proportion of the Cambodian population deemed to be middle class by economists from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) rose by 24 per cent (ADB 2010, p. 8). That amounts to approximately four million people, or 27 per cent of today's population. In total, 33 per cent of the population fit this category, meaning that the overwhelming majority of these people are—to a moderate degree—newly wealthy. By this measure, the middle class is made up of those members of the population with expenditure of between PPP\$2 and PPP\$20 per day, which equates to an approximate real-currency expenditure of between 3200 riel (\$US0.79) and 32,000 riel (\$US7.90).¹²⁵ Measured by these economic terms, by the capacity for consumption, the Cambodian middle class makes up a significant portion of the population. In Phnom Penh in particular, over the decade to 2004, the rate of poverty has approximately halved and according to their measure, Phnom Penh is the only part of the country where the disparity between rich and poor has actually decreased (World Bank 2006, pp. 23-29). These figures may be skewed, given that Cambodia's shadow economy¹²⁶ is amongst the world's largest relative to the formal economy (Schneider et al 2010, p.

¹²⁵ Figures derived from Implied PPP conversion rate data from the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook Database, April 2010.

¹²⁶ The shadow economy accounts for economic activity that takes place outside of government regulation and taxation, and is generally not included in official measures of GDP.

30). But they serve as a starting point in demonstrating the significance of upward social mobility in Phnom Penh and the growing capacity of the city's residents to consume, to travel and to participate in other activities that they deem to be modern.

It is certainly useful to recognise the growing significance of moderate gains in wealth in Cambodia, but the addition of a 'middle' category between rich and poor does little to reveal the complexity and variability of scales on which modern status is judged. By the ADB's measure, the majority of Phnom Penh's garment factory and construction workers are classified as being part of the middle class. The same categorisation would apply, though their numbers are difficult to measure, to many people working in the informal economy—such as sex workers, and even moto-taxi and tuk-tuk drivers. At the upper end of the scale of PPP\$2 to PPP\$20 are the workers in Phnom Penh's emergent knowledge economy—university graduates who work in air-conditioned offices in the private sector, in government and in NGOs and international development organisations. To consider all of these groups as the middle class might seem far-fetched, particularly with reference the evolution of the term 'middle class' in European social and political theory (King 2008).¹²⁷ Many of them do not possess Weberian middle class characteristics such as white-collar professional employment or tertiary education, but they are still people who have moved out of rural poverty, have elevated their socio-economic status, and who see themselves as increasingly modern.

The ADB's definition of a middle class is both informative and problematic. The variability of individuals who are placed in this category highlights the wide range of wealth, education and status that is present in Phnom Penh, beyond the polarised categories of rich and poor. At the same time however, it is unclear how attempting to

¹²⁷ King's exploration of the problems in delineating and defining the middle class in South East Asia is informative. This has often involved attempts to define what it is that designates someone as being 'middle class' with relation to much broader class-analysis with its origins in Marxist or other academic traditions conceived with reference to the development of the middle classes and of social structure in Western Europe.

define a middle class is a useful endeavour—comparable attempts in other Asian contexts have demonstrated little relevance in terms of the shared experience of members. Defining socio-economic classes and drawing class boundaries is controversial, as these boundaries are inherently fuzzy (Koo 1999, cited in So 2004). Hsiao and Koo have argued that this is even more marked in the case of Southeast Asia's middle classes which are 'coming along at a lower stage of development, exhibiting even more ambiguity and fluidity in their collective identity' (Koo 2006, p. 11). For Cambodia, the contemporary growth and emergence of the middle class(es) comes well after those of East and Southeast Asia, and in the wake of an acute unsettling of established class by the Khmer Rouge, these characteristics are stronger still.

In this fuzzy, fluctuating space of moderate incomes, individuals at both ends of the spectrum often see their gains in income and their new city lives as an engagement with modernity. This is supported by the observations of Annuska Derks, who has published research on some of the poorer groups in the ADB's middle class spectrum, including women who work as street merchants, sex workers and garment factory workers, and Cambodian fishing and construction workers in Thailand. She argues that individuals in all these categories still broadly regard themselves as upwardly mobile, enjoying their engagement with the modernity of the city, and their newfound capacity for consumption (Derks 2008; Derks 2010).

Working and living in Phnom Penh gives these young people the opportunity to become, if only temporarily and to a limited extent, part of a 'modern' urban world

(Derks 2008, p. 12)

Derks usefully describes the membership of low-income¹²⁸ female migrant workers in Phnom Penh's urban modernity as limited and temporary. However, it might be more usefully understood as meaningful only on particular scales and in particular contexts. Their assertions to modern status are not recognised by those who work in the central city, and as Derks has acknowledged, they are always seen as *neak srae* or rural people, by the residents of the central city. Typically, their own expectation is to return to the countryside and work as farmers after they get married (Derks 2008, p. 144). Their occasional engagement with the modernity of the central city takes place through outings to places such as Wat Phnom, moving around the city on foot, attending free concerts, or visiting markets and shopping malls. They are visitors in the central city, and while they engage with its modernity, their claim to membership is highly limited. As students and young professionals work on laptops in the many new cafes with espresso machines and free Wi-Fi, they can only look on—many items on the menu cost more than a day's wages. For low-paid migrant workers, expectations of an urban life of abundance and air-conditioning are frequently based on mediated experiences, and are rarely matched by reality. Desires to shed a rural image are rarely achieved through moving to the city to engage in low-paid work (Derks 2008, p. 165).

On the scale of their home village however, Derks' description indicates that these workers are exemplars of modernity, this is an opportunity to display their new modern status to their peers, in a context where relatively speaking, it is recognised as

¹²⁸ While they are low-income, very few of them would earn less than \$PPP2 per day, equivalent to just under eighty US cents. This figure is extrapolated using data from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2011).

being modern. They typically bring gifts home on holidays, and at these times, they are seen as different from their rural peers due to their capacity for consumption and urban sophistication. Similarly, I have observed young men returning to villages in Prey Veng after stints working on Thai fishing boats. Their style of dress, personal presentation, and stories of life on shore leave in Thai coastal towns such as Rayong, differentiates them from their less mobile peers, and inspires other young men to take a similar path. While both these groups make assertions to modern status based on their increased capacity for consumption and engagement with urban modernity, neither can make an enduring claim to membership in the modern city—whether that is Phnom Penh, or a relatively small Thai town like Rayong. They could be seen as encountering, rather than becoming a part of, urban modernity.

A much smaller number of migrants to Phnom Penh, make a stronger and more enduring claim to membership in the modernity of the central city. This involves an assertion to modern status that involves more than just *having* modern things. Within the broad spectrum of Cambodia that the ADB describes as ‘middle class’, educational statistics point to the rise of a group of tertiary-educated Cambodians, the majority of which are located in Phnom Penh. Like their low-paid counterparts, their claim to modern status is strongest on returning to their home village. However, those who are successful do not simply engage with the modernity of the central city. As we will see in the following section, they often establish more meaningful claims to membership through embarking on white-collar careers in Phnom Penh’s emergent knowledge economy.

Rice Farmers in the Modern Economy

When I was young, I dreamt that I can study higher and I want to learn English, but just at that time my family was so difficult, so I couldn't study a lot...now, it's simple because we stopped study and have children and look after them and something like that, it's simple. I feel frustrated with myself, sometimes, I have no

education other people have high education...sometimes I cry...because I have low education and they look down on me.

Lai, merchant, early 20s¹²⁹

When I stay at home in Toul Kouk, everybody stares at us and when we ask them they don't answer, and they just stare and walk away, and they said that you are *neak srae*,¹³⁰ so I don't want to speak with you...they think I come from the countryside because they see our dress, sometimes, a lot of people in Phnom Penh, they like to wear new clothes...and short.

Chhenghuot, student, late teens¹³¹

[My parents are] just laypeople, because they are uneducated, they're happy to see people have high educated but they don't know how to push [...] they just ask 'hi children', during dinner, they said, 'who wants to become high educated or to become a professional staff in your life?' Among my brothers and sisters, only I raised my hand. I wanted to because I don't want to work in the field or hard work at the village.

Chanda, training manager, early 40s¹³²

Chanda was part of the first generation of students to graduate from her university in 1996. Her life story, which is described in more detail in the appendix, is remarkable, but not uncommon. Coming from a poor, uneducated rural household, through hard work and a little luck, she was able to continue in school right through to university and ultimately trade a life of manual agricultural labour for white collar work in air-conditioned offices. As she related her story, Chanda would periodically take a

¹²⁹ Pers. Comm. 3 August, 2010.

¹³⁰ *Neak srae* is a derogatory term used to describe rural people in Cambodia.

¹³¹ Interview conducted on 28 August, 2010

¹³² Pers. Comm. 31 August, 2010

breath before remarking on ‘another big turning point’. While most Cambodian villages are not far from a primary school, high schools and upper secondary schools are more disparate. To continue studying beyond primary school, Chanda, like many Cambodians, had to first save money to buy a bicycle, then use it to travel seven kilometres to school along long-neglected roads that had been damaged by the war. The move to upper secondary school was even harder, as the closest school was in Battambang town—too far for a bicycle. Chanda was able to negotiate an arrangement with a friend to help with their business and housework in exchange for being able to live with them while she attended school. Throughout her youth, Chanda made arrangements like this, took on paid work and sold goods in the market wherever she could in order to support her quest for education. She eventually secured a scholarship in Prey Veng where she was part of the first generation of students at Maharishi Vedic University (MVU).¹³³ Chanda is now president of the MVU alumni association, and has established a successful career first in positions at NGOs and later in the private sector.

A lot of people in Phnom Penh city, and they have high knowledge, so they can get [a job], before us, I don't know if we can get a job easily...they use computer very well and for me I don't know, I never touch it even.

Chhenghuot, student, late teens¹³⁴

Chhenghuot moved to Phnom Penh intending to find work in order to fund her study. She was determined, but not overly confident about her ability to do so, knowing that her lack of knowledge would be a hindrance—she had not yet touched a computer.¹³⁵

¹³³ MVU was Cambodia’s first rural university, and was established as a partnership between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Australian Aid for Cambodia Fund. Until the name change, the university was linked to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s Transcendental Meditation movement and the teaching philosophy, at least that of the foreigners, reflected this link.

¹³⁴ Interview conducted on 28 August, 2010

¹³⁵ An update from Brak Sareth, the monk who runs the NGO supporting education in their village confirmed that 8 months later she had found work as a receptionist in a hotel. She was

Her story is similar to Chanda's in many ways, though hers is located in the present. She overcame similar obstacles and is now enrolled at university, though she was unable to gain a scholarship and her parents had to sell their two cows to fund her move to Phnom Penh and assist with her fees. Unlike Chanda, she has no relatives to stay with, and has rented a room which is shared with around 5 other girls. At the time of the interview, she was still uncomfortable living in the city, and this was not helped by their roommates who refused to talk to her on account of her background.

In describing other students from her upper secondary school who had progressed to university, Chhenghuot pointed out that these students were from a nearby town. To live in the town, even such a small town, means short travel times to school. It also means that these students are far more likely to have educated parents, and have been able to engage in extra-curricular classes in computing or English language. Relative to her peers who lived in the town, the ascent being attempted Chhenghuot—on the socio-economic ladder or on a hierarchy of modern status—is remarkable. Far more common are more moderate advances in socio-economic status—people who have come from merchant families in provincial towns rather than from farming families.

[People from our village] said that you're stupid to let me study, why don't you get your daughter to go to a factory, why do you let her to study at university? Because they know about the country, you know, very corrupt, so everything is not good. So you are poor, you're from a poor family, you go to university, after you graduate, how can you get a job?

Chhenghuot, student, late teens¹³⁶

then taking night classes at the University of Management. At this stage, the risk that their families took in selling land and livestock to make a long-term investment in their education appears to be paying off.

¹³⁶ Pers. Comm. 28 August, 2010

My friends that stopped, they dropped out at grade 10 or grade 11, they got a job and they got a family and they have a house, they have a car, and they say that oh don't waste your time to study, should be starting a business, go to the farm...study is not important, but I still think that study is very important for me.

Sreyneang, student, late teens¹³⁷

For rural Cambodians, and farming families in particular, committing to long-term investment in education is a great risk—it is a long-term aspiration that takes years for the family to see any return on their investment. Derision from neighbours—partly motivated by jealousy, but also the real possibility of failure—was frequently cited by participants from rural backgrounds. While still a student, Chhenghuot has little to show for her life in the city, and at the time of the interview she was still a financial burden on her parents and not in a position to provide for them or bring gifts home on holidays. At this point, her peers from her home village who went to work in the garment factories have more to show for their efforts.

For today's rural poor, the risk is in many ways greater than it was in the 1990s when people like Chanda went through university. Today, university degrees are increasingly common and youth unemployment and under-employment is on the rise (ILO 2007). The rapid growth of the higher education sector in Cambodia—and the number of private institutions in particular—has produced large numbers of graduates whose skills are often poorly matched with the demands of the labour market (Chealy 2009).¹³⁸ Over 110,000 Cambodians were enrolled in higher education in the 2007-2008 academic year with over 35 per cent of these being female (UNESCO 2010).

¹³⁷ Pers. Comm. 30 August, 2010

¹³⁸ While university enrolments are poorly matched to the demands of the job market, participants often had very little understanding of what they would be studying at the point of enrolment.

When Chanda entered university in 1993 there were just over 10,000 students enrolled, with women accounting for less than 20 per cent (UNESCO 2012).

While this is certainly a positive development, graduates now enter a highly competitive job market. Today, almost all university graduates have a knowledge of English, and to stand out as a remarkable student requires more than just a degree. Chhenghuot is starting university when it is now common for young people in Phnom Penh to study at multiple universities—a practice that informants in government and at a private university stated that they were trying to prevent.¹³⁹ Without going too far into the detail of these changes, it is clear that the path to a modern professional life through attaining a university education is far more common, but also far less clear and reliable than it was two decades ago.

Apart from this temporal difference, these stories begin to highlight some of the complexities of the scales of modernity for individuals in Cambodia. Beyond the polarised divisions between urban and rural, or between Phnom Penh and the provinces, we saw that in the ‘provincial’ or ‘rural’ categories, the distance from upper secondary schools was a major barrier to continued study. These distances are highly variable by province (SCW 2006), those who are born closer to a large regional centre—such as Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom or Battambang—have a much greater chance of completing their secondary education and becoming eligible for university. Those who are further from these towns must travel further, and if they do come to study in Phnom Penh—as was the case with Chhenghuot—they are likely to be the subject of derision and social exclusion on the basis of their rural upbringing. Annuska Derks (2008, p. 145) has noted the difficulty in crossing the gap between *neak srae* and *neak krong*—country people and city people. For those from a rural background, it is

¹³⁹ This was cited as a problem by both Mak Ngoy, Deputy Director General of Higher Education at Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and Ban Thero, Vice Chancellor, Cambodia Mekong University.

difficult to rid oneself of the effects of their upbringing, with the sun and hard work in the fields having a visible impact on appearance, and immersion in rural social settings having produced identifiable patterns of speech.

Females faced particular difficulties in continuing education and establishing themselves as modern professionals due to cultural restrictions. Living away from home to attend upper secondary school or university is far easier for young men, who can live cheaply at a pagoda—the complex surrounding a Buddhist temple. While many young women from Chhenghuot’s village have moved to Phnom Penh to work in the garment factories, and are engaged in modern consumption practices, they have moved into a very different space of modernity. Phalla and Chhenghuot will increasingly live their lives in much cleaner, air-conditioned spaces—such as their university classrooms and their new workplaces—and if they continue to be successful in gaining white-collar employment, they will earn many times the salary of their peers in the garment factories.

Degrees of Inclusion, Exclusion and Abjection

All this development area, I don't know what to call it, but it's great. I don't have time to visit, but I can see the construction, and feel happy to see that it's modern, up to date. Before we just had cottages. Now we have 10 or 20 floors, even 40 floors. We're happy because our country is developing a lot and, when I was young, there was only one and two-storey houses. So it means that I can see the modern generation, and that is good. I want to be like that but I don't have money to do it.

I'm not modern, I don't know anything. Modern people, they can fly and go abroad...but I don't have anything, I just stay at home. I can't go anywhere, that's the difference.

Bunna, unemployed, early 40s

Bunna's case—as we can see in the above quote, and in more detail in the appendix—highlights the exclusivity of modernity, but also the ambiguity and ambivalence of this exclusivity. He is resigned to never be modern, but he lives in a household that is full of people who have attended university and are pursuing white-collar careers. He is well aware of his lack of mobility, his inability to afford current fashion, his low level of education, and the relative lack of technology in his life. He is impressed, and in awe of the people that he considers to be modern, he thinks 'they are fantastic'. They are people who engage with technology, have the wealth and sophistication to dress according to current fashions, and are well educated and are able to travel. But he is largely apathetic about his own capacity to become 'modern'. He is not interested in trying to gain a better education and to be more 'modern' himself, as he felt he was too old to go back to school. Today, he rarely leaves the house—he is bored at home, and likened his day-to-day life to being in prison. Still, he views the modernisation taking place around him in positive terms, and is excited about the prospects for his children.

From the earlier theorisations of modernity, treated as a set of processes associated with the rise of rationalism in the Western world, Bunna could be considered outside of, or in opposition to modernity. Here, the weakness of 'multiple modernities' identified in chapter two starts to show. His story and others like it can and should be included in describing the socio-cultural and even the economic transformations taking place in contemporary Phnom Penh—changes frequently understood to represent a modernisation process. But he is not regarded as modern by other members of his household, nor does he regard himself as such. His position highlights the importance of issues of membership and of perceived exclusion from being modern in the everyday lives of the residents of Phnom Penh. He is largely, but not wholly excluded from the modernisation of the city. While not identifying as modern, he hopes that through his children, he will experience a vicarious engagement with modernity, as he hopes that his sister and brother in law will continue to support their study. The scales of Bunna

and Chhenghuot's exclusion are both intensely local. For Chhenghuot, it was within her rental room, and for Bunna, within the household. But as we saw in both cases, both exclusion and inclusion are partial. To a limited degree, Bunna still feels part of the modernising city, and through his children, feels that he will share in the success of his family. Similarly, Chhenghuot's exclusion from conversation in her rental room is countered by her sense of achievement and rising modern status associated with her university education.

