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The Soriya Band: A Case Study of Cambodian American Rock Music
in Southern California

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Southeast Asian Studies

by

Sopheha Seng

June 2016

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Christina Schwenkel, Chairperson

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The Thesis of Sophea Seng is approved:

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I would like to acknowledge my parents for loving me, my sister and brother for listening to me and my partner for cooking dinner for me every night in our home next to the canyon.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Soriya Band: a Case Study of Cambodian American Rock Music in Southern California

by

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Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Southeast Asian Studies
University of California, Riverside, June 2016
Dr. Christina Schwenkel, Chairperson

Following the 1975-1979 genocide, Cambodian exiles in the U.S. recreated cultural institutions through music. Music remains significant in rebuilding cultural life in diasporic Cambodian communities. Live bands perform contemporary and classic ballads during Cambodian New Year in April, at wedding parties and in restaurants on weekend nights. Live rock bands continue to dot community celebrations as survivors collectively create musical repertoires and schedule practices to perform at festive community events. Despite the ubiquity of live musical performance in Cambodian communities, this aspect of Cambodian American cultural formation has been scarcely addressed in detail. This Thesis addresses the deficiency in the literature through ethnographic fieldwork with a Southern California rock band called the Soriya Band, comprised of three guitarists, a keyboardist, a drummer and two vocalists who are all first generation Cambodian survivors. Music persists as a vehicle for cultural creation and change for Cambodian American refugee-survivors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Music reigns central across Cambodian¹ diasporic cultural worlds (Sam 2010). Scholars theorize Cambodian music in wedding rituals (McKinley 1999), boxing matches (Campbell and Sam 1991), traditional music (Pou 1997; Chorn-Pond and Ungar 2012; Dyer 2016; Miller and Sam 1995), music during the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge genocides (Shapiro-Phim 2002; La Freniere 2000; Marston 2002), 1953-1970 postcolonial popular music (Mamula 2008; Saphan 2013; Muan and Ly 2005), as well as music in diaspora (Schlund-Vials 2012; Wong 2004; Pecore 2004; Giuriati 2005; Chambers-Letson 2011). This Thesis builds on these studies on Cambodian music, and in particular, addresses Cambodian modern music (or *pleng samay* in Khmer) in diaspora through an ethnographic case study of the Sunshine Band or *Dontrey Soriya* in Khmer language, hereafter the Soriya Band—a band comprised of seven first generation Cambodian refugee-survivors. Ethnographic research took place primarily in Long Beach, California the symbolic center for Cambodian American cultural life following the 1975-1979 genocides (Needham and Quintiliani 2007; Needham and Quintiliani 2010; Chan 2010); however this Thesis expands concepts of place to include Southern California as a region since members of the Soriya Band reside throughout Southern California. In addition, during my field work, various Cambodian American refugee-survivor bands performed throughout Southern California in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, La Puente, Baldwin

¹ I use Cambodian and Khmer interchangeably throughout this Thesis.

Park, Fontana and Lake Elsinore. Music persists as a vehicle for cultural creation and change for Cambodian American refugee-survivors.

Cambodian American rock music arrived in Southern California following tragic histories. In 1973, the United States dropped half a million tons of bombs on Cambodia—more than three times the tonnage of bombs dropped on Japan in the last few stages of WWII—on a country with which it was not a war (Chandler 2000; Shawcross 1978). As a result, out of a population of 7 million, the bombings produced 1 million refugees. With the pretense of respecting the sovereignty of a neutral country, the US subsequently offered the most restrictive aid to Cambodia (Hein 2010). Moreover, following the bombings, approximately 500,000 Cambodian civilians died in the 1970-1975 civil war initiated by American-funded coup led by Lon Nol (Chandler 2000). The 1970 coup destabilized the democratically elected Sihanouk regime. The majority of Khmer subsisted off their own land but following the bombings which displaced peasants, the Khmer Rouge were able to recruit landless Cambodians (Um 2015). As the overarching Khmer Rouge ideology was the New People versus the Base People, as a consequence, with refugee migration to the capital following the U.S. bombings, many rural Base People were classified as New People (Scupin, 1995:322). An estimated 1.7 million people perished in the 1975-1979 Cambodian genocide (Chandler 2000).

Mortland (1996) characterizes the subsequent Cambodian resettlement in the United States as a permanent second asylum country in waves: the first wave from 1975-1979 in which approximately 6,000 Cambodians mostly the urban and upper classes relocated to the United States; the second wave in 1979, 10,000 Cambodian refugees,

largely rural people relocated as refugees in the United States. The first and second waves of refugees did not experience life under the Khmer Rouge. However, from 1980-1986, the United States government resettled 125,186 Cambodian refugees; this third, and largest wave experienced atrocities under the Khmer Rouge. The fourth wave from 1987-1993, 8,627 relocated to the United States, many of whom were joining family (Mortland 1996: 240-241). (Mortland and Ledgerwood 1987) document Southeast Asian secondary migrations—that is, movement following initial migrations as refugees migrated to join family and kinship elsewhere in the US. From 1975 to 2010 a total of 145,230 Cambodians migrated to the United States.