For myself, and a number of other observers, the positivity associated with economic growth and political stability in Phnom Penh and in Cambodia more broadly, is seen to be widely celebrated. There is a stronger sense of inclusion than exclusion, even as the uneven distribution of the fruits of Cambodia's growth has seen rising inequality throughout the country—though Phnom Penh is a notable exception to this trend (World Bank 2006, p. 29). Modernity's exclusions are many, from the often violent dispossession of households who possess weak forms of land title, to the large numbers university graduates who find themselves unable to find work in Phnom Penh's competitive job market, to members of otherwise successful households like Bunna who, for whatever reason, are largely excluded from participation in modern life. Jennifer Robinson has argued that as much as the processes of modernisation have been exclusionary, so too has the theoretical imaginary of urban modernity, 'excluding many cities and their citizens from their accounts of the excitement and potential of city life' (Robinson 2006, p. x). Robinson describes the simultaneous pain and joy of a black South African poet, entirely excluded from the modern city of Durban during apartheid, but still captivated by its wonder. While the exclusion of someone like Bunna cannot be compared to that of apartheid, there is a similar uneasy co-existence of pain and joy in his observations of Phnom Penh's transformation.

The strongest argument that positions Cambodia's recent economic and urban development as exclusionary is made by Simon Springer (2012; 2011; 2010). Springer

views these processes primarily as the products of the establishment of neoliberalism in Cambodia and sees the benefits as existing only for a small elite. Springer argues that these developments have brought about increased violence linking neoliberalism to a claim that 'rapes, murders, and assaults have become a common lived experience for the poor as marginalization and minor differences are magnified' (2011, p. 17). In contrast, elites are insulated from this violence through the control of public space and private security measures. For Springer, the promises of the market economy—of increased living standards and emancipation from tyranny—have been empty. He sees this situation as being so extreme that he sees a new revolution as a real possibility.

But as we have seen, exclusion is relative, and being excluded or even violently cast out of these processes of modernisation does not preclude enthusiasm for modernity or even a feeling of inclusion in particular contexts and scales—from the household to the globe. The feeling of not being modern, or of low status within ones household, is much more immediate, intense and persistent than for someone like Kimleng, who felt that her city and her life were not very modern following a business trip to Beijing. Annuska Derks has shown that female migrant workers in Phnom Penh often feel modern in their engagement with the city. This is particularly strong when they return to their home village, but their experiences in the city are often confirmation that they will always be seen as 'rice people' rather than 'city people' (Derks 2008, pp. 21-36).

Individuals' relationships with modernity are typically ambivalent—membership is fluid and relative, with particular people and socio-economic groups having stronger or more persistent claims than others.

While many people have become modern, upward social mobility is commonly incremental. Beyond the urban and the rural, there are many other spaces that are both seen to occupy a higher position in national hierarchies of modern status, and that have more tangible benefits such as easier access to education and technology—necessities for establishing a modern career. As we have seen in the cases of Chanda and

Chenghuot, it is possible but very difficult to make the transition from a rural childhood far from a provincial centre, to a modern urban career. Further, in doing so however, they will frequently encounter derision, exclusion and a degree of alienation in both their new urban lives, and the village life they left behind.

Conclusion

In attempting to address the complexity of modernity's scales and spaces in Phnom Penh, there is a risk of adding to confusion over the meaning of modernity rather than clarity. What has been made clear in this chapter is that modernity cannot be understood in the singular, even within a geographically bounded locale such as Phnom Penh or Cambodia. As this chapter and the previous chapter have both demonstrated, there is a growing sense that Phnom Penh is becoming modern, and by extension, that Cambodia is becoming modern. At the same time however, many of the city's residents are well aware of the inadequacy of Phnom Penh relative to other cities in the region and the world. Phnom Penh is simultaneously at the apex of Cambodian modernity as the largest and most developed city in the country, and also peripheral to international imaginings of urban modernity as a relatively poor and undeveloped national capital.

Civic and national pride is not necessarily dulled for individuals who are excluded from, or occupy a low position within, much smaller spaces of modernity. Within the city however, spaces of modernity are more exclusive. Even the household was shown to be a site where relative status is intensely apparent. This obtuse inclusion and acute exclusion highlights the need to understand modernity in the plural, but not from the established perspectives of 'multiple' or 'alternative' modernities that we saw in chapter two. These perspectives located modernities within particular cultures or bounded within nation-states, whereas what we have seen in Phnom Penh, is modernity on a wide range of overlapping hierarchical social and spatial scales ranging from Chhenghuot's position in her shared rental room to Phnom Penh's position amongst the cities of the world.

7 Popular Imaginings and Tangible Realities: the Modern World from Phnom Penh



Figure 11: A snapshot of modernity on the dashboard of a taxi that runs between Phnom Penh and Kampot

Cambodians still appreciate foreigners a lot [...] generally, abroad, but not really Russia or the communist block anymore [...] they feel that a native English-speaking country is much better. [...] We respect highly educated people particularly those with degrees from Australia, England or America.

Ban Thero, Vice Chancellor, Cambodia Mekong University¹⁴⁰

It's about the Korean entertainment nowadays; the young people in Cambodia...like Koreanisation. I'm also crazy about that. I want to go there and see their live concerts there.

Vathana, student, late teens¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

Assertions to modern status are strongly linked to international reference points and facilitated by transnational flows of capital, images, ideas, products and people—even as they take place on relatively local scales. While the hierarchies of modern status are—for individuals at least—contained predominantly within Cambodia, assertions to enhanced modern status reference geographies beyond Cambodia. Fashionable youth mimic the style of South Korean pop stars such as *U-KISS*, *SHINee*, *Super Junior*, *2NE1* and *Wonder Girls*, and university students study English and to a lesser extent, Chinese and Korean, in their attempt to establish themselves as modern professionals. As wealthier residents of the city assert their claims to modern status amongst their peers, they take part in practices that they often imagine to be ‘Western’ such as eating fast food, drinking whisky, cognac or red wine, or even using electrical appliances. At the level of the city, we have already seen that the modernisation of the built environment and the development of infrastructure is driven by intra-Asian people, knowledge and capital.

These extra-territorial links are highly visible in central Phnom Penh. The prime riverfront area along Sisowath Quay—home to the French Quarter during the colonial era—is home to businesses that cater primarily to western tourists and expatriates. The new Cambodia-China friendship bridge, currently being built across the Tonle Sap in Russei Kaev, displays bold Chinese characters, and many foreign businesses or businesses selling foreign products actively market their origins. Geographies beyond Cambodia are used in marketing even in cases where the product or business is either locally produced, locally owned or both. Planetary geographical terms such as global, international, worldwide, world-class and *mondial* are used to sell everything from edge cities, to eyeglasses, to education, and from bread to books. More specific geographies are used in marketing particular products and services. These include the USA, France, Japan, Europe, Asia and even ASEAN. Goods and services, particularly

¹⁴¹ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

those associated with technology, education and luxury—that is, modern goods—are also frequently marketed through an association beyond Cambodia. But this is not just elsewhere, situated imaginings of places that are less modern are also common. China and Vietnam are used in vernacular expressions to deride poor quality products. When a rubber band snaps, it is not uncommon to hear a Cambodian make the flippant remark that it probably came from Vietnam.

This foreign-linked marketing and geographical understanding of the quality of products reflects perceived prominence in areas such as education, political and economic power, city-image and the built environment, and in more general standards of living. These perceptions of prominence shape Cambodian understandings of the location of modernity. This is not a singular modernity, but rather, multiple uneven imaginaries with particular aspects of modernity associated with various core locations throughout the world. In attempting to understand these inchoate imaginaries, it is useful to consider the ontological concepts of Deleuze and Guattari that were discussed at the end of chapter three. These are not fixed, or even coherent structures, but rather, they are assemblages characterised by cultural and economic links between various geographic locations, and importantly, these links change with time.

Historically, the composition of these understandings of what is modern (and what is not) partly correspond to shifts in Cambodia's international relations at particular points in the country's turbulent political history. As we saw in the Introduction, this has seen a shift from French dominance in international relations and economic and cultural flows, through a period of relative isolation, though with the maintenance of some Soviet-aligned relations, through to the contemporary post-conflict, post-Cold War economic and cultural diversification of global links and flows.

Imaginings of modernity are complex and variable, with different geographies privileged when focusing on different aspects of modernity. As these reference points have shifted, imaginings of the world—and particularly of what it means to be modern

in the world, or to be world-class—have transformed accordingly. The process of becoming modern is very much a process of ‘worlding’—of making a claim to the significance of Phnom Penh in the world, and simultaneously re-imagining what constitutes being modern. In this chapter, I am not going to attempt to thoroughly detail the variability of geographical reference points for Cambodian imaginings of modernity. Rather, I will illustrate the shifting dynamics of modernity in Phnom Penh through an analysis of a few exemplary cases where modernity is associated with the West, as well as a number of cases that illustrate an increase in modernity’s association(s) with locations throughout Asia.

Locating Modernity in the West

I want to work in United States [...] it's the big country, a powerful one, and I want to go there.

Vathana, student, early 20s¹⁴²

People here think that America is a wonderful place to live [...] when Cambodian people return from America, they look wonderful, they have money.

Kovith, software developer, mid 20s¹⁴³

I wish I could visit European countries and also USA, Australia, France. I want to travel all around the world [...] and compare to my country and see why they can develop their country so fast.

Vouchny, office administrator, late 20s¹⁴⁴

For many of Phnom Penh's residents, a better quality of life is imagined to exist outside Cambodia, in a general ‘abroad’, in the West or in Europe, or more specifically in

¹⁴² Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

¹⁴³ Pers. Comm. 16 August, 2010

¹⁴⁴ Pers. Comm. 18 July, 2010

France, or the Anglophone settler countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. In the above quotes, all from university students or graduates, the West is seen as a highly desirable place to live. It is a major source of an imagined 'modern' culture, and in some respects, it is seen to be an ideal model for Cambodia. The flows that facilitate these referents include the implicit character of the West that is contained in everyday encounters with the ideology of the development sector, popular culture and media, engagement with technology for leisure and in the workplace, encounters with Western tourists and expatriates, and experiences of, and desires for, international study.

As we saw in the Introduction, for much of the twentieth century, Cambodia's strongest links to a 'modern' country were with France. Today however, links to China are far more economically significant than to any European nation, and it is primarily Chinese funding that is driving infrastructural modernisation in Phnom Penh and the provinces. But somehow, even as intra-Asian links drive the modernisation of Phnom Penh, the West is still frequently positioned as the source of all things modern. For some informants, 'international style' and 'Western style' were used interchangeably, as were the terms 'modern' and 'Western'. On further questioning, these informants were aware that 'European style villas', electrical appliances and 'modern' dress were often of Asian origin—but in an abstract sense, the aesthetic, the style, or the culture was still frequently seen to be 'Western'. Why is it that in spite of all the economic growth and development that has occurred in East and Southeast Asia over the past few decades, it is locations in the West, and not Asian sites of recent economic growth, that occupy the highest positions in imaginings of being modern?

Cambodian people prefer international style because local brands are not so good
[...] people favour Western style.

Ros Sokha, Senior Advisor to City Hall, United Nations Development Program¹⁴⁵

Right now, Cambodian People always think and like the Western culture, they pretend themselves to be foreigners...by dressing, by speaking in foreign language and other thing, they use modern stuff [*sic*].

Phannarak, software developer, mid 20s¹⁴⁶

Cambodian people live in shophouses, but they love villas. Their dream is to live in European style villas.

Anonymous South Korean property developer¹⁴⁷

I see Cambodian people now they transform their life like Western. Like we want fridge, we want fans or air-con or we have an oven and a toaster and I see people start to eat bread [*sic*].

Ny, shoe salesman and education administrator, early 30s¹⁴⁸

In the above quote, Ny positions appliances like refrigerators, ovens, toasters, fans and air-conditioners, which are much more likely to be produced by Asian-owned companies, as still somehow being 'Western'. Bread was introduced to Cambodia by the French, and its status as being 'Western' is justifiable to some extent, however Ny situated this transformation in the present. Given that bread is still not readily available in the Prey Veng village where he grew up, his observation that people have started to Westernise by eating bread is more likely to be a product of his encounter with Phnom Penh rather than an observation of changes taking place within the city. He has associated some very ordinary aspects of Cambodian urban life with the West. If these

¹⁴⁵ Pers. Comm. 16 August, 2010

¹⁴⁶ Pers. Comm. 19 July, 2010

¹⁴⁷ Pers. Comm. 1 September, 2010

¹⁴⁸ Pers. Comm. 30 July, 2010

things are not directly linked to the West, why is it that Cambodians like Ny imagine that they are?

In part, it is due to the way that the presence of the West, and the US in particular is experienced in Phnom Penh—and indeed in many other places throughout the world. Writing at a time when the size of the US economy was ten times that of China, and the Korean popular culture wave was yet to start, Michael Billig posited the existence of a US-centred global culture. He argued that 'the United States flags its presence so often and so globally that it almost seems invisible' (1995, p. 129). For example, Billig's analysis of US professional wrestling positions it as 'world wrestling'. He argues that comparable wrestling traditions are not perceived as cultural equals, and US professional wrestling is the only form that possesses international fame. In this case he argues that 'its operations are global, but its heart, both commercially and thematically, remains in the United States' (1995, p. 151). For Cambodians, who can watch US professional wrestling on free-to-air television, 'world wrestling' could be seen as being linked a decentred 'global', but also the United States specifically, or a looser West of which the United States is a part. Cultural factors such as these serve to softly position the US most notably, but also the Anglophone nations collectively, and the West more broadly, as possessing a privileged relationship with modernity.

A similar argument could be made with reference to many other banal everyday forms. English language and other Western cultural forms such as the English Premier League, fast food outlets such as KFC and The Pizza Company, the use of US dollars in the Cambodian economy, and US professional wrestling, can be viewed as a banal assertion of international hierarchy, or as a loose and decentred expression of external 'banal globalism' (Billig 1995). This is true of Western geographies to a greater degree than is the case for Asian sites of modernity. It is often the case that the modernity of the West is more visibly branded—for example, in the city's modern workplaces, interaction with computers takes place through software owned by US firms such as Microsoft and

IBM, while the hardware, much of which is produced in China, Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea, is often out of sight. In salaried positions, Western foreigners command far higher salaries than their local counterparts and tertiary educated employees from elsewhere in Asia. Products that have no direct association with the West are marketed using Western geographies—the Eurotech water in the below image is produced by a Cambodian company. Similarly, the architecture of Indonesian-owned Grand Phnom Penh International City is marketed as being 'world class' through associations with specific places in Europe and North America (Percival & Waley 2012).



Figure 12: Eurotech water—a local brand of purified water marketed through an association with Europe and the United Kingdom

In addition to these many banal everyday forms, an understanding of modern life in specific Western countries is produced by links with the Cambodian diaspora and to a lesser extent, the visible presence of Western tourists and expatriates in Phnom Penh. The presence of tourists and expatriates who have spent thousands of dollars on airfares is in itself a powerful symbol of the wealth of the West. Western countries and their people are often grouped together by Cambodians, who tend to refer to all light-skinned foreigners using the term *baraing* which literally means French. On the

whole, *baraing* are seen to be more modern than Cambodians—a number of informants saw their association with *baraing* as a symbol of their own modernity.

I have found that for many Khmers, no distinction is made between the Western foreigners who visit Phnom Penh, and those who do not. Thus Khmer perceptions of Westerners are shaped by the most visible groups of Western expatriates—those who work in the development sector; and those who engage with the sex industry. I have been asked by Khmer friends why it is that Westerners are so good—a fairly naïve question from a woman whose only direct contact with Westerners was with such volunteers. I have also been asked why it is that so many Western men like to have sex with children, a question that is understandable given the prominence of reports of this nature in the Cambodian media. These perceptions of Westerners are largely mediated or indirect, and with many expatriates staying for months or years rather than decades, they are typically shorter engagements than those with friends or family — members of the Khmer diaspora — who live in the West.

The size and location of the diaspora is difficult to ascertain as reliable statistics on the demographics of Cambodian emigrants around the world are not available. According to the OECD's International Migration Database, which is limited to the 29 OECD member countries, the Cambodian-born population is largest in the United States, followed by France, Australia and Canada, with New Zealand a distant fifth (OECD 2012).¹⁴⁹ As such, the Cambodian ethnoscape is centred in Phnom Penh, but has significant nodes in these overseas Cambodian communities. As was evident in the

¹⁴⁹ The OECD data indicates that the United States has consistently taken in the highest numbers of Cambodian immigrants. Again, France, Australia, Canada and New Zealand generally take in the next highest numbers of Cambodian immigrants, though in 2007 and 2008 Japan and the Republic of Korea have taken in higher numbers than these four countries. This limited dataset makes for difficult comparisons, as the Japanese and Korean data takes into account any Cambodian nationals intending to stay for more than 90 days, which includes many temporary migrant workers. In contrast, the data for the United States, France, Australia, Canada and New Zealand is based on permanent residents.

quotes at the top of this section, these locations are close to the top of hierarchies of modern status within the Cambodian geographical imagination. Based on this data, it appears that over the last decade, the perception that the West is the most common and most likely destination for emigrants to establish a long-term legal livelihood, appears to be justified. Of course this 'West' is limited to these five countries—four of which are Anglo settler society nations located outside Western Europe.

For many people in Phnom Penh, a life in France, Australia or the United States is a remote possibility—and many Cambodians have relatives living in these countries. A modern life in these places is both easier to imagine, and easier to realise than, for example, moving to Hong Kong or Shanghai, where even most Chinese nationals would have a difficult time establishing a comfortable level of wealth and standard of living. The West is imagined to be both modern and inclusive, as well as being free of poverty. I am acquainted with a number of Cambodians and their families who have worked without legal residence in Thailand and Australia. While all of these people were engaged in manual labour, for those working in Australia, their parents relate their story with pride to friends, family and neighbours, and are convincing when they lie about the nature of their son's low-status work as farm labourers, claiming that he received a university scholarship. In contrast, work on construction sites and fishing boats in Thailand is typically seen as being desperate and dangerous (Derks 2010).

They say that in Western [countries], if you are poor or you are rich, we can all study, we can go to university together.

Phalla, student, late teens¹⁵⁰

My son is studying in New Zealand. He'll graduate next year and then companies come to the school and ask them to sign a contract to work in a bank [...] if he comes back to Cambodia, maybe he'll be unemployed.

¹⁵⁰ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

Yim Sovann, Member of Parliament for Phnom Penh, member of the opposition Sam Rainsy Party¹⁵¹

Because in the other countries I've seen on TV, Australia, France, New Zealand, their children are under control with the government, they feed them. But they are growing up, they give them education, bachelor degree and then they have a job for them. But in Cambodia, you know how it is.

Saren, unemployed, mid 40s¹⁵²

As is evident in these statements on Western countries, the appeal of the West is supported by an exaggerated belief in just how good it is—for example, in the level of support provided by the government in finding work, in general equality, and in levels of wealth. However, amongst a minority of informants, I encountered a much more grounded and realistic view of life in the West. Kovith, a recent graduate in information technology, had the chance to migrate to the United States through marriage to a relative in Long Beach, California. Much to the amazement of his family and friends, Kovith ultimately decided to remain in Phnom Penh. His case illustrates both a general positioning of the US at the top of an imagined hierarchy of global status, as well as a more specific understanding through which he sees himself and his Cambodian education as being of low status within the United States.

It's not what I like, I wouldn't have my career, my qualification wouldn't be recognised, that's why I decided not to go, but my mother, she thinks that living there is great... I accept her idea, living there is great, I live in a strong economy, the number one economy in the world, and I can earn a lot of money.

Kovith, software developer, mid 20s¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Pers. Comm. 30 August, 2010

¹⁵² Pers. Comm. 2 August, 2010

In Phnom Penh, Kovith works as a software developer. His salary provides him with what he describes as adequate income and comfortable living conditions. A similar awareness of relative socio-economic status for US migrants is fairly common amongst recent university graduates. Their position with relation to those who do migrate to the US can involve both jealousy and disdain. A former colleague of mine did take up the opportunity to migrate to the US through an arranged marriage. While he has not indicated any regrets, other colleagues and some of his former students have talked down his move to me, for precisely the reasons that Kovith decided to remain in Cambodia. Here the imagining of the United States as a site of wealth, development and modernity is not necessarily compromised, but rather the capacity of Cambodian people to attain socio-economic status in that space is deemed to be low—not only lower than the white majority, but part of a category of ‘other Asians’ that are, according to Aihwa Ong, known for their ‘high fertility rates’ rather than high-tech expertise (Ong 2003, p. 2). Kovith’s Cambodian qualifications are both perceived to be of a low standard, and in a more tangible sense, deemed inadequate to attain relevant employment in the United States.

In its variability and multiplicity, the idea of what constitutes a modern life and where it is located is ambiguous and elusive. While there is a widespread belief that the West is a site of modernity and equality, and is free of poverty, there is a growing awareness of the fact that Cambodians in the West often occupy a low socio-economic status, and that relative success might be more readily obtained by working in Phnom Penh. But this does little to unsettle imaginings of an international hierarchy of status. The fact that Cambodians often occupy a low position in the West could be seen to show that many Cambodians are ill-equipped to participate in spaces of high modern status, rather than lowering the imagined position of the West or of the United States in particular. The pre-eminent position of Western locations as sites of wealth and power

¹⁵³ Pers. Comm. 16 August, 2010

is reinforced on a daily basis. As people realise their aspirations and become more modern through education and in their careers as graduates, even without leaving Cambodia, they will routinely encounter symbols that symbolise the importance and modernness of the West.

The English Language in the Modern World

In Cambodia now, even if they are good in their class, they need to be able to speak in English—as required by the client. So this is the first thing that I take into account—I don't think about how many universities they've studied at.

Meath, recruitment consultant, late 20s¹⁵⁴

The preceding section has briefly covered a broad range of processes that contribute to the privileging of the West in imaginings of modernity. In this section, I will go into more detail to explore what is probably the strongest, yet possibly the most banal signifier of the West, and of the Anglophone West in particular—the use of the English language in Phnom Penh. Like other aspects of modernity, the language of higher education has reflected Cambodia's political alignment. Higher education in Cambodia has been taught in foreign languages throughout the twentieth century. French during the colonial and Sihanouk eras, and Vietnamese, Russian, and various languages of the Communist bloc during the 1980s. With the end of the Cold War and the broadening of Cambodia's international engagement, English has been established as the primary language of international engagement. Many consider English to be the single most important factor in gaining post-university employment. According to Chy Meath, head of HR services at the recruitment firm *A-Plus* in Phnom Penh, English language ability is given the highest priority in recruiting candidates.

¹⁵⁴ Pers. Comm. 30 August, 2010



Figure 13: Foreign flags hanging outside an English school in Phnom Penh.

Thomas Clayton has detailed how decisions made to learn English in Cambodia have been variously influenced by the transnational architectures of 'the global infrastructure of English-language universities, the global community of nongovernmental organisations, and—certainly most importantly—the global economy' (Clayton 2006, p. 130). Clayton's nuanced analysis takes into account the role of the English language in both national contexts, and the aforementioned transnational architectures. The linguistic theory with which Clayton engages is beyond the scope of this study, but it is worth noting the significant body of work that exists on language, hegemony and globalisation (Sonntag 2003; Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 2007), and on English as a *global language* (Crystal 2003; Murata & Jenkins 2009).

We are going crazy. In first year we studied socialism, we had Vietnamese teachers and the language. The next year we studied free market economics and French accounting, we had French teachers and learnt the French language. Now we study marketing, business and American accounting, we have Khmer teachers from the US and we study English.

(cited in Mang, 1994)¹⁵⁵

The early years of the 1990s saw the Cambodian government adopt what Clayton describes as a 'flexible language policy', accepting assistance from foreign donors, and the languages that they brought with them. This situation was unstable, and in the early days of UNTAC, a source of frustration for students. The use of language in education has since stabilised, and more recently, English tuition has become the norm in locally owned and staffed universities, as well as universities owned by non-Anglophone nations. The recently opened Phnom Penh branch of Limkokwing University, a Malaysian-owned institution, requires proof of English-language ability for Cambodian enrolments.¹⁵⁶ Similar requirements exist for a number of other private universities, including all courses at Pannasastra University of Cambodia and postgraduate courses at Cambodia Mekong University. The 'flexible language policy' of the early 1990s has given way to a clear preference for English.

Some academic accounts have linked the rise of English outside of traditionally Anglophone nations to linguistic imperialism, a notion that follows the cultural

¹⁵⁵ "Students walk out over course changes", The Phnom Penh Post, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://phnompenhpost.com/1994060316319/National-news/students-walk-out-over-course-changes.html>

¹⁵⁶ "Application Procedures for Limkokwing Cambodia", Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, accessed February 13, 2012, http://www.limkokwing.net/prospective/procedures/application_procedures_for_limkokwing_cambodia/

imperialism thesis (Phillipson 1992). Accordingly, the rise of English is tied to the direct promotion of the English language by Anglophone nations, particularly the United Kingdom and United States. Clayton refutes this thesis, claiming that in contrast to the utilisation of French, Vietnamese and Russian, the use of English has been significantly delinked from the Anglophone nations. English is not seen to be a means of engaging with the citizens of English-speaking nations, but as a means of international communications more broadly. Today, English is a requirement for participation in almost all businesses and organisations that reach beyond the borders of Cambodia, as well as many that don't. It is the language Cambodians use for engagement with US citizens working at USAID as well as Japanese citizens working with JICA. Moore and Bounchan (2010) have observed that large numbers of students at the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Institute of Foreign Languages see English as an international language or a second language rather than being 'foreign'.

The Cambodian case study...shows English to have expanded considerably beyond these [Anglophone] polities, being today not only post-imperial, but also post-Anglophone. Importantly, English has also evolved along coordinates other than the political, becoming simultaneously 'post-national,' 'transnational,' or simply 'global'.

(Clayton 2006, p. 247)

Clayton situates this development in Cambodia's institutional engagements—the language requirements of UNTAC, of membership and participation in ASEAN, and broadly as the prevailing language of international cooperation in the development sector. He contends that the spread of English in Cambodia is not significantly related to the interests of Anglophone nations, but is valued for its 'role both in the success of business in Cambodia and in the country's—or at least parts of the country's—related regional, hemispheric, and global economic integration' (2006, p. 256). Informants in the education sector mirrored this view, not linking English with any particular

Anglophone nation, but with wider engagement with the world. For Ban Thero, the Vice Chancellor of Cambodia Mekong University, using English was tied to fuller participation in ASEAN, and enhancing the ability of Khmer people to participate in wider debates. He justified the use of English as the primary language of instruction in many of his courses by arguing that:

I'm teaching ASEAN culture, not just Cambodian. We know that Cambodian is very important for Cambodians. If we use English, it doesn't mean that we don't like Khmer, but because we love Khmer, we study English, in order to have the ability to participate in debate. Because English is our second language, so in debate and discussion, we are still inferior. We have to improve that.

Ban Thero, Vice Chancellor, Cambodia Mekong University¹⁵⁷

Clayton acknowledges that French and Chinese are both important languages in contemporary Phnom Penh, and that the majority of interaction continues to take place in Khmer. French is important in particular domains, such as for students at the *Université des Sciences de la Santé du Cambodge*, and the *Institut de Technologie du Cambodge* where French funding comes with the condition of French-language instruction. This language condition is typically viewed as a concession, rather than a benefit, of the assistance (Clayton 2006, p. 265). According to Clayton, French is of little economic utility, with even French firms such as *Total* requiring their employees to speak English. In contrast, Chinese does have economic utility, and is increasingly listed as a requirement in job advertisements, however it is not displacing English, but rather it is being established as a secondary foreign language. For ethnic Khmers however, the value of learning Chinese may be limited because regardless of language ability, familial ties prevail in securing employment. Margaret Slocomb (2010) has argued that Chinese families tend to have strong familial bonds, but a relative lack of trust of people to

¹⁵⁷ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

whom they are not related. The success of some Cambodian Chinese businesspeople has been helped by their engagement with familial networks, such as the Lim Family Association¹⁵⁸—which includes Cambodia’s most successful businesswoman, Lim Chhiv Ho—and the Li Family Association—which includes Ly Yong Phat, the head of the LYP group.¹⁵⁹

Compared to French and Chinese, English enables participation in a far wider range of practices that are seen to be 'modern'. Competency in the English language is a significant factor for inclusion or exclusion in greater imaginings of modernness—which often contribute to enhanced modern status on small scales. For example, with little technology being available in the Khmer language, English (and to a lesser degree, Chinese) is necessary to use technology. It is also a language of international popular culture, including much that is not produced in the West—English lyrics are common in regional and local popular music. Finally, and arguably most importantly, for upwardly mobile Cambodians, it is necessary in finding white-collar work for university graduates, and even in attaining undergraduate and particularly post-graduate qualifications both within and beyond Cambodia. To return to the scales of individual modernity as addressed in the previous chapter, the English language is an integral part of becoming knowledgeable—working towards becoming *neak ceh dəŋ*. Clayton follows Alastair Pennycook, in arguing that English ‘functions as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige’, becoming ‘one of the most powerful means of inclusion ... or exclusion ... in [some] societ[ies]’ (Pennycook 1994, p. 14; cited in Clayton 2006, p. 261).

¹⁵⁸ “Global Lims descend on Cambodia”, The Phnom Penh Post, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://phnompenhpost.com/Special-Supplements/global-lims-descend-on-cambodia.html>

¹⁵⁹ LYP Group is a diverse business conglomerate with interests in hotels and nightclubs, infrastructure, large-scale agriculture, import/export and real estate. See <http://lypgroup.com/download/lyp-group-brochure.pdf> for more detail.

Clayton's argument is important in allowing us to appreciate the wider role of English in Cambodia and its frequent dissociation from Anglophone nations, as is now the case in many contexts throughout the world (Crystal 2003; Pennycook 2007; Murata & Jenkins 2009). As we have seen, it is a means of engaging with the world in relationships that often do not involve any native English speakers. Formal links to Anglophone nations are not present in many contexts where English language is used, and its utility goes far beyond the ability to interact with the Anglophone nations. But this dissociation is not absolute—English schools all over Phnom Penh fly the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack and to a lesser extent, the flags of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. As Clayton and Pennycook both contend, English is a gateway to status. Accession to a modern life almost invariably involves learning English—and it is native speakers from the United Kingdom and its former settler colonies, that are most highly valued in facilitating this transition. With the English language acting as a gatekeeper for accession to modern status, it is these nations that are imagined to set the standard. In many cases this goes beyond the imaginary, as accrediting bodies from the UK and US such as IELTS¹⁶⁰ and TOEFL¹⁶¹ act as very real barriers to attaining international educational qualifications and link the use of English to a standard set in a particular national context (Pennycook 2010; Pennycook 1994). The English language is a powerful and persistent confirmation of the privileged status of the Anglophone West.

In imagining the international location(s) of modernity, the English language contributes to the position of Western Anglophone nations at the top of imagined hierarchies of status. But as we have seen, these links to Western nations are often indirect. Informants in this study and in more specific studies of the use of English in Phnom Penh (Moore & Bounchan 2010; Clayton 2006), were much more likely to see English as an enabler of greater participation and engagement within the region than

¹⁶⁰ International English Language Testing System.

¹⁶¹ Test Of English as a Foreign Language.

an enabler of engagement with Anglophone nations themselves. As such, this is partly an imaginary link, it persists in spite of the fact that many of the processes that contribute to the modernisation of the city—processes that often involve the use of English—take place through flows and exchanges between Phnom Penh and other Asian cities. As we will see in the following section, in certain areas, Asian reference points are emerging as key locations in Cambodian imaginings of modernity—though they are not (yet) posing a significant challenge to the prominence of the West.

‘But now they Like Korean Style’: K-Pop, Urban Spectacle and Other Images of Asian Modernities

In 1995, I taught my students only ‘supermarket’, but now I teach them mall, and I explain this is a mall and the mall is bigger than a supermarket. We copied it from the Western or some neighbouring country. Like from Thailand, Indonesia or Malaysia or from America or Australia [sic].

Samnang, human resource manager, early 50s¹⁶²

Yes, I think, the skyline or tall buildings can be good in the future—good for middle class people. When they come to work in Phnom Penh I think some of them can afford to buy. Like I've seen in movies, Hong Kong movies or Singapore, people always live in apartments.

Sokny, Director, Mores and Customs Commission, Buddhist Institute¹⁶³

In an extended interview in his home, Tipo, a development worker in his early forties, gave me his take on youth in Phnom Penh: 'they watch TV, they copy the culture, everything from the TV...from the high country like United States'. Phanna, his wife, in her late twenties at the time, and 10 years his junior, interjected: 'but now they like

¹⁶² Pers. Comm. 30 July, 2010

¹⁶³ Pers. Comm. 12 August, 2010

Korean style'. Not to be outdone as the dominant voice in the conversation Tipo continued 'now, you see Korean Style now is spreading, the culture, like dress and hairstyles'.¹⁶⁴ This brief exchange captures much of the dynamic through which modernity is understood in Phnom Penh. The West persists as the strongest abstract reference point, or perhaps more accurately, Western countries occupy the top of imagined hierarchies of modernity in Phnom Penh. But in many meaningful ways this imagining of the West as the source of all things modern is increasingly geographically inaccurate. As is evident in the above quotes, aspects of urban modernity including shopping malls and skyscrapers were often associated with other cities in Asia and not necessarily with the West. Direct engagement in areas such as trade and aid, popular culture and tourism frequently takes place through links within Asia. As we saw in the previous section, learning English is often seen to facilitate the strengthening of Cambodia's position within ASEAN rather than increased engagement with the West.

As we saw in chapter five, the city's largest property developments are being undertaken by Asian investors and with Asian reference points for their development. Key pieces of the city's infrastructure such as bridges and drainage are being implemented with Chinese and Japanese funding and expertise. While all these flows contribute to the modernisation of Phnom Penh, and to the imagining of modernity in the city, they do not necessarily correlate with Cambodians' geographic imaginaries. There are two key areas where locations outside the West are emerging as key reference points for imaginings of modernity in Phnom Penh—firstly in the development of the built environment and the mediation and experience of Asian reference points for the world's most spectacular architecture, and secondly with the growth of South Korean popular culture as a reference point for fashion and urban lifestyles.

¹⁶⁴ Pers. Comm. 8 August, 2010

As we have seen in chapters four and five, the emergence of economic power and urban modernity in Asia and the Middle East has been visible in the development of urban spectacle—skyscrapers, observation wheels, mega-malls and casinos—with the largest of all these modern forms now located in the Middle East, North and Southeast Asia (Roy 2009a). When this wave of construction began, Anthony King described the process as 'Manhattan transfer' (King 1996), that is, the (re)production of a 'world-class' city based on the image of the skyline of Manhattan. Today, well over a decade later, the success of this transfer process across Asia means that Phnom Penh's efforts to establish tall buildings are situated in a predominantly Asian context.

Reference points for urban modernity are now well established in the spectacular skylines of cities such as Shanghai, Dubai and Kuala Lumpur. As skyscrapers emerge in Phnom Penh, these locations increasingly figure in imaginings of the 'global' image of the city. For most people these images are formed predominantly through media, as indicated in Sokny's quote above. As we saw in the previous chapter, advertisements for proposed development projects have drawn comparisons to sites of emergent urban spectacle such as Dubai and Shanghai. While the experience of these locations is predominantly mediated, a number of closer sites of urban modernity are now experienced directly by some of Phnom Penh's residents.

According to travel agents in Phnom Penh,¹⁶⁵ overseas tours are relatively inexpensive and have become popular following the launch of budget airlines. The most popular two packages are an itinerary that includes Singapore and Malaysia, and another that includes Hong Kong, and nearby locations in mainland China. It is notable that these two popular tours are to the most developed, yet still affordable, destinations in the region. Tour operators informed me that these destinations are popular because they allow Cambodian tourists to see an environment that is different to Cambodia. That is

¹⁶⁵ Based on interviews with seven travel agents in central Phnom Penh. Interviews took place on 19 July, 2010.

in part, a modern urban environment, but also includes sites of consumption such as theme parks. The numbers of tourists travelling from Cambodia to Singapore and Malaysia represent only a very small proportion of the population. However, these locations make their way into Cambodian imaginings of the city both through the diffusion of stories and photographs through family networks, and also through marketing, most notably of Malaysia. Tourism Malaysia is the only foreign government tourism department with any significant presence in Cambodia. As a result, tour operators tend to have a large proportion of Tourism Malaysia-supplied marketing material. Mediated as it is, primarily through the image of the Petronas Twin Towers, images of Kuala Lumpur's skyline have a strong presence on the streets of Phnom Penh (Paling 2012b).