Um (2015), Quintiliani and Needham (2014), and Lee (2014) utilize the term “refugee-survivor” to describe survivors of the Cambodian genocide from 1975-1979. I borrow the term “refugee-survivor” to recognize the economic and political liminality of Cambodians in mainstream US society as refugees while acknowledging the necessary continued research on their cultural productions as survivors. From positions of liminality, Cambodian refugee survivors create interdependent narratives of aging (Becker and Beyene 1999). I argue that since arrival in the US, as racialized Southeast Asian American bodies, Cambodian refugee-survivors—such as the members of the Soriya Band—have created spaces of belonging through musical practices and performances to negotiate liminality. First generation refugee-survivors utilize weekly band practices and public performances to reaffirm gendered affective hierarchies, and reinvigorate events through creating music that accompanies group dances.

Methods, Researcher Positionality and Project Goals

Ethnographic field work began in June 2015 and ended in June 2016. I attended Saturday practice sessions as a participant observer with the Soriya Band which lasted 7-8 hours each time. I informally asked the members about their music lives. Most conversations took place after these Saturday practices when band members put their instruments away to have dinner. The members of the Soriya Band collectively created Southeast Asian places of belonging through Cambodian food—white rice, lemongrass sauce, large whole fried fish, chicken, fermented fish paste, sliced mango, and raw green eggplants. My year-long field work culminated with the Soriya Band’s debut concerts for Khmer New Year on April 16th and April 17th in 2016. In May and June of 2016, I conducted one life history interview with the eldest member of Soriya Band, Sorn Pich, which chapter three of this Thesis details. To protect the privacy of the participants, all names of places and individuals are pseudonyms. Unless otherwise noted, all fieldwork and interviews were conducted in Khmer language, the dominant language of the participants.

My presence as a researcher was obvious—if not outright odd—to the band members. I have many limitations as a 1.5 generation Cambodian American working with first generation Cambodian refugee-survivors. Narayan (1993) complicates conceptualizations of the “native anthropologist.” Born in Cambodia, and was raised in the US, I identify as a 1.5 generation Cambodian American immigrant. Thus, whereas Khmer is the dominant language for all members of the Soriya Band, English is my dominant language. Moreover, the generational gap proves unmistakable as I am in my

30s whereas five of the band members are middle-aged men in their 50s and one is in his 60s; the other band member is a middle-aged woman. While this Thesis primarily addresses masculinities of the Soriya Band, future work will account for the gendered realities of the Soriya Band. As a young female researcher—and the only one to have earned a college degree in the research setting—as much as possible, I underscored our intergenerational connection and similarities. Though I am younger, I too arrived as a refugee and grew up in a Khmer-speaking home raised by parents who survived the Khmer Rouge genocides. Nonetheless, as a young child in Cambodia, I have no clear recollections of the genocides which separates me from the Soriya Band members (Meyerhoff 1979). As a student researcher interested in contemporary Cambodian American musical practices, these shifting power relations were evident; data collection and production reflect these limitations and particularities. In other words, my gendered presence as 1.5 generation Khmer graduate student shaped the creation and transmission of musical ethnographic data (Shelemay 1996).

This Thesis is an initial iteration of a larger research project designed to advocate for the rights of refugees globally, and ameliorate the physical and emotional impacts of social marginalization (Crestwell 2009). Through the specific lens of Cambodian refugee experiences and music, future work will extend outside the U.S. to France, and Cambodia to study how refugee-survivors mediate poverty through the creation of rock bands. Further research will also address the treatment of Japanese American Issei as racialized Other and the subsequent parallels of state-imposed violence. Asian elder adults may experience what Mui and Kang (2006) term “acculturation stress” as a result of migration

as adults. In the case of forced migration following the Cambodian genocides, medical anthropologists suggest symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder accrete in Cambodian survivors' bodies in part due to economic marginalization (Gay et al. 2000; Hinton et al. 2009); ethnographic research from Rwanda corroborates these findings (Burnet 2012). A comparative study of Cambodia, the U.S. and France may contextualize the continued efforts of Cambodian refugee-survivors to mediate postcolonial feelings of disillusion, displacement and continued hope through Cambodian rock under different policies of resettlement. The study of Cambodian refugee-survivor musical productions may contribute to the literature on cultural responses to trauma. Chhim (2013) reveals Cambodian survivors process posttraumatic stress disorder through the linguistically and culturally-specific Khmer term *baksbat* or "broken courage." Adding to these studies from a cultural anthropological framework, Cambodian rock performances may be a culturally viable form of transmission of traumatic memory, and adaption in the context of acculturation stress.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Scholars employ interdisciplinary approaches to interrogate the WWII state-sponsored genealogy that initially produced Southeast Asian area studies (Steinberg 1987). Scholars such as Tang (2015), Ho (2009), Schlund-Vials (2012), Schwenkel (2008), Wong (2004), and Um (2006) have addressed the ethnocentric origins of the discipline by incorporating the lived religious, artistic and musical experiences of Southeast Asians. Following this body of scholarship on critical Southeast Asian studies, this Thesis details the diasporic rock musical practices Cambodians to continue to expand