Figure 14: *Left*: stills from Rasmey Hang Meas volume 85, Exciting World. This was the first of two karaoke DVDs produced in collaboration with Tourism Malaysia. *Right*: Tourism Malaysia promotional material outside a travel agent in central Phnom Penh.

In addition to the provision of promotional material, Tourism Malaysia has made efforts to strengthen Malaysia's position in popular Cambodian imaginaries through a

promotional arrangement with *Rasmey Hang Meas*, Cambodia's largest music production company. Most notably, *Rasmey Hang Meas Karaoke Vol. 85 - Exciting World - Malaysia Happier* which features a range of Cambodia's most famous popular music stars singing romantic songs in their usual style, as well as more direct promotions of Malaysian tourism.¹⁶⁶ All of these songs are set against backgrounds like the Petronas Twin Towers, various locations amongst the modern architecture of the administrative centre of Putrajaya, shopping malls, theme parks and resorts. While they include some tourist-oriented cultural displays, the focus is on showcasing the image of a modern Malaysia. Through both mediated and direct experiences, Malaysia provides the most striking and prominent images of a modern city skyline in Phnom Penh.

More broadly, the mediation of modern Asian urban life takes place through television. Dubbed television shows from throughout Asia, most notably South Korea and China, are shown on free-to-air television and broadcast throughout the country. Due to the limited production capacity of the Cambodian television stations, both free-to-air and subscription television broadcasts in Cambodia are relatively cosmopolitan. It is far cheaper to import and dub foreign programs than it is to produce new programming in Cambodia (Peou 2009). In 2009, a study conducted by Chivoin Peou showed that prime time television was dominated by foreign programming, with just four of the seventeen series shown between 7:30 and 9:30pm being produced in Cambodia (Peou 2009, p. 424). The other thirteen shows were variously sourced from China, Hong Kong, South Korea and the Philippines.

In Thai they move ahead than us, and the Korean style had come to Thailand before it came to Khmer. and when I go to Thailand and my friend at there, they like Korean style also, they like doing something like Korean style [*sic*].

¹⁶⁶ The title song *Malaysia Happier* can be viewed online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkJ29N7V23jI>

Vatey, fashion model and singer, early 20s¹⁶⁷

I think in Cambodia everything increase every day, especially culture that we got from another country and I see some point that the people in Cambodia, especially youth, that they always copy some style like Korean song, if we talk about the culture. Like have something grew up fast, about the culture, when they saw singer from Korean, just copy and do everything like singer [*sic*].

Kim, student and youth group leader, late teens¹⁶⁸

I'd like to go to my dream land, Korea...I think Korea has many talent people and like singer, actor, and maybe Korea is now going fast like industry, agriculture, and especially entertainment, so I want to know, I want to see how they grow, and the view in the city and how the people live, I want to know it's the same in Cambodia or not [*sic*].

Leak, student, late teens¹⁶⁹

As has been the case in many Asian countries, the growing popularity of South Korean television dramas in Cambodia has been part of a broader growth in the popularity of South Korean popular culture. As indicated in Vatey's statement above, the 'Korean wave' has arrived in Cambodia after it was established in neighbouring countries. While this is common in many Asian countries, the way in which South Korean dramas are consumed can vary. Korean dramas have been seen to evoke nostalgia amongst Japanese audiences (Hirata 2008; Iwabuchi 2002), in Cambodia however, they more frequently represent a desirable future. Youth fashion and hairstyles are drawn significantly from K-pop stars, and Korean dramas are now strong, and relatable, reference points for modern life—as has been the case throughout much of Asia since

¹⁶⁷ Pers. Comm. 10 August, 2010

¹⁶⁸ Pers. Comm. 13 August, 2010

¹⁶⁹ Pers. Comm. 20 August, 2010

the late 1990s (Chua & Iwabuchi 2008). Like many other Asian countries, in Cambodia, it is the urban romance genre that is most popular. This is an important point, as Chinese dramas, which are also very popular, are more frequently situated in history or fantasy, and do little to contribute to imaginings of a modern life, or to elevate the position of China in imagined hierarchies of modernity. Korean urban romance dramas are far more pertinent to the aspirations of the residents of Phnom Penh.

I will not delve too deeply into the meaning of the consumption of South Korean drama and popular music in Phnom Penh. In the case of Cambodia, a more detailed analysis has been published by Chivoïn Peou (Peou 2009), and more broadly Chua and Iwabuchi have undertaken a detailed analysis of the Korean wave throughout Asia (Chua & Iwabuchi 2008). My point here is not to add to these analyses, but to identify the elevation of South Korea to the position of being a prominent reference point for urban, consumerist modernity for large numbers of Phnom Penh's youth (Peou 2009). South Korea and Malaysia (or more specifically, Kuala Lumpur) are two Asian locations that increasingly figure in Cambodian imaginings of the modern world. That is not to say that they are challenging the position of the West at the top of the modern hierarchy, but that they are increasingly prominent reference points for the modern city and a modern life.

Western Imaginings, Asian Realities: China Amongst Modernity's Many Cores

What is noted to be different here is the fact that Asia rises fast in comparison to the speed in America and Europe. What is happening in the Euro zone, the case of Greece, makes it difficult for some other countries like Portugal and Spain. In Asia, thanks to strong growth in China and India, a better state of economy for other countries in the region, especially ASEAN, has also anticipated [*sic*].

Hun Sen, Phnom Penh, 2010¹⁷⁰

Although the West may be broadly imagined to be the most modern, it is often not imagined to represent the best reference point for the *process* of becoming modern. The fact that development in Asia has generally taken place much more recently than in the West means that in many cases, Asia is seen to be a stronger reference point for the process of modernisation today. In terms of economic growth and socio-political development, the Cambodian Prime Minister positions Cambodia as part of Asia or ASEAN, and expects the country to follow regional rather than Western patterns of growth. While the country was excluded from earlier regional growth, it is still seen to be a part of the region, and is expected to benefit from its continued growth. This is evident in the above statement from Hun Sen, who anticipates that Cambodia's growth will take place rapidly, spurred on by growth in the regional powers of India and China. This is also true at smaller scales and plays into the business strategies of regional investors as well as the imaginations of young Cambodians. Amongst the informants for this study there were regional investors such as South Korean property developers, for whom Cambodia's current state can be related to memories of early growth in their home countries¹⁷¹, and also some young Cambodians, for whom the pace of China's recent growth is a far greater source of inspiration for national development than processes taking place in the West.¹⁷²

Cambodia's opportunity to benefit from economic growth taking place outside of Europe and North America is largely positioned as a regional phenomenon. Certainly

¹⁷⁰ "Selected Comments at the Diploma Conferment for Graduates of the Build Bright University", Cambodia New Vision, accessed 14 February, 2010, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/04aug10_bbu_graduation_comments.htm

¹⁷¹ This was expressed in an interview with an anonymous Korean property developer (Pers. Comm. 1 September, 2010) and also in an interview with Doug Cooper, CEO, Leopard Capital, (Pers. Comm. 24 August 2010).

¹⁷² Chea, Pers. Comm. 29 June, 2010. Kimleang, Pers. Comm. 12 August, 2010.

this has been strongest in Asia, which is obviously proximate to Cambodia, but it has also taken place on a more global scale. 'The rise of the rest' (Zakania 2008) has seen strong growth in political, economic and military power outside of Western Europe and North America. In international relations, numerous scholars are speaking of the emergence of a multipolar world—as opposed to the bipolar world of the cold war or the US-centred unipolarity of the 1990s (Khanna 2008; Wallerstein 2010). For some time now, this has been mirrored in popular culture—writing of Asia in the 1990s, Koichi Iwabuchi has challenged the primacy of a US or Western centred model of globalisation, and detailed the emergence of a Japan-centred model of globalisation in the 1990s (Iwabuchi 2002). As was evident in the previous section, this Japanese centrality in flows of popular culture in Asia has itself been challenged by the emergence of South Korea as a major exporter of television shows and popular culture over the last decade (Chua & Iwabuchi 2008).

During a similar time period, China has increasingly positioned itself as central to many aspects of modernisation. Chinese universities have taken on increasing numbers of scholarship students from developing countries, and have emerged as a major source of state-led investment in infrastructure throughout the developing world. Within China and throughout the Chinese diaspora, Pál Nyíri (2006, p. 87) has argued that amongst otherwise disparate groups of Chinese people, there is an increasingly widespread view that China has 'taken up the torch of the global modernizing mission' and that this is a key component of Chinese nationalism. Nyíri states that 'in official ideology, it is disguised by the "united-front" rhetoric of "opposing hegemony" and "solidarity with developing countries"' (ibid.: 106). One such assertion to this view was displayed explicitly at the Expo 2010, in Shanghai, where the host nation was positioned as a key source of urban knowledge and driver of urbanisation and modernisation in developing countries. As I have detailed in a recent book chapter (Paling 2012b), official statements from the Expo organisers pointed to the desire to create a forum for the sharing of urban knowledge for the world's developing cities. However, the reality

of the event was that China was positioned as a central source of knowledge, whereas smaller cities like Phnom Penh were almost entirely absent from the event.

The assertion to Chinese centrality in urban knowledge that was on display at the Expo confirms Ananya Roy's (2009a) position that urban theory needs to reflect new, multiple core-periphery geographies, some of which exist within the global South. Roy has described two such relationships: firstly a Pacific Rim urbanism centred in Chinese cities, with Vancouver and San Francisco on its periphery, and the Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Chinese economic zones as labour outsourcing hinterlands; secondly, she positions Dubai as representing desires and aspirations for transnational migrants from villages in Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan (Roy 2009a, p. 828). As we saw in chapter four, China's influence in Phnom Penh goes further than utilising the city as a labour outsourcing hinterland. Like many developing cities, it is also home to numerous urban development projects which are funded by Chinese capital, and in the case of infrastructure projects such as the second Chroy Changva bridge, constructed by Chinese workers.

For many groups of Chinese people, as Nyíri has argued, it may be possible to believe that China is central to modernisation processes throughout the developing world (Nyíri 2006). However, this is a view that does not reflect the view of modernity that was expressed by informants for this study. In Phnom Penh, the Chinese claim does not override the broad association of modernity with the West which we saw in the first half of this chapter. Chinese language has not come close to challenging the position of English as the language of modern individuals, and products from China are still generally seen to be of poor quality. China is playing a strong role in the modernisation of Phnom Penh, but has been less influential in penetrating the imaginaries of modernity amongst the city's residents.

Conclusion

Rather than representing a challenge to the prominence of the West in imaginings of modernity, the variously located modern reference points explored in this chapter amount to evidence of the diversification and dispersion of modernity throughout the world. As we have seen throughout this thesis, Cambodia is not seen to challenge for prominence in regional or international imaginings of modernity—the reference points for becoming modern are almost always seen to be located outside the country. Today, the diversification of international connections in Phnom Penh means that many places are seen to be modern. From Phnom Penh it is apparent that there are many modernities, and it is not with reference to a single Western modernity, but to specific Western and Asian locations, that Phnom Penh is forging its own modernity. In this sense, modernity—as viewed from Phnom Penh—reflects a loose assemblage of component modernities, each of which occupies its position for perceived prominence in a particular area that is perceived to be modern.

While this assemblage is in a constant state of flux, and its constitution varies for different people in Phnom Penh, in this chapter I have sketched out some of its most important components. The West has been shown to be associated with aspects of modernity including the English language and ‘global’ culture, and features prominently in imaginings of modern life through mediated images and stories of the diaspora in Western countries. At the same time, direct and mediated experiences of Asian modernities in places such as South Korea and Malaysia contribute to increasing the association of particular Asian locations with the image of a modern city and modern urban life. Additionally, Chinese assertions to centrality in many modernisation processes are evident in the transformation of Phnom Penh’s built environment. While these Asian locations are increasingly important, and we are seeing a shift towards Asia in the geographical imaginaries of modernity, the association of modernity with the West remains strong. In some cases, modern forms that have come to Cambodia from elsewhere in Asia are still imagined to be ‘Western’.

Broadly speaking, if the concept of what is 'modern' is situated geographically by the residents of Phnom Penh, it is most frequently positioned in the West. As a general rule, Western influences are more likely to be indirect and remain mostly imaginary—the West is thought to be the most modern, but Western nations rarely take a tangible role, and are not seen to be a reference point for the *process* of modernisation. In contrast, Asian influences are more likely to be direct—either being involved in the modernisation of the city, or seen to be a model for the process of becoming modern.

8 Conclusion: the City, Modernity and its Inclusions

I opened this thesis with a quote from Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen that claimed Cambodia had become ‘a modern society in the modern world’.¹⁷³ The changes he cited—new buildings, vehicles and goods—are popularly understood as being modern, and few would argue with the claim that they are indicators of the modernisation of the city. This claim is all the more meaningful given that the city has, over the last three decades, risen from the horrors of the Pol Pot regime—a period that was described by informants as ‘less than zero’. More contentious however, is the claim of membership in the ‘modern world’—while many informants stated that Phnom Penh is modern, none of them identified modern cities that they saw as its peers.

Phnom Penh’s claim to modernity and membership in the ‘modern world’ has been shown to be simultaneously improving and diminishing. As skyscrapers, new bridges and ‘world-class’ developments are built in the city, it is certainly seen to be improving and moving towards becoming ‘world class’. Similarly, for residents of Phnom Penh, improvements in income, capacity for consumption, quality of leisure, education and occupational attainment are confirmation of their improving status as modern individuals. These improvements are particularly meaningful when cast against the violence and conflict of the recent past, and the reducing, but still widespread poverty throughout the country. At the same time, growing international flows of images,

¹⁷³ ‘Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh’ Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

objects, ideas and people, contribute to increasing awareness of places beyond Cambodia's borders. As we saw in chapter six, cast against many of these places, residents' perceptions of Phnom Penh's status is significantly reduced. This does not challenge the position of the city at the apex of Cambodian modernity, but confirms its peripherality to international urban modernity.

By now many studies have challenged the Eurocentrism of academic and political understandings of modernity. In doing so, a smaller number of studies have successfully reconciled the strong role of the West as the imagined core of modernity for much of the world, with the recognition that Western ideological modernity typically has little to do with these imaginings. This thesis has furthered these analyses through a grounded investigation of the processes and imaginings of modernity in Phnom Penh. It has responded to Winter and Ollier's identification of the need for culturally-focused analyses of contemporary Cambodia, and has contributed to the modest, but significant body of literature on Cambodia that details the nuances of what actually exists in the country rather than assessing its transformation with reference to pre-existing ideals such as democracy or 'good governance'.

The 'actually existing' expressions of modernity in Phnom Penh have been most visible in the transformation of the built environment, but can also be seen in other areas including consumption, travel, fashion, popular culture, education and occupational attainment. Each of these areas play a role in the hierarchies of modern status within Phnom Penh, and are often inspired by a range of broader international hierarchies. In chapter seven we saw that while the West is imagined to be at the top of many of these hierarchies, modern Asian cities are increasingly influential. Perhaps most importantly, beyond the imaginary, it is through intra-Asian connections that the physical modernisation of the city is taking place and it is Asian modernisation experiences that most frequently serve as reference points for the modernisation of the city. In contrast, links to Western countries rarely produce such tangible outcomes.

Phnom Penh, Asian Urbanisms, Small Cities and Social Theory

At various points throughout this thesis, I have argued that modernity in Phnom Penh can be understood through multiple core-periphery relationships on all manner of scales. In this modernity of multiple hierarchies, we have seen that exclusion from, or a low position within one of these relationships cannot be seen as complete exclusion from modernity. This relational ontology draws on the recent usage of assemblage theory in geography in tying together important threads in theorising modernity and the city. It responds to Jennifer Robinson's concern with countering the exclusions of theoretical accounts of urban modernity by acknowledging enthusiasm for modernity even amongst those who are broadly excluded (Robinson 2006, p. x).

This model of multiple hierarchical scales draws on and expands Ananya Roy's recent assertion that the geographies of urban theory need to shift toward the recognition of multiple cores and peripheries including *within* the global South (Roy 2009a, p. 828). In line with the direction taken in some of Roy's more recent work, this ontological position is informed by recent developments in the use of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of assemblage in human geography. Rather than viewing these scales as discrete wholes, assemblage thinking better allows us to understand the relationship between Phnom Penh and its people with each other, and with many external factors that play a role in the contemporary city. Importantly, its multiplicity has allowed us to easily understand modernity in the plural—split geographically and thematically—and in a constant state of transformation, becoming, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation.

While the West remains the imagined core for many aspects of modernity in Phnom Penh, we also saw that South Korean popular culture and Asian urban development are well established as the cores of particular aspects of modernity in Phnom Penh. Importantly, this does not override James Ferguson's criticism of the perspective of alternative or multiple modernities for including people in an analytical modernity

when they themselves identify as non-modern (Ferguson 2006, p. 185). Instead, it allows for contextual specificity in describing how individuals see themselves and their city to be (or not be) modern—acknowledging and allowing for the contradictions and ambiguity that modernity presents.

Phnom Penh, like many other smaller and less spectacular cities throughout the world, is not at the forefront of urban modernity, but rather, it is peripheral to many modern cities. While there has been a shift in urban studies that has seen increasing attention paid to the cities of the global South, there has been a focus on the largest, most spectacular and economically significant cities such as Dubai, Mumbai, Shanghai and Singapore. Following authors such as Roy (2011b), Robinson (2002; 2006), and Bell and Jayne (2006; 2009), I have argued at various points in this thesis, that smaller and less influential cities like Phnom Penh need to be treated seriously in the production of urban theory. These cities are important both for their location in the global South—home to the majority of the world’s urban population—and for their size—the majority of the world’s urban dwellers live in cities with a population of less than five million (UNFPA 2007, p. 10). If we are to take seriously the claims that this is an urban century, it is imperative that we give due attention to the people that form the basis for this claim—people who are located predominantly in these smaller cities. In my research outside of this thesis, I have analysed the representation of smaller, ‘ordinary’ cities at Shanghai Expo 2010 (Paling 2012a). I demonstrated a number of similarities in Phnom Penh’s relationship with modernity at the event, and that of many other ‘ordinary’ cities and nations. These similarities extend beyond the Expo—amongst the poorer countries of the region, cities such as Vientiane, Rangoon and Naypyidaw are undergoing comparable processes of increasing international engagement and market-driven economic growth with intra-Asian actors playing a strong role. As such, it is my intention that this study will make an important contribution to our understanding of the processes popularly understood as ‘modernisation’ and

'globalisation' in a wide range of other cities that are similarly situated on modernity's peripheries in Southeast Asia and beyond.

'A small dragon in Asia': Urban Modernity, Scale and Geography

Over the past two decades, 'globalisation' has been highly visible in Phnom Penh. The flows of images, ideas, people and capital that contribute to the modernisation of the city have grown exponentially, and have been increasingly diverse. While it is easy to describe these changes under the umbrella of 'globalisation', in all these areas, it is intra-Asian actors—most notably those from China and South Korea—that have been the most significant in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The strength of these intra-Asian actors was demonstrated in chapter five, where we saw how plans for the development of the city that were funded by French donors were subverted by privately planned developments backed by intra-Asian capital. In this tangible sense, a shift in the geographical orientation of modernity is highly visible in Phnom Penh. Beyond the physical development of the city, the West is typically imagined to be at the top of the modern hierarchy, but this does not mean that it is the yardstick by which Phnom Penh's progress is measured today. This may be in part due to the city's development being seen as so far below that of the West, but more significantly due to the emergence of modern cities within the region. These act as sites of comparison, as well as being direct sources of investment and urban knowledge and often serve as inspiration for the process of modernisation amongst Cambodia's leaders.

Statements made by Prime Minister Hun Sen—the most powerful figure in the nation's drive towards modernity—have measured the city's success on the scales of Asia and ASEAN. His claim that Phnom Penh will become 'a small dragon in Asia'¹⁷⁴ seems to be

¹⁷⁴ "Speech at the Inauguration Ceremony of Kbal Thnal Overpass", Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 12, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/24jun10_kbal-thnol_overpass_speech.htm

far more realistic than his earlier claim that Phnom Penh was already ‘a modern society in the modern world’.¹⁷⁵ He has pointed to the expectation that through the development of edge-city projects, Phnom Penh will be comparable to other ASEAN capitals in the near future. Recently this claim has been enhanced by Cambodia’s chairing of ASEAN in 2012 and Phnom Penh’s hosting of regional and international leaders at the ASEAN summit, and in associated meetings such as the East Asia Summit. While not arguing that Phnom Penh will be better than any specific city, he is clearly seeking to establish regional significance, and is staking a claim for membership amongst the modern cities of the region. On a global scale, Hun Sen’s goals are modest, but for Phnom Penh, they are still ambitious. As urban mega-projects throughout Asia are frequently cancelled, or fail to reach their ambitious goals (Shatkin 2011b; Shatkin 2008), it remains to be seen whether Phnom Penh will emerge as an exception to this trend. Popular opinion suggests that private developers won’t fulfil Hun Sen’s ambitious goals, and already, a funding collapse has halted the progress of CamKo City for well over a year. As we saw in chapter six, while proud of the progress that the city has made, many informants in this research, both government officials and ordinary residents, did not expect that the city would be comparable to neighbouring capitals such as Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City in the foreseeable future.

Modern Asian cities are not the only yardstick by which Phnom Penh’s progress is measured. On the scale of the nation, Phnom Penh has long been Cambodia’s premier space of modernity. On a national scale, pride in the city is widespread, in spite of its real and perceived inability to compete with the major cities of the region. This pride is based in the city’s absolute rather than relative progress over the past few decades.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Keynote Address at the Official Inauguration of all Achievements related to Flood Protection and Drainage Improvement Phase II, Improvement Project in Phnom Penh’ Cambodia New Vision, accessed February 13, 2012, http://cnv.org.kh/2010_releases/16sep10_flood_protection_-drainage_improvement_speech.htm

Informants often positioned the city as having grown from ‘nothing’ or ‘less than zero’ into what it is today. This pride is often qualified by awareness of the reality of poverty and social ills such as forced evictions and rising national inequality. Still, enthusiasm for progress is dominant; even groups formed to challenge evictions associated with modern urban projects such as Boeung Kak Town, have qualified their criticism by stating that they are not against the notion of development.

Becoming Modern on Local Scales

For most people in Phnom Penh, the reality of everyday engagement is local, and these small scales, on which modern status is judged, are frequently exclusive, much more so than the larger scales which are associated with civic or national pride. As we saw in chapter six, modern status is frequently judged in terms of being ‘up to date’, in line with the associated Khmer language vocabulary. Judgements of who is ‘up to date’ frequently play out on small scales such as the household or a shared rental room, the workplace, the classroom or the neighbourhood. Informants positioned the modernness of individuals in areas such as wealth and consumption, personal presentation and speech, education, the ability to travel, the ability to spend time in air-conditioned spaces, and in the opposition of urban and rural traits including occupation and income. Attempts to elevate one’s status takes place through both tangible and superficial improvements made primarily through these parameters—increased consumption, changing fashion, educational and occupational attainment, participation in leisure activities, travel and migration.

In the analysis of new wealth in Phnom Penh in the latter half of chapter six, I analysed the increasing numbers of residents of Phnom Penh who have established moderate wealth—and in turn, have made moderate improvements with reference to the above parameters. This includes groups ranging from garment factory workers who earn approximately \$US2 per day, to recent university graduates, who might earn closer to \$US10 per day, to the country’s business and political elite. All of these people typically

experience a newfound, albeit often limited, capacity to consume and to engage with the modernity of the city. However, these experiences take place in separate social and geographical spaces. The central city, home to universities, shopping malls, and the offices of private businesses and NGOs is a far cry from the garment factories and workers' accommodation in the city's outer khans. From the rural villages in which most of Cambodia's population still lives, the entire city is seen to be modern. Within the city however, the garment factory districts are distinctly non-modern—associated with low socio-economic status and a lack of education.

Social and geographical differentiation goes beyond what exists in the contemporary city, and is based significantly on where people happened to be born. There are very obvious advantages for people such as Eric Tan,¹⁷⁶ who was born into one of the country's wealthiest families and enjoyed a very privileged transnational upbringing and high quality education. Much less obvious are the benefits that vary throughout provincial Cambodia. Being born closer to a provincial town means being closer to an upper secondary school—the prerequisite for university. It also facilitates increased access to technology, media and English language schools. Lastly, though perhaps most importantly, it means that people's parents are more likely to be educated have the knowledge and motivation to support the education of the younger generation. For some Cambodians, a subset of these advantages can be realised by moving to a town for upper secondary school, by staying with friends or relatives, or for some young men, by living with monks in a pagoda. A lack of alternatives to the pagoda, as well as restrictive cultural expectations, make such a move particularly difficult for rural women.

As we saw in the case Chhenghuot, and in comments from a number of other informants, the move from a rural upbringing into a modern tertiary-educated urban

¹⁷⁶ Eric Tan has been discussed briefly at various points throughout this thesis. A more detailed account of his background is included in the appendix.

life, is often met with derision and exclusion on many fronts. Within the city, it is near-impossible to completely rid oneself of the *neak srae* (rural people) label, as the physical effects of exposure to the sun and years of hard work are enduring. In the provinces, many informants asserted that their rural peers saw the long-term benefits of investing in tertiary education as being outweighed by the shorter-term benefits of starting a business or doing agricultural work. In some cases informants acknowledged that they would have made more money by following the latter path, but stated that on visits to their village, they felt superior to their provincial peers based on their modern presentation, wider knowledge and international awareness or cosmopolitanism

The concerns of the rural naysayers are not unfounded, as graduate numbers have rapidly increased. Graduate employment is now highly competitive and unemployment for urban youth is a major concern. Further, the rapid growth of tertiary education has been poorly correlated to the requirements of the job market. While just two decades ago a university degree could guarantee a job, the supply of graduates is now high enough that there is no such guarantee today. For several informants, including Samnang and Chanda, success came as a result of having some combination of a tertiary education, knowledge of technology and English-language ability at a time when these qualifications were uncommon—in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Some older informants positioned their success entirely in their English language ability in the early days of the UNTAC administration. They benefited from being able to quickly adapt to the requirements of Cambodia's changing international orientation. Today however, competence in the English language is a requirement for almost all graduate employment. To stand out as high achievers, many students now study multiple degrees, and additional languages such as Korean, Chinese and French. As this particular path to a modern life—through tertiary education—is becoming more common, it is also becoming far less clear and reliable as aspirant young Cambodians negotiate the fast-paced complexity of the modern city.

While it is certainly the case that increasing numbers of Cambodians are travelling abroad or migrating for work, these numbers are not high enough to destabilise the idea that everyday life, and modern status by extension, is predominantly local. However, these local lives are increasingly destabilised by a growing and diversifying array of international flows. It is these flows that have contributed to the pace and complexity that has unsettled the once-reliable paths through education to white-collar employment. The third chapter of this thesis began with a review of the term 'globalisation' which has come to be the most common term used to explain the present period of changing spatial relationships and intensification of international connectivity. These changes have been used to make claims of deterritorialisation and of the decreasing relevance of the nation-state. Significant questions have been raised over the extent that these claims are true, and over the historical specificity of the present (Cooper 2005; Dirlik 2003). The thesis has supported the position that for individuals, the increasing significance of physical mobility and the decreasing significance of borders and territory has been broadly exaggerated. The case of Phnom Penh supports the claims of Morley and Tomlinson—made primarily with reference to the developed West—that local experiences remain the norm, but are increasingly destabilised by global processes (Morley 2000; Tomlinson 1999).

Modernity's Imaginings and Reality

In broad terms, this thesis has been concerned with furthering challenges to the Eurocentrism of social theory and of academic understandings of modernity in particular. But it has also demonstrated the tension between efforts to counter theoretical Eurocentrism and the prominent position of the West in many popular imaginings of modernity. We have seen that many informants described banal modern consumption practices as generically 'Western' and that in some instances, this label was at odds with the Cambodian or Asian location of the source. New buildings that are of Asian origin have been labelled as 'Western' or 'European' often at the same time as

being marketed as 'world-class'. There are many such banal signifiers of modernity (re)producing a strong link between what is seen to be 'modern', 'world-class' or 'global' and specific (mostly Western) geographies. In contrast to colonial era Cambodia, in which modernity could be seen to be wholly located in France, today these ideas are produced through a diverse array of connections. While often described as 'global', these connections are usually geographically specific, reflecting the most advanced, spectacular or powerful places rather than the sum or average of all places in the world.

In chapter seven, we saw that English language—which has been shown to be an important component of becoming modern—is the language of ASEAN, of regional and international exchange, and is significantly de-linked from the national context of the Anglophone countries (Clayton 2006). It is useful for regional engagement far more often than for engagement with native speakers. But quite literally, the perceived importance of English results in the flags of Western Anglophone nations being displayed on the streets of Phnom Penh, advertising English schools, international schools and universities. Apart from education, many aspects of popular culture, fashion and the consumption of luxury goods are commonly associated with the West. The location of significant Khmer populations in the United States, Australia and France adds to the prominence of the West in imagining, and sometimes directly experiencing, the location of higher standards of living. Importantly, we also saw evidence of the growing significance of Asian modernities in Phnom Penh. The examples of South Korean popular culture and urban spectacle demonstrated the growing significance of Asian sites of modernity, which may represent the start of a more general shift towards Asia in popular imaginings of the hierarchies of modern status.

The correlation between everyday imaginings of modernity, and the realities of the city's modernisation is often weak. Even as the political and economic orientation of modern Cambodia is turning towards East Asia, popular imaginings of modernity still

frequently privilege the West. This apparent disconnect between the geographical imagining and reality of modernity in Phnom Penh is paralleled in the miscorrelation of imaginings and realities of modernity's inclusivity for many of the city's residents. Even for those who have been broadly excluded by the process of modernisation, the modern city is often celebrated. Exclusion is relative, and a marginal position in spaces of modernity within the household or the city does not preclude a sense of inclusion in the civic and national. Here, the difficulty of theorising modernity, and particularly the vernacular, has been readily apparent—modernity is ambiguous and polyvalent, and membership and exclusion are by no means clear.

In chapter six we saw the difficulty of arguing for the modernity of citizens such as Bunna,¹⁷⁷ who saw himself to be non-modern, and was seen to be so by other citizens. The reality of his engagement with modernity sees very little direct inclusion in modern spaces and practices. But at the same time, his story is a part of the city's modernisation, and Bunna himself identified with a sense of pride in the modernisation of Phnom Penh. To account for Bunna, and many other cases, it is necessary to understand modernity through multiple hierarchies. His exclusion from one hierarchical scale does not preclude inclusion on another. Further, inclusion is relative rather than absolute—Bunna's self-identification as non-modern is indicative of his peripherality to these processes and not his absolute exclusion. Broadly, relationships with modernity are polyvalent, and as we have seen, this is true for individuals, and also for the city itself, which is simultaneously the pinnacle of Cambodian modernity and a peripheral player in international geographies of modernity.

This variable relationship has highlighted the need for a theoretical understanding of modernity that allows for multiplicity on numerous scales—building on, but moving beyond the society/container models of multiple or alternative modernities that have

¹⁷⁷ Bunna's case is explored in chapter six, and is covered in more detail in the appendix.

been advanced by authors such as Eisenstadt (2000), Gaonkar (1999) and Appadurai (1996). When considering the relationship between individuals and ordinary understandings of modernity as status (Ferguson 2006), the need for a theoretical understanding that is even more 'multiple' is stronger still. Building on the core-periphery model of urban modernity proposed by Roy (2009a), this thesis has advanced a more general understanding of modernity through multiple core-periphery relationships and hierarchies of status on a wide range of scales. This understanding of 'modern' and its derivatives is related to its vernacular use, its positioning as the opposite of war and poverty, and as a relationship in various hierarchies of status with 'world-class' at the apex. Drawing on recent developments in assemblage theory, this understanding has sought to integrate all manner of scales in order to explore collective and individual assertions to modern or 'world class' status as components of the same process, while allowing for the variation that we have seen in the geographies of the *process* of modernisation, and popular *imaginings* of modernity.

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Appendices

Publications arising from this research

Sustainability, consumption and the household in developing world contexts

in *Material Geographies of Household Sustainability*

Paling W. and Winter T.

Ashgate (2011)

Overview: This chapter explores issues of sustainability and consumption beyond the developed world through a focus on Phnom Penh. It shows how modern aspirations are resulting in shifts away from sustainable, traditional practices—particularly with reference to the built environment.

Ordinary City, Ordinary Life: Off the Expo Map

in *Shanghai Expo: An International Forum on the Future of Cities*

Paling W.

Routledge (2012)

Overview: This chapter details the representation of the world and its cities at the Shanghai Expo in 2010, with a focus on ‘ordinary’ nations and cities. The chapter shows how the event has reproduced the hierarchies of modernity and urban knowledge, while simultaneously making an assertion to Chinese centrality in both these areas. At the same time, the chapter shows how the event has cast most of the world as devoid of modernity.

Planning a Future for Phnom Penh: Mega-Projects, Aid-Dependence and Disjointed Governance

Paling W.

Urban Studies (2012)

Overview: This article forms the basis of chapter five in this thesis. It explores the modernisation of the built environment in Phnom Penh and the international connections and locally grounded processes through which it takes place.

Methodology and Research Design

Situated as part of a very personal engagement with Cambodia, and Phnom Penh, this thesis draws on numerous years of observation. This has occurred through direct experience, at times when I have been physically located within Cambodia, through mass-mediated experience, through the maintenance of personal contacts in Cambodia through phone, email, and social networks, as well as through casual engagement with members of the Cambodia diaspora in Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. Through circumstance rather than design, this thesis draws on an extended light ethnography or participant observation process. While this experience was not guided by theory, I have found it to be very useful and necessary to consider recent theoretical developments in ethnography and participant observation in interpreting and positioning the results.

Apart from this circumstantial data in which this thesis is grounded, the study draws on a period of intense fieldwork that was designed and ran according to a tight schedule. This involved 88 face-to-face interviews ranging in length from 8 minutes to over 3 hours. Interviews were conducted with a range of key figures chosen for their involvement in the contemporary urban development of Phnom Penh, as well as a range of laypeople residing in the city. A set of interview questions were established for each group and used as a guide. For interviews with key figures, an interview guide was prepared before a scheduled meeting. Interviews with laypeople utilised prompt cards for those that took place on the street, and a more detailed guide for scheduled interviews.

Interviews with key figures included staff from: Phnom Penh Municipal Government (PPMG); the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC); Grand Phnom Penh International City; CamKo City; The World Bank, UNDP's Seila programme; and the opposition party MP for Phnom Penh, Yim Sovann. In most cases access was facilitated by introductions made through previously established academic and professional networks. Interview requests were made by email, and

generally followed up by phone. In the case of the PPMG, a formal written interview request was required, and repeated phone calls and visits to City Hall were necessary before an interview was granted.

The first part of this chapter is focused on the research design and provides detail of research aims and questions, the data produced for this study, language issues and ethical considerations. The second part of the chapter begins with a section that contextualises me, providing background of my own engagement with Phnom Penh and how I came to conduct this study. This is followed by an exploration of methodological issues that have informed this thesis and have shaped the research design for my fieldwork.

Language

The majority of interviews were conducted with the assistance of a Min Phannarak, who I employed as my research assistant and Khmer language interpreter. My spoken colloquial Khmer language ability is reasonably strong, and is useful in establishing rapport and in introducing my research. However it is not strong enough to conduct these interviews alone, and the English language ability of many informants was similarly limited, so interviews were conducted in a mix of direct and translated English and Khmer. While my spoken Khmer language was often sufficient for much of the interview, an interpreter was present at all interviews to assist with translation and clarification. Interviews were recorded where consent was granted, and transcriptions were made of all English and Khmer dialogue. For the analysis of textual material, translation was always provided by Phannarak, as my Khmer reading and writing ability is elementary.

Ethnography and experience.