the discipline beyond the geographic borders that military projects established following the Second World War. Contemporary economic constructions of Southeast Asia elide recent histories of imperialism (Wilson 2000). As a result, Southeast Asian diasporic experiences become doubly marginalized: geographically-orientated Southeast Asian area studies deemphasize diasporic experiences; simultaneously, Asian American studies may mimic nation-state hierarchies which may subsequently relegate Southeast Asian American experiences to the periphery necessitating interdisciplinary approaches (Ngo, Nguyen and, Lam 2012). In the remainder of this chapter, I outline literature on key texts that inform this Thesis: Cambodian music by the 1.5 generation (Schlund Vials 2012); the first generation (Muan and Ly 2001); the second generation (Dariotis and Lee 2011; Lee 2014). I conclude with how this body of literature informs the research conducted in this Thesis.

Schlund-Vials (2012) demonstrates how 1.5 Cambodian American diasporic musical productions counter historical erasures masked by contemporary economic discourses. Historic and national erasure of these recent war crimes in both Cambodia and the US creates an epistemological crisis in which Cambodian Americans know more about the Holocaust than their own genocide. To counter this historical context of selectively forgetting the experiences of violence in Southeast Asia, Schlund-Vials documents the cultural work of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans who perform memory in a context of remembering and forgetting in Cambodia and the US. The focus on the diasporic music and film productions of 1.5 generation Cambodian American performers—among them Anida Ali, rapper PraCh Ly, and documentary film maker

Socheata Poev—uncover violent official historical narratives through performance. Findings from ethnographic field work with the Soriya Band reveals that like their 1.5 counterparts Schlund-Vials addresses, first generation refugees contest their marginal histories through performances related to the period prior to the genocides (1953-1970), a period described by Muan and Ly (2001) in their anthology, and elaborated on by Mamula (2008) in his discussion of popular music in Cambodia following the genocides.

Stephen Mamula (2008) and Muan and Ly (2001) address popular music created in Cambodia during French colonialism and Sihanouk's post-independence regime in 1953. Mamula argues that Khmer cultural openness to certain types of influence in society—which has historically been true for Khmer dance and music—made Cambodian popular music popular. Mamula argues that the power of media in the 1950s and the 1960s as well as cultural borrowing from the U.S. and the Philippines brought about a new form of indigenized popular music in Cambodia. Muan and Ly (2001) assemble an anthology written in English, Khmer and French, which outlines Cambodian nation-state construction and modernity through architecture, theater, film and music as modernity following independence from France in 1953. The book is a collection of writings published in newspapers such as the *Kambujasuriya*. Muan and Ly also provide transcripts in original language of interviews conducted in the past decade with key cultural figures. Though the section on modern Cambodian rock music is relatively short, its content provides information about cultural enactments of modernity in postcolonial Cambodian (1953-1970) that inform contemporary diasporic musical practices. As argued by Schlund-Vials, the 1.5 Cambodian American generation grapple with silenced

“Cambodian Syndrome” narrative of reconciliation in American schools. Muan and Ly’s provide primary documents that attest to the postcolonial period known as the modern Cambodian cultural renaissance (Amatrisha 1998).

As exemplified in the work of Schlund-Vials, the 1.5 generation of Cambodian Americans engage in histories of the Cambodian genocide. First generation Cambodians engage in histories through the lenses of the 1960s Cambodian cultural renaissance. They perform the 1953-1970 cultural renaissance period—often overshadowed by narratives of genocide—in order to contradict reductive Angkor Wat/Khmer Rouge binary models of Cambodian history originating in part from the French colonial narratives of the racialized myth of a declining Khmer (Edwards 2007). Thus, first generation Cambodians contextualize their memories by incorporating the historical period 1953-1975—the postcolonial period through Cambodian rock music which translates as “modern” music, a product of nation-state and Cambodians in diaspora continue to revere the iconic singers Ros Sereysothea and Sinn Sisamouth who represent that historical period. First generation Cambodians draw on this music and these icons as a means of acculturation and a continuation of their personal histories as they construct home in their new homelands in ways that reflect their lived cultural experiences. Muan and Ly’s anthology presents key historical documents to contextualize the Soriya Band’s performances and additionally connect them to the work of the 1.5 generation.

While Schlund-Vials (2012) engages with the 1.5 generation, and Muan and Ly (2001) historicize first generation postcolonial musical performances, Dariotis and Lee (2011) and Lee (2014) further integrate the musical practices of second generation

Cambodian Americans. Dariotis and Lee (2011) detail the life of second generation Cambodian American Laura Tevary Mam the lead singer and guitar player of the band the Like Me's. Born and raised in San Jose, California, Tevary's parents spoke English at home but Mam learned Khmer by speaking with her grandmother. She connected emotionally as part of a community through a UC Berkeley program directed toward Southeast Asian American youth. Mam returned to Cambodia on a scholarship and witnessed the Khmer Rouge tribunals realizing that everyday Cambodians had few outlets to express their pain toward the lack of retribution and punishment in the trials. In intergenerational musical collaborations, Mam consults with her mother to write lyrics in Khmer that cater to multiple generations. Dariotis and Lee center Mam's narrative within a family network which recognizes the role of first generation survivors in constructing these sites of memory. Dariotis and Lee contextualize Mam's music to include the role of her mother and grandmother thereby emphasizing the role of the first generation, thereby incorporating first generation narratives into the second generation narratives. This is significant to my findings with the Soriya Band members focus on the future in relation to their children. Dariotis and Lee recognize the achievements of the second generation in the context of their parents. Therefore, in part the existence of younger Cambodian Americans who engage in Cambodian rock from the 1960s testifies to the significant cultural work created by the first generation.