The interpretation of my experience in an ethnographic sense draws on two non-traditional approaches to ethnography. To a limited degree, my extended personal

relationship with the some of the informants in this research, and the personal nature of my experiences in Cambodia is suited to being analysed through an autoethnographic approach. Ellis and Bochner argue that 'human communication is not an object' and that 'as communicating humans, studying humans communicating, we are inside what we are studying' (2005, p. 743), the same can be said of social and cultural interactions, embedded as they are, in various forms of human communications. Ellis and Bochner acknowledge that such a personal narrative will be somewhat fictionalised. They argue that 'a story is not a neutral attempt to mirror the facts of one's life; it does not seek to recover already constituted meanings' (2005, p. 745). A story is not useful only if it accurately reflects the past. Rather it is useful for its consequences, it does not simply reflect a series of events, but the aspects of those events that the storyteller highlights, their selective remembering of the past.

This approach to narrative is important in both the relation of my own experience, as well as that of the informants in this research. This thesis involves a process of self-discovery for myself as the author, a process that began well before this thesis, and it is a process that is useful to understand in contextualising the more substantial aspects of this research, which are much less self-reflective. This thesis takes the approach that Paul Willis describes, telling "my story" about "their story" through the fullest conceptual bringing out of "their story" (2000, p. xii). In acknowledging and accepting my own position as part of the process that I am investigating, I make no pretence of eliminating the influence of myself as an observer. Where it is relevant, I have acknowledged and interrogate the nature of my involvement. Such an approach is increasingly common in social and cultural research, breaking with the traditional ethnographic observational approach.

The importance of moving beyond a traditional ethnographic approach is heightened by the increasing significance of movement that I addressed in chapter 3. While this has in no way supplanted locality, it is increasingly important to consider a wider range of

scales up to and including the global in the interpretation of experience—both my own, and those related to me by others. In anthropology and sociology, the consideration of such extra-local forces is not new. Burawoy (2000) traces the practice of ‘global ethnography’ back to the early 20th century publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Thomas et al 1996) in sociology as the foundation tome of the early Chicago school; and to the early 1940s publication of *The Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia* (Wilson 1941), which holds a similar position for the development of the Manchester School of Social Anthropology. To varying degrees, both of these works consider the subjects of ethnography as extra-local, existing as part of a multiplicity of dynamic and connected processes, rather than being fixed and contained.

So in making observations centred in a geographic location, we must acknowledge the complexity of simultaneously transcending and reinforcing local scales. As locality is undercut by the penetration of global forces and networks, reactionary desires commonly emerge, seeking to (re)define these locally bounded imaginaries that were previously taken for granted. As Burawoy has argued, ‘just as global connections are transnational, global imaginations are post-national in that they react against the nation, reinvigorate the local, demand regional autonomy, or clamour for universal identities’ (Burawoy 2000, p. 34). Burawoy’s ‘global ethnography’ as well as ethnographic approaches detailed by other author’s such as Appadurai’s ‘cosmopolitan ethnography’ (1996, p. 52) seek to situate the traditionally bounded, and local scope of ethnography within the complexity of the myriad processes that constitute the globalised present. It is in this context that I situate my own analysis, amongst the myriad interconnected processes that intersect with Phnom Penh. Processes that are local, national, regional, and global in scope.

Complexity, the Cultural, and the Social

Having established the local as intensely connected and recognising that this must be acknowledged in interpreting experience, it is necessary to consider how these innumerable connections can be meaningfully conceived. In what Urry (2003; 2005b) refers to as 'the complexity turn', social and cultural theory and enquiry has begun drawing on recent developments in fields such as physics, mathematics, economics, and biology. In the last few decades of the 20th century, ideas of chaos, complexity, non-linearity, and dynamical systems analysis are increasingly deployed in place of relatively static, reductionist conceptualisations that have traditionally been employed. Such fixity is represented well in Newton's claim that:

absolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable. Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external

(Quoted in Greene 2000, p. 377)

Contemporary physics employs a vastly different conceptualisation of space and time, in which Leibniz's contemporaneous criticism of Newton's absolutism is much closer to the current picture. For Leibniz:

space and time are merely bookkeeping devices for conveniently summarizing relationships between objects and events within the universe. The location of an object in space and time has meaning only in comparison with another. Space and time are the vocabulary of these relations, but nothing more

(Quoted in Greene 2000, p. 377)

The fixity of these rudimentary concepts of science has long been questioned, and the treatment of space and time as absolute, was wholly abandoned in the early 20th century with the Einstein's publication of his theories of special and general relativity.

More recently, an analogous change has occurred with respect to the treatment of the abstract configurations of the social and cultural realms.

In response to the inability of abstract theoretical science to accurately describe the complexities of the real world, which involves large numbers of variable components, the 20th century saw the emergence of systemic thinking. Systemic thinking, concerned itself with real world systems thinking in terms of relationships, patterns, processes, and context. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and the early 21st century, an intensification of activity in systems thinking led to the development of complexity theory (Capra 2005, p. 33). Urry has described this as a 'revival of neo-vitalism' in its acknowledgement of the limits of a determinist approach to knowledge (2005b, p. 1). Such an approach is congruous with the acknowledgement within physics and mathematics that 'no physics theory is able to explain a teapot' (George F. R. Ellis 2005, 743). That is, that the fundamental laws of physics whether in their current form, or in any future form that may involve a unified 'theory of everything', do not explain social processes, in humans or in elephants, as the complexities of social processes depend on causal powers that act independently of lower-level fundamental processes (Ellis 2005).

It is important to note the links between broad ruptures brought about by rapid developments in computing and communication, and the broader turn towards complexity theory. For the hard sciences, complexity was partly enabled by the massive increases in computing power available from the 1980s onwards. It was only at this time that modelling complex physical systems with huge numbers of components became possible. This technological change might well be as significant as the introduction of the printing press, which allowed renaissance scholars the freedom to generate thought rather than copying texts (Bhambra 2007a). Today the computing power of the late 20th century has enabled another level of analysis, the possibility for scientists to acknowledge the complexity of real-world systems, and make the

calculations necessary in researching the behaviour of systems involving large numbers of components.

Analogous concepts have been developing in the social sciences, both explicitly articulated as 'complexity', but perhaps more often where the link between the 'complexity turn' in the hard sciences and the chaotic and complex nature of theoretical concepts used in social analyses is not explicit. Much of the theory that was explored earlier in this thesis falls into this category in that it relates to complexity, and can be comfortably situated within a complexity framework but does not always explicitly refer to it. For example, Bauman's description of 'liquid modernity' involves a world of transience and impermanence, a light, liquid world, in contrast to earlier incarnations of modernity, heavy, and solid in comparison. The speed at which the movement of people, capital, ideas, objects, and images occurs, is paramount. Amongst such rapid and free-flowing movement, Bauman describes the resulting situation as one in which the structures of social life can no longer be relied upon to hold their form. Thus, in contrast to the relatively solid structures of the early modern, and pre-modern world, understandings of contemporary social structures cannot be utilised in the life-strategies of individuals. Understanding this liquid world involves ongoing attempts at adaptability in a world that is rapidly moving, multiple and complex and as a result, objects of analysis are often ambiguous or 'fuzzy' (Bauman 2000).

Independent of the development of complexity theory, Bauman summarises the scientific turn towards chaos in the context of liquid modernity:

Once moved by the belief that 'God does not play dice', that the universe is essentially deterministic and that the human task consists in making a full inventory of its laws so that there will be no more groping in the dark and human action will be unerring and always on target, contemporary science took a turn towards the recognition of the endemically indeterministic nature of the world,

of the enormous role played by chance, and of the exceptionality, rather than the normality, of order and equilibrium

(Bauman 2000, 136)

Bauman's liquid modern world of today is a complex, open system, far from equilibrium, characterised by the rapid movement of people, capital, ideas, objects, and images in turbulent disorder. This picture corresponds with that posited by the *Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, which argued that social analysis ought to be 'based on the dynamics of non-equilibria, with its emphasis on multiple futures, bifurcation and choice, historical dependence, and ... intrinsic and inherent uncertainty' (Wallerstein 1996; cited in Urry 2007, p. 27).

With these descriptions of the world as complex and unstable, it is difficult to understand the relative stability that we experience in everyday life – from the stability of living organisms, to that of the city, and that of the world as a whole. Such stability is described in complexity terms as being 'on the edge of chaos', relatively stable, but comprised of porous and open systems, in a state that is far from equilibrium, but maintains some degree of balance. Urry has argued that complex systems and their constituent components do not maintain a consistent stability, but rather, a balance of order and chaos, 'where the components are neither fully locked into place but yet do not dissolve into anarchy' (2005a, p. 238). The components of these systems interact to produce neither order, nor chaos, but rather a dynamic that can be described as metastability (Urry 2007, p. 27).

The transition from an ontological position that involves chaos, complexity and general lack of structure will naturally involve a somewhat messy array of methods. Mirroring the approach that Majima and Moore see fit in the context of cultural sociology, it is necessary to take on an 'openness [...] and willingness to engage with a variety of data and methods, however unorthodox' (Majima & Moore 2009, p. 204). That is, not privileging or prioritising any particular method over any other, and involves 'greater

reflection on how sociologists' or cultural researchers, 'can best relate to the proliferation of social data gathered by others, which we currently largely ignore' (Savage & Burrows 2007, p. 895). While the original data produced for this study is centred on interview data, complimentary methods reflect this approach.

This is by no means a comprehensive review of the development of complexity theory in the social sciences, and this thesis is not focused on complexity. Rather, I have approached this thesis informed by, but not focused on, complexity. The above represent a crude summary of my understanding of complexity. What I have sought to do in this thesis, is not to identify complexity and further contribute to the confusion in our understanding of the world, but to provide analysis that renders this complexity palatable. This is articulated much more eloquently in a recent article by Ien Ang titled *Navigating Complexity: From Cultural Critique to Cultural Intelligence*. Ang argues that complexity has become a truism, and indeed, the above summary offers nothing new. But, Ang continues, 'what remains unclear...is how we should respond to this complexity in practice' (2011, p. 779). While she takes care to point out that there will never be a definitive means of dealing with complexity, Ang argues simplification—but not being simplistic—can allow us to navigate complexity. Through such a process, cultural research can move from deconstruction and critique, to more meaningful engagement with complex real-world problems.

This concern strikes a chord with me in that I have attempted to move beyond the deconstruction of existing understandings of social and cultural issues in Cambodia and Phnom Penh. I have sought to produce meaningful analysis that clarifies rather than adds to confusion, while demonstrating an acute awareness of the complexity of the issues at hand. In some cases this has been very difficult, particularly for the first two data chapters that deal with the elusive and ambiguous vernacular understandings of modernity and being modern in Phnom Penh. It was slightly easier in the third and fourth data chapter, where the more tangible objects of analysis provided grounding

for an investigation of the complexity that surrounds them. Overall, I have aimed to take complexity into account while foregrounding the subject matter rather than its complexity, and I think, and certainly hope, that as a whole, this approach has resulted in a thesis that adds clarity rather than confusion to our understanding of contemporary Phnom Penh.

Ethics

The study was approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number H8135. Informants were provided with information sheets and consent forms in English and/or Khmer language. Informants have been de-identified in cases where their position is not relevant to the study, they have not consented to the use of their full name. In some cases, informants declined to participate after seeing the consent form, as they did not feel comfortable putting their name to something that confirmed that they would be anonymous. The research was seen to be low risk, but precautions were taken to avoid the research being seen as political in order to further reduce the risk to myself and my research assistant. As expected, the research was not seen to be political, and no problems of this nature arose.

Research Design

The original research component of the data for this thesis is qualitative, involving relatively informal participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, life-histories, and the analysis of various social and cultural texts. Two types of in-depth interviews were conducted, one set focused on identified key figures in the processes involved in the staging of modern identity in Phnom Penh, and another that consists of a more general sample of people living in Phnom Penh.

Original research for this thesis produced the following data:

Informal participant observation based on my experience of Phnom Penh since 2002. These observations are based on approximately twenty trips to Cambodia, with a total of around three years spent in-country, approximately two years of that time was spent in Phnom Penh. I detail this experience more thoroughly in the latter half of this chapter.

Three in-depth biographical investigations of Phnom Penh residents. These began with either a single person or a couple, and took place over multiple sessions and often involved other family members.

34 semi-structured interviews with key figures in the development and transformation of modern identity in Phnom Penh. These included government employees, members of parliament, a former ambassador, an economist from the world bank, property developers, university lecturers, architects and business owners.

40 semi-structured interviews with laypeople throughout Phnom Penh.

Seven scripted interviews with travel agents investigating popular overseas destinations and tour itineraries.

Photographs taken in Phnom Penh comprising over 2000 digital images of street life, the built environment, interiors of buildings, billboards, restaurants and people.

Photographs taken at Expo 2010, Shanghai, China, comprising over 500 photos of the Cambodia pavilion and events that took place on Cambodia's national day and over 1000 additional photos taken elsewhere on the Expo site.

Other smaller data sources such as the results of automated extraction and textual analysis of Cambodian internet directories, archival research at the Cambodia Daily and online with the Phnom Penh Post and analysis of Facebook statistics that detail the size of advertising markets for particular demographics within Cambodia.

Interview Approach

The approach to interviews drew from the 'three-interview series' model articulated by Seidman (Seidman 2006). Seidman advocates the use of multiple interviews in order to better contextualise the meaning of the experiences related by the interviewees, arguing that 'interviewers who propose to explore their topic by arranging a one-shot meeting with an 'interviewee' whom they've never met tread on thin contextual ice' (2006, p. 17). Seidman proposes that the first interview establishes the context of the informants' experience. The second allows informants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages informants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. Seidman details the specifics of each interview, the first involving a focused life history; the second an exploration of the present lived experience with specific focus on the topic area; and the third, asking informants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. A sample interview plan is included in the appendix, as is a list of all interviews conducted.

Seidman's approach was developed in the context of education research, and required a loose interpretation in order to be utilised most effectively for the social and cultural issues explored in this thesis. The proposition of three one-hour interviews was too much to ask for many informants. A small number of informants were interviewed using the three interview series method. A larger number of informants were involved in just one interview, though its progression was loosely guided by the aims of each of Seidman's three interviews. It was my intention that interviews would take an hour with each of the three interview themes occupying around 20 minutes. My experience in actually conducting research was that interview times were highly variable dependent on how whether the informant was comfortable talking, whether they were busy, and the setting in which the interview took place. Interviews conducted on the street lasted as little as five minutes. In contrast, interviews that were pre-arranged took anything from half an hour to as long as three hours. These were conducted in a range of settings including the informants' home or office, the house I

was renting at the time or in cafes or restaurants. In cases where interviews took place with informants who I had never met before, and lasted only a short time, then as Seidman has argued, I was treading on 'thin contextual ice'. However, I found that many of these interviews were still useful, as they often provided uncritical assessments of the interview questions. That is, simple answers that haven't been thought out, and reflect informants' existing opinions on a topic, which may be inchoate.

All interviews were recorded, and transcriptions were produced which included all English language dialogue as well as translations of all Khmer language dialogue.

Interview Sampling

The first set of interviews were obtained through identifying a range of figures: in Cambodian popular culture, such as actors and musicians; in the process of the changing built environment, such as architects and developers; in governing culture, such as politicians and public servants; and in the consumption of fashion, such as the owners of boutiques and fashion magazines. As the subjects have very specific relevance to this project and to Phnom Penh, interview guides were developed separately for each interview. In government and the private sector, this sample significantly reflects the people who I had access to through my academic and/or professional networks. Chinese developers were found to be far less accessible than Cambodian, Korean and Indonesian developers and as such, they are absent from this interview sample.

The second set of interviews were conducted with a range of laypeople in Phnom Penh. The sample was acquired through snowball sampling starting with my own established connections with Cambodians living in Phnom Penh, as well by approaching people in public places. The guiding questions for these interviews can be found in the appendix.

While I have included a wide range of the city's residents in this sample, the views of those who are more enthusiastic about participation are more thoroughly represented.

University students and recent graduates were often eager to practice their English, and engage in prolonged conversation. Those participants with lower levels of education were more likely to give shorter answers or decline to participate.

The resulting sample is not, and does not claim to be, representative of the entire population of Phnom Penh. A deep engagement with a sample big enough to make such a claim would require more resources than I had access to. A thinner engagement might have been practical, however, for the reasons mentioned above, I feel that more useful insights can be drawn through richer, albeit possibly less representative analyses.

Interview Plans

The guiding plans for interviews were developed and revised as fieldwork took place, with revisions often being conducted with a particular interview in mind. This was the case for all interviews with key figures, as interview questions needed to reflect their particular expertise. For extended biographical investigations, this was also the case, with different sets of questions developed after revision of the first interview.

Interviews with laypeople were much more likely to use a consistent plan, but custom plans were developed for some pre-arranged interviews.

Section 1: Demographics

Interviews began with Khmer language pleasantries, enquiries as to the informants name, age, home province, marital status and education. These are questions that are very common in a conversation with a stranger. As much as the demographic data was useful, they were primarily aimed at establishing rapport and loosening the mood. My Khmer language is sufficient to engage fully in these discussions without the need for a translator. Following this initial discussion, a translator was used more often.

Section 2: Personal Background

This set of questions aimed to establish how people had come to live in Phnom Penh. I addressed informants' education and current occupation and whether they felt that these things were highly regarded. I then turned to their perception of their standard of living, asking whether it had changed over the last 5 years, whether they felt that it had changed for the better, and what has become more difficult. Finally I asked directly if they felt that they were a modern person, and asked for clarification of what makes people modern or less modern.

Section 3: Perceptions of Others

This section was aimed at understanding where they felt they were positioned within social hierarchies, whether their job and education was respected and why. This was followed by a broader investigation of what they feel is respected people in Phnom Penh and whether that is different in the provinces.

Section 4: Perceptions of Phnom Penh

The final section of the interview addressed the informant's perception of their city. I sought to understand their feelings about the transformation of the built environment, and particularly skyscrapers and other 'world-class' developments. Further questions were aimed at understanding how they saw Phnom Penh's position in the world, and how they think that this will change of the next decade.

Biographical investigations

Biographical investigations were conducted with Cambodians living in Phnom Penh who I had a long-standing, established relationship with or relatives of these people. These people were chosen because of the degree of mutual respect and trust that we have for each other, which facilitates honest and open discussion. While I had initially intended to interview individuals in their own homes, this meant that other members

of the household were typically drawn in. All three interviews ended up involving the individual and their husband or wife. I made sure to spend some time speaking with each of the informants separately, particularly in cases where one informant—typically the husband—dominated the discussion.