Novak (2011) provides a compelling discussion on how new media allows constructions of audiences of listeners—making music such as Cambodian rock that might otherwise be stored inside a local public library—available. As a result, second

generation Cambodian Americans learn about Cambodian rock through bands such as Dengue Fever and Australian Space Project, and in turn interpret these liaisons. Echoing colonial claims on culture, the company Seattle-based Sublime Frequencies stated to have rediscovered a psychedelic rock music despite the fact that Cambodian popular form has never disappeared. Through the example of the Sublime Frequencies, Novak complicates definitions of appropriation, and also nudges scholars to vitally reengage in new media forms and their implications. In engaging new media, Novak opens up space for musicians like the Soriya Band to re-appropriate the music through their continued simultaneous performances of memories and futures; like Novak, as discussed below, Chambers-Letson skillfully demonstrates how the music opens up new possibilities through his study of the band Dengue Fever.

Chambers-Letson (2011) applies Spivak's "native informant" to argue that the Los Angeles-based indie band Dengue Fever began as an Orientalist project. The band sought a Cambodian singer in Long Beach to authenticate the band. For example, they requested that singer Chhom Nimol don "traditional" Khmer attire and sing music from the Cambodian 1960s. Chamber-Letson argues that 1960s Cambodian music eclipses the corruption of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes. Dengue Fever purposely perform music influenced by 1960s Cambodian rock to reengage American involvement in Cambodia. He argues that through the song "22 nights," Dengue Fever also engages in the global war on terror that creates racialized bodies that deports Cambodian Americans. According the Chambers-Letson, Dengue Fever's performs memories and the present together to collapse time, to counter amnesia on the effects of war in Vietnam, Laos and

Cambodia. According to Chambers-Letson, lead singer Chhom Nimol initially consented to this role but subsequently transformed her role, thereby repositioning herself and altering Dengue Fever's music into a site of contestation. Chambers-Letson poignantly questions the role of appropriation while maintaining the significance of transnational musical collaborations as spaces of historical and cultural engagement.

Campbell and Sam (1991) and Giuriati (2005) center on traditional music of Cambodia within the U.S. context. The authors provide lesson plans to utilize in American classrooms that teach Cambodian music. Sam has since returned to Cambodia as noted in Giuriati's study of traditional music following the 1993 elections in Cambodia. Giuriati (2005) addresses Cambodian traditional music in daily ritual and community religious celebrations in diaspora. Giuriati benchmarks the year 1993 as significant for traditional music because of the United Nations Transit Authority in Cambodia. According to Giuriati, prior to 1993, Cambodians abroad preserved traditional music which they believed had disappeared. However, following the 1993 elections Cambodians abroad acknowledged the existence of traditional music programs in universities. Giuriati argues that Cambodians abroad focused less on traditional music after 1993 and provides vignettes of traditional Cambodian musicians who returned to Cambodia following the 1993. Giuriati argues that the traditional music in diaspora Cambodia continued primarily to help Cambodians maintain ethnic identity. Campbell and Sam (1991) and Giuriati (2005) critically informs my research on the Soriya Band as it attests to the shifting identities of refugee-survivor musicians by providing data on how

Cambodian survivors negotiate and change diasporic belonging through musical practices.

Bree LaFreinere (2000) and Marston (2002) confront music during the Khmer Rouge genocides. LaFreinere interviews Daranh Kravan then tells his story in the form of a first person autobiographical novel. Whereas histories often leave out these stories, this novel details history through the voice of Kravan challenging official histories. Marston (2002) recreates the social worlds of the Khmer Rouge period through music. Through various sources such as interviews, Hang Ngor's biography, and Chinese journalists, and diasporic interviews, Marston details the performance groups that sang songs and danced in the name of *angkaa* the state. Marston points out a boundary of purity and pollution through this music and parallels it to prohibitions on Buddhist monks singing. Aside from the content of propaganda about hard work and serving *angkaa*, Marston discusses the style of the music. Sometimes with traditional instruments men and women sang duets but there was no set gender role in the music as men and women often sang together as well which according to Marston indicates the ideal of gendered collaboration though the realities were far from egalitarian. Marston references Cambodian refugee-survivors in diaspora to bridge their memories of Khmer Rouge songs into a musical history.

Wong (1994; 2004) incorporates first generation Southeast Asian Americans as producers of music within a larger Asian American tradition. Wong (1994) examines informal gatherings of karaoke in a Vietnamese restaurant in Pomona and how Vietnamese Americans create different identities through singing these songs even if

these moments may be ephemeral. According to Wong (2004), for many Southeast Asian refugees, creating popular music is a means to creating new culture in a new homeland. Ethnographic research creates texts that emerge from relationships between people such as through the translation of central Thai, Lao and English in the word “taeng,” which means “to compose” but meanings change in context. In this way, remembering is about linguistics as well with the word carrying memory. Wong incorporates the musical experiences of Southeast Asian Studies within Asian American studies through the essay on Lao refugee-survivor Khamvong who traces the memory of *lam* tradition while also incorporating new meanings of *lam* in the American context. Wong’s careful emphasis on creation and change inform the following chapter on labor of the Soriya Band.

Chapter 2: The Soriya Band: Engineering Urban Musical Identities

Tracing the colonial and postcolonial origins of Cambodian rock, and its dispersal following the migration of Cambodians globally may reveal how Cambodian American refugee-survivors engineer social worlds through popular music to make claims on urban spaces in order to surpass images of liminality. Examining infrastructure and materiality may reveal how place-based iterations of the music constitute social ecologies of decolonization mediated by hope, loss and renewal through new media technologies that brought commotion, streamed into infrastructures of language and music during the state construction of Cambodia, and its construction in diaspora. The Southern California-based band, Soriya, comprised of refugee-survivors engineer musical and social worlds through interactions with their urban environments. I borrow from Mrázek’s (2002) use of the term “engineer” described as workers who believe they can assemble and

reassemble anything; Mrázek ends the paragraph by noting that everyone is an engineer (xvii). I utilize Swyngedouw's (2006) concept of "metabolic processes" to detail the work of Cambodian refugee-survivor musicians. Swyngedouw contends humans differ from other organisms because of the ability to engineer a future (23). The band Soriya Band negotiate their belonging in mainstream society through their musical practices as they target Cambodian audiences in the selection of the Cambodian restaurant Bayon's Dining for the band's debut in celebration of Khmer New Year. As society often views Cambodian American refugee-survivors as liminal, a framework of infrastructure focuses attention on refugee-survivors of engineers of place and belonging through Cambodian rock music.

Infrastructure as a Framework

Outside of Cambodia and diasporic enclaves, Cambodian classic rock became more widely perceived with the increased use of the Internet in the 1990s. In this section, I trace the moving and shifting elements of Cambodian classic rock through its Internet node. I argue that the exclusion of Cambodian refugee-survivors in the literature stems in part on the fact that the literature focuses on music as an open-source Internet platform. Infrastructure systems are indelibly technical and social (Graham and Marvin 2000:115). The Seattle-based company Sublime Frequencies marketed Cambodian classic rock under the label African and Asian psychedelic rock without the names of the songs or artists (Novak 2011). Sublime Frequencies contend to democratize music by providing open access to this music which they claim to have rediscovered. This open access infrastructure without regulations reproduced colonial images of rediscovering lost

music. Novak argues that while the Sublime Frequencies CD *Cambodian Rocks*, the open-access technological infrastructures facilitated the systematic collection of Cambodian rock globally as online users began to add the names of the songs and artists to the CD. Khmer rock rotates among new audiences including Cambodian Americans such as the band Dengue Fever as well as John Pirozzi's documentary film work on popular Cambodian music (Novak 2011:620). This open-access platform online of Cambodian rock music reaches alternative niches of audiences from North America and Europe. Chambers-Letson (2011) argues that the Los Angeles-based Indie rock band Dengue Fever inadvertently began as an orientalist project casting lead singer Chimol as "native informant," but the band has instead created a musical space to negotiate genocide and U.S. imperialism. By focusing on the digitized access to music, it allows for a conversation on new mediations of this music by extending the virtual spheres of Cambodian rock.

Online Cambodian rock reaches has transformed itself into a transnational space where musicians interrogate the American presence in Cambodia. Uneasy engagements for Cambodian Americans educated in American school whose histories largely omitted from school books that music becomes a way to perform 1960s Cambodia through music from the period (Schlund-Vials 2012). Cambodian Americans who migrated to the U.S. as children, interpretation of Cambodian rock is inextricably associated with their parents. In a comparative study of children whose parents survived the Holocaust and children whose parents survived the Khmer Rouge genocide, Kidron reinterprets silence and transmission as culturally embedded. I argue that the open source infrastructure of

Cambodian rock music functions as a culturally appropriate means of processing trauma for children of genocide survivors. Lee (2014) interviews Oakland rapper Ratha Jim Sin (RJ Sin). Lee argues that subsequent generations of Cambodian Americans are “socially dead” –disconnected with heritage and family traditions and music becomes a means of social life. Although RJ Sin primarily raps, he also performs a rendition of a Cambodian rock song. Similarly, Laura Mam and Bochan Huy also mediate Cambodian rock music through their own experiences that narrate their parents’ displaced histories obscured in the standard American textbooks. The structure of music facilitates sampling of sections that result in a patchwork of transgressions of time and space. The musical gap between Cambodian Americans and their parents may be more than generational but also infrastructural as Cambodian Americans learn about Cambodian rock in part from open source online access while their parents utilize the electric guitars, synthesized drums and keyboards to adapt to and metabolize with local environments.