The obvious pitfall of this approach is the abandonment of any sense of detachment. These people, to varying degrees, have been involved in my life, and I in theirs, and as such, they have shaped my own views, and I have shaped theirs. While there are obvious pitfalls involved in interviewing people with whom I have an existing relationship, I feel that these are the people from whom I can get the most insightful data, as they are much more able to speak from the private voice. Chou Meng Tarr's (2001) reflections on her research carried out throughout the 1990s describe the difficulty that can be had in conducting social research in Cambodia. Tarr had to contend with the power relationships of the communities she was researching, which at many times prevented subaltern voices from being heard.

Biographical investigations followed a similar guide to that which I have detailed above, but in the extended period of time during which they took place, the topic of discussion deviated significantly from the guide. For subsequent interview, new questions were written that further investigated issues that had already been raised.

Photographs and Promotional Material

For construction projects, photographs were taken of buildings and construction sites, of billboard advertising and project offices. Promotional material was obtained from project offices, television and magazines advertising, and project web sites. For fashion, travel, and popular culture, photographs were taken at promotional events, clothing retailers, on the streets of Phnom Penh, in travel agents, and at the airport. Promotional material was sourced from the same channels. A selection of recent issues of approximately twenty of Phnom Penh's most popular magazines were sourced. This

was supplemented by the extensive archive of Cambodian magazines available online at <http://www.ekhmerbook.com/>.

Shanghai Expo Fieldwork

I participated in a research project on Expo 2010, Shanghai, China with a team from what was then the Centre for Cultural Research led by my supervisor, Dr Tim Winter. My fieldwork was conducted over a period of one week during which I was attendance at the Expo. Data collection involved photography, video, audio, and note-taking, from approximately 50 pavilions. I focused on the Cambodia pavilion, and took part in events that took place on Cambodia's national day.¹⁷⁸ In addition to being a very useful source of data in its own right, it provided an opportunity to request interviews with a number of key figures in government, the private sector, and the entertainment industry.

Archival Research, Data Mining and other Minor Data Sources

A range of other minor data sources informed this thesis. These included the results of a day spent using the Cambodia Daily archives, where digital photographs were taken of all articles that were found to be relevant to this thesis.¹⁷⁹ A similar process was used for the Phnom Penh Post—their online archive enabled a more thorough investigation.¹⁸⁰ Other less conventional data sources included the results of automated extraction of data from the Cambodian Yellow Pages.¹⁸¹ I used this method

¹⁷⁸ Participation was facilitated by Lay Sovichea, a former student of mine who is now studying in China.

¹⁷⁹ The Cambodia Daily archive system allows for search by headlines only. So results were based on the title rather than the full text of the article.

¹⁸⁰ Paid access to <http://phnompenhpost.com> theoretically allows full text searching of their archives. During the time that I was working with this data they experience numerous technical difficulties, and full text search was often unavailable.

¹⁸¹ I wrote a script that would automatically retrieve all result pages for a particular search term or category and produce a comma separated list that I was able to import into my spreadsheet software.

to investigate the types of listings that used particular terms such as modern, global and their Khmer and French equivalents, as well as the terms used by particular types of listings, particularly educational institutions. Facebook data provided another unconventional source, both from extracted datasets which have since been deemed illegal, and from signing up as an advertiser and evaluating the size of different Cambodian demographics.

Data Analysis

Content analysis techniques were used to identify key themes within the data. However as the sample is non-representative, the quantitative results of this analysis are not presented as significant data. Themes were drawn out in the process of analysing texts, rather than simply being predetermined. Analysis entailed a cyclical process of thematic analysis, revisiting coding definitions, and re-analysis, loosely based on methods described by Krippendorff (2004). Coding was undertaken using *Atlas.ti* which allowed for both manual and automatic coding of interview data. Reports generated from the software allowed for the identification of significant themes and provided quick and easy access when reviewing quotes relevant to a particular code.

The findings are presented thematically, drawing on all datasets in the descriptive analysis of each of the key issues raised in the following chapters. Savage and Burrows (2007, p. 894) question the value of the in-depth interview in the context of mobility, at the same time, acknowledging that it does serve as a valuable resource for the elicitation of the reflexive identities of individuals. Situating individual identities within the myriad mobilities that constitute social life requires research that extends well beyond the interview. These identities ought to be situated in the context of historical processes, as well as the contemporary flows that intersect with the lives of individuals.

The majority of the research methods utilised here draw on relatively local resources, all geographically situated in Phnom Penh. Such an approach to data is seemingly out of

place in a thesis that puts significant focus on mobilities, and considers the city as an array of networked processes. It is in the following analyses that an outward-looking reading of the data fully engages with the issues of complexity and the mobilities involved in the staging of modern identity in contemporary Phnom Penh. This process of analysis draws out and articulates the positioning of these processes within wider national, regional, and transnational networks, as well as more anthropological 'global assemblages' of associations (Ong & Collier 2005) that constitute individual, and group notions of identity.

Sample Interview Plan 1 (laypeople)

Demographics

What is your age?

Gender?

What is your home province?

How long have you been living in Phnom Penh?

What is the highest level of education that you've achieved?

Personal Background

Have you always lived in Phnom Penh, if not, how did you come to live in Phnom Penh?

Who did you stay with?

What did you come for in the first instance?

Was it easy to fit in?

Was it exciting? Scary? Easy? Whatever?

Did you study in Phnom Penh?

Was it a good school/university?

Was it easy to find a job when you graduated?

Tell me about how you went about finding a job?

What sorts of things made it difficult to find a job?

What is your occupation? Can you tell me a bit about what that involves?

Why did you choose this occupation?

Do you feel that your life, and your standard of living has changed much over the last 5 years?

Do you feel it has changed for the better?

What has become more difficult over the last 5 years?

Do you feel that you are a modern person?

If not, who do you think is modern? How are they different to you?

What about people who are less modern? How are they different?

Perceptions of Others

Do you think your job and education is one that people respect?

Is your family proud that of your job?

What other things do you think people in Phnom Penh respect highly?

What about when you travel to the provinces? Does this change?

Perceptions of Phnom Penh

How do you feel about the current wave of developments taking place in Phnom Penh – Gold Tower 42, Phnom Penh Tower, CamKo City, Diamond Island, OCIC Tower, etc?

Do you think it will be successful?

Who do you think will live there?

Do you think you might live there?

Do you think Phnom Penh is an important city in the region? Or in the world? Why?

Do you think it will become an important city in the near future?

How will it be different?

What do you think Phnom Penh will be like in 10 years' time? Are you excited or worried about the future of Phnom Penh?

What are some of the problems that you see with Phnom Penh becoming more modern?

Sample Interview Plan 2 (City Hall)

Can you comment on what you see as the greatest challenges involved in the development of the city of Phnom Penh?

Do you feel that the administrations of Chea Sophara and Kep Chuk Tema have been effective in this process? Can you comment on what you feel has been most successful in each of these administrations?

Urban development receives significantly less attention than rural development from development agencies and NGOs; there are very few courses at Phnom Penh's universities that address the social and cultural aspects of urban development, while there are many that do so for rural development. Do you agree with this statement, and why do you think this is so?

Which development agencies have cooperated with city hall? What projects have been most successful?

Are there any plans to encourage universities to produce graduates specialising in urban planning and development? What about in urban social analysis?

It seems that perhaps as a result of this, urban development has been largely left to the government, who at the time had little experience in these areas due to the effects of the war. And it seems that by extension, much of the city's development has been undertaken by private investors.. Can you comment on this issue, and the challenges that it poses?

Do you think that it affects the consistency of vision for the development of the city?

—

Hun Sen makes no secret of the fact that he has a strong desire for tall buildings in Phnom Penh; why do you feel that this is the case? Do you feel that these are appropriate for Phnom Penh?

OCIC tower is now largely empty; can you comment on why you feel that this office space is difficult to lease?

Do you feel that the office space in development such as Gold Tower 42, Diamond Island, and CamKo city will be similarly difficult to lease?

It seems that in spite of the fact that most people in Phnom Penh will not have access to these developments, they are excited and inspired by their presence; do you feel that this excitement is justified? Why do you think that people are excited by them, even though they will not be able to live, work, or afford to shop in these new spaces?

Do you feel that CamKo city will be successful? Could it be the future centre of Phnom Penh?

—

Can you comment on the Phnom Penh 2020 Master plan? Why in your opinion, has it been delayed so long?

Given this delay, do you feel that there is much of an overarching vision guiding the current development of Phnom Penh?

Do you have any comments on the development of commercial edge-cities such as CamKo city and Grand Phnom Penh International City? To what extent are they integrated into the Master Plan for Phnom Penh?

These large developments are all called 'global', 'international' or 'world'; do you think Phnom Penh can become a 'global city'?

Why do you feel that there has been an increase in gated communities in Phnom Penh?

Why do people want to live in these spaces?

The separation of Phnom Penh's wealthy and poor residents means that the very practical and effective recycling networks in Phnom Penh do not have access to the recyclables of the most significant consumers; what effect do you think this has on recycling rates in Phnom Penh? Will it just be recycled anyway, but at a later stage?

Are you aware of any other useful informal services provided by the poor that are affected by this segregation?

—

Obviously the removal of the urban poor from the centre of the city is a major issue and a source of significant criticism for the municipal government; do you feel that any alternative approaches could have been utilised in communities such as Dey Krahom?

While it seems that progress is being made throughout the country, it seems that the gap between Cambodia's urban and rural population is increasing; can you comment on why you feel this is so?

The same thing could be said of developed nations like Australia; do you feel that the situation in Cambodia is any better or worse than in other countries?

—

Speaking to people around Phnom Penh, it seems that traffic, pollution, and flooding are seen as the most pressing issues where improvement is needed; do you feel that this is justified? What challenges are involved in addressing these issues?

It seems that there are significant social/cultural issues that pose a challenge to the implementation of various infrastructures in Phnom Penh; e.g. people blocking drains in order to prevent the smell near their house; private use of the public sidewalk

meaning that walking is not a realistic option in Phnom Penh, and preventing the implementation of public transport. Are there any other similar social/cultural challenges that you are aware of?

How can these social/cultural problems be addressed?

Are there any recent plans to implement public transport in Phnom Penh?

Are there plans in place to improve drainage? What action is currently being taken?

In your opinion, to what extent is the increased flooding in Phnom Penh linked to the filling in of lakes? What other factors have played a part in this problem? Silt? Rubbish?

Interview list

<i>Date</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age (approx)</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
19/07/10	M	24	LP	IT
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
19/07/10	n/a	n/a	KF	Travel Agent
20/07/10	M	30	KF	IT teacher
20/07/10	M/F	32/43	LP	Merchants
20/07/10	M	35	KF	IT teacher
20/07/10	M	38	KF	IT teacher
20/07/10	M/F	28/26	BIO	Manager/accountant
22/07/10	F/F	21/23	LP	Sales Coordinator/receptionist
23/07/10	M	24	LP	Salesman/student
23/07/10	M	40	LP	Unemployed
25/07/10	M	43	BIO	WFP clearance
27/07/10	M	42	KF	President, Nigerian Association of Cambodia
27/07/10	M/F	28/26	BIO	Manager/accountant
28/07/10	M/F	25	BIO	Phone salespeople, former garment factory workers
30/07/10	M	30	LP	Admin officer at English school
30/07/10	M	51	KF	Assistant to Hun Kimneang
2/08/10	M	48	LP	Tuk-tuk driver
2/08/10	M	19	LP	Dental prosthetist
2/08/10	F/F	30/16	LP	Homemaker/student
2/08/10	M	45	LP	Moto-taxi driver
2/08/10	M/F	40/45	LP	Homemaker + unemployed electrician
3/08/10	M	55	BIO	Teacher
4/08/10	M	30	LP	Moto-taxi driver
4/08/10	F	40	LP	Merchant
4/08/10	F	25	BIO	Seller/trader/homemaker
4/08/10	M/F	25	BIO	Phone salespeople, former garment factory workers
7/08/10	F	24	LP	Student
7/08/10	M	24	LP	Student
7/08/10	M	26	KF	Accountant
7/08/10	M	29	KF	IT teacher and businessman
8/08/10	F	28	LP	Student
9/08/10	M	40	KF	Restaurant owner
9/08/10	M	40	KF	Government official
9/08/10	M	30	KF	Government official
10/08/10	M/M	28/35	KF	Marketing professional
10/08/10	F	24	KF	Model/Singer
11/08/10	M	22	LP	Med Student
12/08/10	F	26	LP	Salesman
12/08/10	M	30	KF	Director

13/08/10	M	22	LP	Student
13/08/10	F	23	LP	Student
13/08/10	M	22	LP	Student
13/08/10	F	50	LP	Pig Farmer
13/08/10	M	30	LP	Finance administrator
13/08/10	M	40	KF	Architect
13/08/10	M	32	KF	Dancer/dance teacher
14/08/10	M	26	LP	Accountant
16/08/10	M	28	LP	Manager
16/08/10	M	40	KF	UNDP advisor
18/08/10	M	34	KF	Lecturer in sociology
20/08/10	F	23	LP	Student
20/08/10	F	24	LP	Student
20/08/10	F	24	LP	Student
20/08/10	M	35	KF	Deputy Vice Chancellor
22/08/10	F	32	KF	Social researcher
23/08/10	M	38	LP	Tour guide
23/08/10	M	27	KF	Assistant to commerce minister
24/08/10	M	35	KF	Government official
24/08/10	M	40	KF	CEO of an investment fund
25/08/10	M	25	LP	Student
25/08/10	M/F	18/23	LP	French Khmer tourists
25/08/10	M	40	KF	Government official
25/08/10	F	30	KF	Homemaker/social researcher
25/08/10	M	40	KF	Project planning manager
27/08/10	M	24	KF	TV presenter
28/08/10	M	31	KF	Monk / NGO director
29/08/10	M/F	30/28	LP	Accountant
29/08/10	F/F	18/19	LP	student
30/08/10	F	23	LP	Student
30/08/10	F	23	LP	Student
30/08/10	F	21	LP	Student
30/08/10	M	26	LP	HR consultant
30/08/10	M	40	KF	MP for Phnom Penh
31/08/10	M	30	KF	Economist
31/08/10	F	35	LP	Trainer
1/09/10	M	40	KF	Project planning manager
2/09/10	M	55	KF	City Hall, director of administration
2/09/10	M	30	KF	Deputy director of land management, Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction
3/09/10	M	20	LP	Student
3/09/10	M	20	LP	Student
3/09/10	M	20	LP	Student
4/09/10	M	26	KF	Cambodian business elite (second generation)
19/11/10	F	55	KF	Former Australian ambassador to Cambodia

Case Studies: Paths to a Modern Life

The four stories that follow each represent successful paths to the establishment of modern lives—on broad trajectories of increasing wealth and connectivity. Most of them involve university education and the establishment of a white collar career. They each represent very different beginnings, from an orphan being selected for a Soviet education to the uneducated rural childhoods in the 1980s and in the past decade, through to a very privileged transnational upbringing. They show the importance of personal aspiration, ambition and tenacity in taking a path out of rural poverty, and the great benefits of being born into wealth—from the seemingly marginal benefit of being born into a provincial town rather than a rural town, through to the immense benefit of being born into one of Cambodia’s wealthiest families. They highlight the various spaces and scales on which status is judged, from comparisons made with other families in the village or even within the household, through to comparisons being made with one of the world’s most expensive night clubs in Las Vegas.

Samnang, male, early 50s¹⁸²

Samnang was born to a family of moderate means in 1960 on the Eastern outskirts of Phnom Penh. He considers himself to be fairly successful today, able to provide for his children, and is proud of his tumultuous life story. Samnang was in high school when Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, and his schooling at the prestigious Sisowath High School was interrupted. He was orphaned during the Khmer Rouge regime, but was able to resume his education and was eventually selected as one of 360 orphans in Phnom Penh who went to university in various locations throughout what was then the Soviet Union. Now 50, he described his excitement as a 20 year old, at the prospects of travelling by plane, seeing snow, tasting European food, and meeting European people. With a small group of students from a similar background, he travelled to Moscow,

¹⁸² Interview conducted on 30 July, 2010

eventually settling in Minsk, Belarus. His encounters with these cities were fascinating experiences, both in stark contrast to the experience of civil war in rural Cambodia during the late 70s.

Samnang studied mechanical engineering, but it was his Russian language skills that were ultimately of use to him on his return to Phnom Penh in the mid 1980s. He was initially employed as a translator, working in Kampong Cham for Hun Neng, the older brother of the current Prime Minister, Hun Sen. He recalls a time in the late 80s, when he came to realise that it would no longer be useful to know Vietnamese or Russian as a foreign language, but that communication between the diverse group of soldiers would take place in English. Samnang had a basic understanding of English from having studied the bible in English during the early 70s, this was hastily added to by listening to lessons broadcast on the radio by Voice of America. In the early days of the UNTAC administration, Samnang applied for a job and worked for with in an administrative role for the police. This position was short-lived, as he was recalled to work for the Cambodian government, as Hun Neng, again needed an interpreter. During his brief stint at UNTAC in the early 1990s, Samnang was amazed to find that their staff rarely used typewriters. He prophetically informed his new boss that typewriters would soon be put in the museum, replaced by personal computers. His enthusiasm for computers saw him attend one of Phnom Penh's first computer schools. On completing his computing course, Samnang bought five computers back to Kampong Cham and passed on his knowledge within his workplace.

Samnang informed me that he left this government work due to a desire understand free market economics. It was difficult to ascertain whether Samnang was successful in realising this understanding as he went on to work in a range of Christian NGOs including World Vision and the Lutheran World Service. He eventually went to bible school in Malaysia, but found it to be too difficult and he quit. This marked the beginning of a financial decline, as he ended up working as an English teacher in a poor

rural area of Kampot province. In a separate interview, I learned from his daughter that somewhere in this process, his wife left him and the family split up. His children remained in Phnom Penh as he taught there for seven months. This period of personal decline came to an abrupt end when he received a phone call from a former student—Hun Kimleng, the daughter of his former boss. She told him she'd had a dream about him, and asked that he immediately travel to her father's house.