Creating Cambodian American Music Places in Urban Spaces

Bacteriological cities are interwoven with layers in relational difference of people and technology (Gandy 2006). Lemon (2000) examines public transit in this transition in terms of citizenship—who is included/excluded in public transit discourse. Public transit is a site where poverty and racialization and social inclusiveness manifest. The Los Angeles county Blue Line light rail which connects downtown Los Angeles with the city of Long Beach built motifs with Khmer writing into its infrastructure. The station on Anaheim Street includes signs in English, Khmer and Spanish with different phrases such as “hope” and “education.” These signs although perhaps background for many, also

linguistically delineate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within central Long Beach. The Soriya band creates a colorful poster to advertise their evening debut concert for Khmer New Year and plaster these advertisements throughout Khmer spaces in central Long Beach which resemble those for Cambodian movies: red letters capitalized in old English font read “Cambodian New Year Party 2016” and underneath in Khmer font also in red, it reads Soriya band; the top left upper corner it says “Happy New Year 2016 year of the monkey” with a gold-lined red circular emblem and a gold comical picture of a monkey. On the right hand upper corner it also features a gold circular emblem with a more solemn picture of a monkey and reads “2016 Happy New Year. “ A woman in her mid-20s who will be a guest singer centers the poster. Next to the guest singer is the face of the band’s female vocalist with a red flower behind her right ear dressed in a gold blouse. Her male singer counterpart dons a dark orange silk top and holds a microphone. In front of the three vocalists are the five males who play instruments all in casual jeans and a collective array of rainbow silk tops: solo guitarist Sambath selects a sheer white short sleeved linen top embroidered with blue vine-like designs that frame the collar; eggplant, dark purple with dazzling gold in the front and black pants; Khom the drummer centers the poster in his lavender silk top with gold; Ongka the manager/keyboardist/vocalist is most casual in navy blue Khmer shirt and jeans. Sorn on the far right wears a grey Khmer shirt and jeans holding his tan electric guitar slung over his shoulder with a black strap. Yellow block writing covers the legs of the musicians with information about the location and time of the event. Soriya’s poster debut targets a Khmer-speaking audience in central Long Beach. Rather than public spaces such as mass

transit, the Soriya band metabolizes through music in primarily Khmer-speaking spaces. Similar to the Khmer script motifs etched on the Blue Line light rail, the Soriya band blends music to intertwine with the city of Long Beach relying on friends from the area to purchase tickets for the debut concert.

Reaffirmation of Identities through Affective Relationships

Weekly practices constitute musical metabolism in urban Long Beach. The members of Soriya create a hierarchy that reinforces relationships among the band members through Saturday band practices that last 8-9 hours each time. A tanned, old comfortable couch sits crammed inside of the garage along with shelving that holds nick knacks. In the center of the garage hangs a carved wooden emblem of Angkor Wat. In the crowded garage, the Cambodian American band Soriya spend their Saturday practicing music. Sokhom who is nicknamed Khom plays the drum set that sits right below the Angkor Wat carving. Khom is known for his volatile personality. Khom lacks vitamin D and bass guitarist Sorn responds with “you have to sunbathe for vitamin D” to which everyone seems to ignore and Khom rolls his eyes. Sorn, the bass guitarist stands in front of the drum set. The eldest with blue jeans and a blue short-sleeved button up shirt and eyeglasses, his hair is black despite being in his 60s. Solo guitarist Sambath hides under his black baseball cap, gray Bermuda shorts with a grey short-sleeved button up shirt and black thong sandals. The keyboardist Ongka a grey t-shirt, white tennis shoes and blue jeans while the singer belts out tunes in his blue jeans and a sky blue short-sleeved button up shirt and black sandals. Rath and his wife Linda own the home in North Long Beach and host the weekly jam sessions that ends with a potluck consisting of lemon grass sauce

made from their garden, round green eggplant-like vegetables, pungent fermented fish paste from a glass jar, three fishes freshly fried crispy golden brown at the supermarket and white rice in a large family size rice cooker. The garage is stocked with ice cold Heineken beers which no one drinks. Rath and Linda's teenaged son helps by setting the table and bringing out the rice. He sits on the outdoor bench with his father. Rath and Linda grow lemon grass, orange trees, papaya trees and other assorted greens at the perimeter of their yard. In the center, two gazebos host friends each weekend. Linda dislikes her full-time office job and recently began a part time job on weekends as a translator Khmer/English at a nearby hospital which she hopes becomes full-time. Rath and Linda are the only ones who actually live in Long Beach whereas the other band members travel from throughout Southern California to attend weekly practice.