His arrival at the house was a shock, she remarked that his hair looked like bamboo roots and that his shirt and pants were no good. He was scrubbed up, new clothes were purchased and he was sprayed with perfume. A laptop and mobile phone were purchased and he was taken to a tailor and fitted for work clothes before being given a job as her assistant at her new company Worldwide Investment Incorporation. Hun Kimleng has many business interests including a branch of Gloria Jeans Coffee in Phnom Penh, and a number of economic land concessions throughout Cambodia, though at the time of speaking to Samnang, none of these were in production. Still, Samnang now works in a suit and tie, managing a small team in an air-conditioned office. He now lives with one of his daughters and is once again able to provide for his children. He is proud of the transitions that he has made throughout his life, and somewhat bemused at his fortune in receiving that fateful phone call from his former student.

Chanda, female, early 40s¹⁸³

[My parents are] just laypeople, because they are uneducated, they're happy to see people become highly educated but they don't know how to push, how to encourage children or people to study hard because they are poor...during dinner, they said, 'who wants to become high educated or to become a

¹⁸³ Interview conducted on 31 August, 2010

professional staff in your life?' Among my brothers and sisters, I rise up a hand, I want because I don't want to work at field or hard work at the village.

Chanda's story is remarkable, but not uncommon. Coming from a poor, uneducated rural household, through hard work and a little luck, she was able to continue in school right through to university and ultimately trade a life of manual agricultural labour for white collar work in air-conditioned offices. As she related her story, Chanda would periodically take a breath before remarking on 'another big turning point'. While most Cambodian villages are not far from a primary school, high schools and upper secondary schools are far more disparate. To continue studying beyond primary school, Chanda, like many Cambodians, had to first save money to buy a bicycle, then use it to travel around seven kilometres to school along long-neglected roads that had been damaged by the war. The move to upper secondary school was even harder, as the closest school was in Battambang town, which was much further, and too far to travel by bicycle. Chanda was able to negotiate an arrangement with a friend to help with their business and housework in exchange for being able to live with them while she attended school.

Throughout her youth, Chanda made arrangements like this, took on paid work and sold goods in the market wherever she could in order to support her quest for education. Each of these arrangements were difficult to establish, as well as requiring a lot of convincing in order to overcome the perception that a young woman should not be far away from home, particularly for extended periods of time. Through another such arrangement Chanda moved first to Phnom Penh in order to attempt to gain a university scholarship. Here her financial limits came into play, as scholarships were only available at some universities and in some degrees, further, Chanda was unable to afford the cost of application forms for many scholarships. She eventually secured a scholarship in Prey Veng where she was part of the first generation of students at

Maharishi Vedic University (MVU), now Chea Sim University of Kamchay Mear.¹⁸⁴

Chanda is now president of the MVU alumni association, and has established a successful career first in positions at NGOs and later in the private sector. Now a mother of two children, she is committed to her children's education, she tells me she spends at least an hour or two each day teaching her children and her nephew at home. They are very unlikely to have to put the same level of personal effort into activities aimed at funding their education, but on the flip side, they will enter a far more competitive workforce than their mother did in the mid 90s. They will have studied English from an early age, but their English language ability will be far less remarkable, as will the fact that they have a university degree as many young people in Phnom Penh.

Phalla and Chhenghuot, both female, late teens¹⁸⁵

When I stay at home in Toul Kork, everybody stares at us and when we ask them they don't answer, and they just stare and walk away, and they said that you are *neak srae*,¹⁸⁶ so I don't want to speak with you...they think I come from the countryside because they see our dressing, sometimes, a lot of people in Phnom Penh, they like to wear new clothes and short.

I want to study English literature...I want to communicate, want to know about a lot of culture abroad...maybe I can become a translator and become and go around the world.

[People from our village] said that you're stupid to let me study, why don't you get your daughter to go to a factory, why do you let her to study at university?

¹⁸⁴ MVU was Cambodia's first rural university, and was established as a partnership between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Australian Aid for Cambodia Fund. Until the name change, the university was linked to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation movement and the teaching philosophy, at least that of the foreigners, reflected this link.

¹⁸⁵ Interview conducted on 28 August, 2010

¹⁸⁶ *Neak srae* is a derogatory term used to describe rural people in Cambodia.

Because they know about the country, you know, very corrupt, so everything is not good. So you are poor, you're from poor family, you go to university, after you graduate, how can you get a job?

Phalla and Chhenghuot are 19 year old girls both from a small village in Kampong Speu province. At the time that I spoke with them, they had recently arrived in Phnom Penh with the intention of studying at university. Both their families have made great sacrifices to support their study, selling land and livestock to fund their education. They told me that this has been a source of amusement for snide neighbours in the village who have derided their decision telling them that when they come back they expect that their parents will be living under a tree. Their home village is particularly poor, and is visibly remarkable for the distinct lack of anyone of working age. Most of those who are capable have left to find work, in the garment factories of Phnom Penh, or in more dubious positions on Thai fishing boats or construction sites—the young and the elderly remain. Phalla and Chhenghuot were star students and later teachers at a school near the village that has been supported by a monk based at Wat Ounalom in Phnom Penh.

They tell a familiar story in describing the difficulty of finishing high school. Daily bicycle rides get longer as they progressed through primary school into high school and upper secondary school. They were lucky to have the support of a small local NGO run by a monk from Wat Ounalom in Phnom Penh,¹⁸⁷ which supported their study and encouraged them to continue. They do not have the luxury of staying with relatives in Phnom Penh, so they have rented a room which is shared with around 5 other girls. They both tell me that their parents have faith in them, and trust them to study rather than go out for leisure during their time in Phnom Penh. At the time of the interview, they were not yet particularly comfortable in the city, and this was not helped by their

¹⁸⁷ Further information on this NGO can be found at <http://rspngo.org/>. The organisation is staffed by volunteer monks and is funded by private donations.

roommates who refused to talk to them on account of their rural background. They are obviously confident, determined and willing to take this massive risk, but in the early stages of their experience in Phnom Penh they come across as being very shy.

A lot of people in Phnom Penh city, and they have high knowledge, so they can get [a job], before us, I don't know if we can get a job easily...they use computer very well and for me I don't know, I never touch it even.

They both moved to Phnom Penh intending to find work in order to fund their study. They were determined, but not overly confident about their ability to do so, knowing that their lack of knowledge would be a hinderance—they had not yet touched a computer. In describing others students from their upper secondary school who had progressed to university, Phalla and Chhenghuot pointed out that these students were from a nearby town. To live in the town, even such a small town, means short travel times to school, it greatly increases the likelihood of having educated parents, and the likelihood of being able to engage in extra-curricular classes in computing or English language. The ascent being attempted by Phalla and Chhenghuot, on the socio-economic ladder or on a hierarchy of modern status, is remarkable. An update from Brak Sareth, the monk who runs the NGO supporting education in their village confirmed that 8 months later they had indeed found work. Chhenghuot as a receptionist in a hotel, and Phalla at a mobile phone company. They are both now taking night classes at the University of Management and working toward degrees in English literature. At this stage, the risk that their families took in selling land and livestock to make a long-term investment in their education appears to be paying off.

Eric, male, mid 20s¹⁸⁸

Eric's path to a modern life is far less tumultuous than that of Samnang, Chanda, Phalla or Chhenghuot. It is a world apart from even the students at Phalla and Chhenghuot's school whose educational path was made so much easier by the fact that they lived in the town. Eric had just two years of Cambodian education before leaving to study in Singapore. After completing high school, Eric went on to study finance at university in the United States and split his time primarily between Los Angeles and Singapore. He speaks Khmer, English and Chinese, but can no longer read and write Khmer having been out of Cambodia for so long. He is now based primarily in Phnom Penh, but regularly travels to Long Beach, which is home to one of the world's largest diasporic Khmer populations.

Even before he began studying at high school in Singapore, Eric's family was well established amongst the Cambodian economic elite. His mother, Lim Chhiv Ho is the president of Attwood, Cambodia's sole importer of a range of European alcohol brands as well the owner and developer of the Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone (PPSEZ) and a planned international port and attached Special Economic Zone in Sihanoukville. Starting from an import/export business, the group of companies led by Lim Chhiv Ho has now diversified into real estate development and private infrastructure projects. Eric is a director of the PPSEZ project and holds a range of other positions within his family's group of companies.

Tao has something that is different...I really want to bring the concept here to Cambodia but at the moment due to the culture and restrictions, Elements still cant expose the true Tao...but I'm sure in time...we'll get there.

¹⁸⁸ Interview took place via email in July, August and September 2010.

I met Eric while I was working on a point of sales computer system for his new night club in Phnom Penh, and later at World Expo in Shanghai when we both happened to be in attendance on the Cambodia pavilion's national day—Eric as part of the Cambodian delegation that would attend meetings with Chinese political and economic elites, and myself as a researcher. He is not only at the top of Cambodia's hierarchy of modern status, but well positioned in global hierarchies, part of the transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2001). Eric cites the inspiration for his night club as being Tao Las Vegas, which describes itself as an 'Asian Bistro and Nightclub'¹⁸⁹ and is located in The Venetian hotel and casino resort. He has brought in artists from Ministry of Sound as well as some Korean pop stars and a host of regional stars.

¹⁸⁹ "Tao Las Vegas", Twitter, accessed February 13, 2012, <https://twitter.com/#!/Taolasvegas>

Case Studies: Exclusion and Unrealised Dreams

The subjects of the following three stories, Khim, Lai and Bunna, have each attained a socio-economic position that is lower than what they had hoped for or what they had expected. For Khim, early success in finding work utilising his associate degree was cut short by a prison sentence. Lai's ambitions were situated more in the realms of fantasy than imagination, as she did not receive the necessary family support to even finish primary school. For Bunna, a more traditional route to improved income and status through patronage was cut short, and his new line of work as a moto-taxi driver ended when his motorbike was stolen. While none of these three could be said to be living in poverty, they have all been, and continue to be, excluded from social spaces of modernity, even within—or particularly within—their extended families.

Khim¹⁹⁰

It's difficult to say [if I'm modern] because I don't know myself, but medium maybe, not a modern person. But in terms of technology, I'm modern, because I am in this profession...I'm busy...so I don't compare with other people...now it's been such a long time since I went for an outing, near the palace royal or riverside. For three months, I never go.

Modern people, most of them are rich, they have money, but some people like they have bought a mobile phone from me, they don't have money but they also do that, do like they dress up nice and go out a lot.

The less modern people are less spending or selfish, second they don't want to go out for leisure.

Khim lives with his wife and young family in the garment factory district of Chom Chao on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. He came to Phnom Penh to study an associate degree

¹⁹⁰ Interviews took place on 28 July, 2010 and 3 August, 2010.

in accounting at university while working at a garment factory to support himself. After completing his studies, Khim worked for a short time as an accounting assistant at the garment factory where he'd worked prior to graduating. During this time, he married his girlfriend, Lai, he wanted to continue on to study a bachelor's degree, but feared that he would lose her if he delayed his proposal. She continued to work in garment factories and he began to supplement their income by producing forged identity documentation for workers who had just arrived from the provinces, and could not afford either the time or the money to source it through official channels. He was ultimately caught by police, and spent a year and a half in prison before returning to Chom Chao where his wife continued to work in a garment factory.

Upon his release he found that his qualification was no longer enough to get him a new job as an accountant due to significant increases in the number of better qualified graduates. So Khim then set about realising the ambition he had set himself in prison—to start a mobile phone sales and repair business. Today his business is quite successful, one of many such businesses repairing, buying and selling mobile phones and phone credit to the many garment factory workers in the vicinity. Today Khim is kept busy by his work and hasn't been into central Phnom Penh (just 20 minutes away) for around three months. When he does, he and his wife generally take their children to Sorya Mall, Phnom Penh's most popular shopping mall. He watches news on TV regularly, and is aware of the many modern property developments in the central city. When I interviewed Khim in August 2010 he was aware that these developments are dependent on foreign investment that may yet run into complications—as was the case in 2011 when many of the Korean-funded investments dried up. Khim is not overly concerned with improving his status and being seen to be modern, though he is proud of what he has achieved in establishing a profitable business over the past few years.

Lai¹⁹¹

When I was young, I dreamt that I can study higher and I want to learn English, but just at that time my family was so difficult, so I couldn't study a lot...now, it's simple because we stopped study and have children and look after them and something like that, it's simple. I feel frustrated with myself, sometimes, I have no education other people have high education...sometimes I cry...because I have low education and they look down on me.

Children are all different, some have different talents and some don't want to study. They want, for female, they have talent in beauty or salon, or something like that. But for me, I want my children to study much higher, I want them to know a lot...I want them to study medicine, to be a doctor.

When I have free time about 1 or 2 hours, I watch movies, drama, and sometimes, but I rarely have free time, I watch movies...Korean Drama...they give advise to people, and sometimes problems in the family, jealousy or something like that, and we can analyse by watching them.

Lai, who has been married to Khim for four years, was aspirational as a teenager growing up in Kompong Speu, south-west of Phnom Penh. She had dreams of becoming an airline hostess, earning money and seeing the world. But she stopped going to school in the fifth grade, her family unable, or unwilling to finance her education. Lai's step-brother was more fortunate, her step-father supported his study, and he went on to gain a bachelor's degree. As the child of her mother's previous marriage, and as a woman, Lai's education was seen to be less of a priority. She lamented that her step-father looks down on her for her low education and that others, as do others, particularly family members back in Kampong Speu. She expressed frustration with her

¹⁹¹ Interviews took place on 28 July, 2010 and 3 August, 2010.

life and her lack of education, and said that at times this brings her to tears.¹⁹² Lai is determined that her children receive the education that she was denied, and does not want her daughter to take what she sees as an expected path for young women such as training to be a beautician. She would like her children to study a lot, to become people who know a lot—*neak ceħ dəŋ*—her ultimate dream is for them to become doctors.

Bunna¹⁹³

All this development area, I don't know what to call it, but it's great. I don't have time to visit, but I can see the construction, and feel happy to see that it's modern, up to date. Before we just had cottages. Now we have 10 or 20 floors, even 40 floors. We're happy because our country is developing a lot and, when I was young, there was only one and two-storey houses. So it means that I can see the modern generation, and that is good. I want to be like that but I don't have money to do it.

Modern people, they dress modern, handsome. They have phones and things like computers and internet. They have education and they are fantastic. But I'm not modern, I don't know anything. Modern people, they can fly and go abroad. Like you, you're from abroad, you're modern. But I don't have anything, I just stay at home. I can't go anywhere, that's the difference.

Bunna is resigned to never being modern, and this is made clear in his first quote at the beginning of this chapter, and again in the quote that begins this section. He is well aware of his lack of mobility, his inability to afford current fashion, his low level of education, and the relative lack of technology in his life. He is impressed, and in awe of the people that he considers to be modern, he thinks 'they are fantastic'. They are

¹⁹² It is worth noting here I have known Wei for over five years and lived for a time with her members of her husband's family. I feel that for this reason Wei is likely to be more open about her feelings than some other participants.

¹⁹³ Interviews took place on 23 July, 2010 and 7 August, 2010.

people who engage with technology, have the wealth and sophistication to dress according to current fashions, are well educated and are able to travel. Bunna is largely apathetic about his own capacity to become 'modern'. He isn't interested in trying to gain a better education and to be more 'modern' himself, as he felt he was too old to go back to school. Still, he views the modernisation taking place around him in positive terms, and is excited about the prospects it might bring for his children. He hopes that his sister and her husband will assist financially in their education through to university, and that they will be able to give him a better quality of life in the future.

He informed me that he never had much aptitude for study, he made numerous attempts at the early grades before eventually giving up on school in the seventh grade when he was in his late 20s. At one stage he worked as a driver for a *bong thom* or politically powerful figure in his local village, improving his position in traditional patron-client network. But he ultimately fell out of favour with his boss following his marriage, after which he worked as a moto-taxi driver in Phnom Penh until his motorbike was stolen. He told me that he feels he is incapable of finishing school, not clever enough to take on the knowledge. He has struggled with alcoholism, and as a result of this, in the time that I have known him,¹⁹⁴ his wife has left him. In his day-to-day life in the family home he lacks confidence and power. He is referred to by his nickname, Bunna, which literally translates as 'black black', given to him because his dark skin. He spends much of his time watching television, but is forced to watch the shows chosen by other members of the house, which generally means the cartoons

¹⁹⁴ At the time of the interview, I had known Bunna for over 5 years, he is the older brother of a woman who, along with her now-husband, studied at the university where I worked periodically from 2002-2006. When I moved to Phnom Penh, through their referral, I rented a house in their street for just under two years. I have had a much stronger association with Bunna's sister and her husband than I have had with Bunna, and over the years I've heard of much of his life second-hand. He doesn't speak any English, which along with his shy nature has limited our conversations in the past.

preferred by the children. He told me that he'd much rather be watching US-produced action movies.

Since graduating from university, both his sister and her husband have been quite successful in their work, together their salaries bring in more than \$1000US per month. They have progressed through various professional roles both in the development sector and more recently in the private sector while Bunna has worked the corner 30 metres down the street as a moto-taxi driver. Having now lost his motorcycle, Bunna spends most of his time in their house, a single-storey shophouse in Beoung Keng Kang II, owned by his mother, and from whom his sister and her husband have taken over as heads of the household. It is through the success of his upwardly mobile middle-class sister and her husband that he is able to survive and have enough to eat without having to work. He told me his occupation was to 'stay at my mother's house and do nothing, just eat rice and not work'.

Bunna told me that he would love to work, and having worked on construction sites in the past, would love to be involved in the construction of modern buildings throughout the city. He is bored at home, and likened his day-to-day life to being in prison. While other members of the household browse the Internet and use Skype on their mobile phones, regularly use email, and even use their personal laptop computers in the house, Bunna has never used a computer. He is often excluded from the family holidays and day trips that take place during festivals and other special events. Still, more than most people in Phnom Penh, Bunna has strong connections to many of the modern changes that are occurring. He is once removed from a handful of university graduates who are now salaried professionals, and from a postgraduate researcher who appears to come and go from Phnom Penh on a whim.

The idle lifestyle that he depressingly compared to prison is enabled only by the success of his family, by their capacity to earn an income in the service sector of Phnom Penh's rapidly growing economy. The small income that he would gain from working as

a moto-taxi driver is not sufficient for his sister and brother-in-law to economically justify helping him to buy a new motorcycle. He is surrounded by modern success and physical mobility. But he is very much aware that it would be very difficult for him to attain similar success. His imagination is continually permeated by ideas, images and people from inaccessible social, economic and geographical locales.