While members of the Soriya Band call themselves a new band existing for just over a year, the formation of the band began in 1995 in El Monte, California. In his apartment complex, Sorn saw Puy, a slender man in his 40s with thinning wavy hair, and a shortened leg playing the bass guitar with Bo strumming on the rhythm guitar. At the time, Puy worked multiple jobs learning to read and understand Chinese in order to secure his job as a busser and cook in a Chinese restaurant to support his wife and five children. Bo later quit the band at his wife's behest. Som wanted to learn to play the drums so he purchased a set for \$200. Som worked in the trucking industry as a driver in his own company. Another man named Uong initially joined the band intending to be a keyboardist but he eventually quit because he said he could not afford to purchase a \$500 keyboard. Sorn claims the man was just too cheap. Another man named Chamroeun

joined the band as a solo guitarist, and Pou joined as a male singer and later quit to start his own band called Dara (Star) band. At the time, no one knew how to play a beat or bar, and relied on books purchased from the Guitar Center. Additionally, an already established band named Amara. Male socializing forms the basis of Cambodian American refugee-survivor rock bands.

Members of the Soriya band, Sambath and Sorn share a father-son type relationship where Sorn already retired with grown children advises Sambath on schooling for his daughters and how to resolve work pressures. Rhythm guitarist Sambath is married with two daughters and when his younger daughter's teacher informed Sambath that she should skip grades, Sambath decided to move out of Long Beach to the San Gabriel Valley to a predominantly Chinese American neighborhood where his daughter would receive a better education racialized as Asian as opposed to Long Beach where Cambodian American and other Southeast Asian youth experience criminalization. Sambath rents a two-bedroom in the back home of a distant acquaintance. When I told solo guitarist Sambath about my research project, he said that he would like for me to address the issue of the future. "When my generation passes away, how will young Cambodians know anything about their culture?" Despite his youth, he is consistently sick. Sambath's older sibling passed away from diabetes and that his sister had her license revoked because of impending diabetic blindness. Sambath suffers from dizzy spells and talks about disease in terms of fate and doctors unable to help. He takes over the counter Pepto Bismal for his stomach and drinks a rocket drink that energizes him. Throughout the car rides he looks disarrayed sometimes on Nyquil daytime formula.

Sambath earns \$12 an hour as a medical supply cleaning person. Sambath and his band members draw on their experiences in Cambodia to make place in Southern California.

In the context of post-migration into the U.S. the affective power of hope despite the realities of low-wage labor through the music becomes an impetus for infrastructure. Sambath earns \$12, Khom lives with his second wife and four children on a business with inconsistent money. Rhythm guitarist Sambath and bass guitarist Sorn live in the same area and buy the potluck fried fish to share. Mainly though, as I followed them in their shopping and morning meals prior to Saturday band practice, they talked about music, and listened to music in the car. For members of the Soriya Band, the rock music they create accompanies events that have regenerative themes such as rebirth and revival. For survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocides, such as members of the Sorya Band, the Khmer New Year celebrations underscore the birth of a yearly cycle which are embodied in music. Simultaneously, as racialized Asian bodies, life in the US with low-wage labor entails added stresses, but despite or because of this, they practice music with a repertoire from Santana, Led Zeppelin, Sinn Sisamouth and popular romance ballads. Through music the musicians of Soriya are not merely neoliberal subjects to the U.S., but rather they engineer music that imbues a sense of hope from the period of a Cambodian cultural renaissance to their urban contemporary lives in the U.S. Cambodian musicians sustain Cambodian classic rock to maintain these feelings of hope despite low-wage labor and social marginalization as racialized refugee subjects.

Khmer New Year Performances in April 2016

Hwee-Hwa Chan (2013) uses Appurdai's concept of ethnoscaples to describe the interethnic city and its tensions. Hwee-Hwa argues that diversity propagates anomie. Hwee-Hwa explores Cambodia Town's spaces such as parks as potential sites of social engagement. To avoid ethnic tensions some Cambodians living in Cambodia Town refuted the official city designation as they said it came about from the interests of Cambodian business owners who resided in neighboring Orange County and not Long Beach. Hwee-Hwa Chan defines the term neutrality as spaces that are equally accessible to everyone. According to Hwee-Hwa Chan, spaces need to be intentionally intercultural such as Mark Twain library with workers who speak the local languages such as Spanish, Khmer, Vietnamese and Tagalog. The band Soriya selects spaces they regard as Khmer situated within central Cambodia Town rather than neutral through selection of performance locations.

The Cambodian American Buddhist temple Samaki hired the Soriya Band to perform following morning chants and the noon meal on April 16th. Women attendees dance in long blue dresses etched with gold studded stars and pink carnation flowers protruding from the crown of their heads. Men pair up with spouses wearing a light blue and white plaid shirt with a collar and pocket with his hair gelled. The Soriya Band while recovering from their debut the night before look solemn as they perform on a makeshift outdoor stage at the temple. The stage directly faces a shrine embellished with yellow lace spanning the roof and pink, yellow and purple flower bouquets that typically surround shrines at Buddhist temples. The shrine's platform is enshrouded in bright

yellow, tomato red and lime green cloth. For the first time, this Buddhist temple hired a band in efforts to keep people at the temple after the monks eat at noon. The Soriya band received \$400 to play music but only a handful of dancers remained at the temple under the white makeshift tent, dancing in the sunny spring and breezy, weather typical of Southern California during Cambodian New Year. The crowd was smaller numbering around fifteen and older with dancers mostly in their 40s, 50s and 60s. Dancers from the debut concert the previous evening were in their 20s and 30s comprised of mainly relatives of the band members. Soriya's decision demonstrates the absence of neutrality in urban spaces as they draw on Khmer New Year to debut the newly formed band. They utilize knowledge of the Khmer calendar of cultural events to insert themselves in Cambodian American cultural life in urban spaces. The Soriya band may change repertoire according to audience cues and they select from over 100 songs to "liven things up," as Rath the male singer says as he points to the repertory of songs the Soriya band. Rath elaborates:

Sometimes there are no dancers at a wedding party, but then you see the *yeay* mother of the bride. So our female singer will leave the stage to call *yeay* the grandmother and all the kids and grandkids will start to dance too. It's important that we as a band picks up on these cues and dance. Sorn enlists his wife, daughter, son and son-in-law to attend his performances as often they will dance to get the crowd going as if a few people beginning dancing all others dance. Like on the evening of our performance comprised entirely of our family and friends, Ongka the keyboardist let his younger sister on stage to dance and sing with me. We constantly think on stage about how to make things sound

pehrouh or harmonious. Are the speakers are too loud? Should Sambath strum his guitar in a certain manner? Does the music blends well? The people in the front experience the concert different than those in the back. So on the *chah* (stage) each person listens. As a singer I listen to those playing the instruments in order to sing properly and those playing the instruments listen to the audience to gauge whether we are in harmony. The solo guitarist listens to everyone first to know to when to solo. Some people play to hard but it has to be just right or *lamohm*. The speakers face the audience and not us so we don't know what they hear. But we need to blend and harmonize among ourselves when we play as a band. And of course I worry about making mistakes because I'm old. After the end of a song we stop and look at each other the band members to understand when to change keys especially the song "Beautiful Sunday. It is my, my, my beautiful day." If I have to sing a higher note, so does everyone else. Musicians are there to support the singers, then the solo guitarist, then the rhythm guitar, and finally the bass and drums. They all support the singers. The drum supports the three guitarists. The keyboard is about the same label as the guitarists and are physically next to each other. The three guitarists are considered a unit. Their labor and performances allow them to temporarily surpass liminality in mainstream society and encode memories of their pasts into their lives in Southern California.

Public performances integrate a repertory of Cambodian music from the past into creations of place in their urban environments. Swyngedouw describes the city as "a kaleidoscopic socio-physical accumulation of human/non-human imbroglios" (24). Cambodian refugee-survivors create musical identities through their involvement as musicians in Long Beach by performing Cambodian rock live to produce within a

specific historical moment of involvement in US/Cambodia. The refugee-survivor rock bands make the music not to challenge national agendas but rather to engage in spaces within the city with transnational imaginaries. While the musicians play music for an audience in specific pockets of Long Beach, Cambodian rock music carries affective powers of postcolonial imaginaries of Cambodian modernity. The band Soriya embeds itself into the city of Long Beach, California to engineer citizenship that includes their experiences as refugee-survivors. I use Graham and Marvin's (2000) definition of embed as "the 'messy' practices of embedding, building and maintain infrastructure networks beneath, through and above the fabric of cities thus infuses the politics of metropolitan areas, requiring complex regulatory articulations between markets and national and local states" (Graham and Marvin s2000:115). Through performances, the Soriya band utilizes the infrastructure of Cambodian rock to create a space within Long Beach to debut its music while drawing on feelings of hope that emanate from the history of Cambodian rock music. One dancer in her early 60s revealed to me, "I don't really like modern music but it does remind me of Khmer New Year when I was young." Through their repertoire of music, the Soriya band caters to the feelings of dancers in the audience through organized music that stems from their shared histories and memories of the postcolonial Cambodian cultural renaissance that they reconstruct with each performance. This section details the construction of memories through the musical repertory.

Renegotiations of Memories Through Music of the Cambodian 1960s

Anthropologist Narom (2005) details the musical instruments harnessed from objects such as bamboo, conch shells and jack fruit tree wood. These instruments contrast

with the politicized colonial histories of the electric guitar and synthesized keyboards of Cambodian rock. Cambodian classic rock music is a labor of decolonization.

Infrastructure is not merely materials but rather relational systems that elicit affect such as desire, fantasy, sensory and collaboration (Larkin 2013:333; Schwenkel 2015). The Soriya Band consists of three guitarists one playing the solo guitar, one the bass guitar and one playing the rhythm guitar. The keyboarder is a single person and the case of the Soriya Band, he also sings. The band includes a synthesized drum but may also include a pair twin drums or *sko plueh* and as well as a male female singing duo. The Cambodian rock band may also consist of an accordion (pronounced *accohdohn*), violin (pronounced *violohn*) but these are rare because larger bands increase expenses that may result in a loss of money. Cambodian rock emerges from the working of materials to make music in the social and political US context. These musical materials of modernity elicit deep feelings that still resonate today seemingly collapsing perceptions of time. The Soriya Band which is a Cambodian pleng samay or modern music band structures memory and reintegrates it into the Cambodian American context through their musical repertory that structures their memories.

Though the Soriya Band include music from renowned 1960s Cambodian singer Sinn Sisamouth in their practice repertory, they did not perform any of Sisamouth's songs at their debut concerts. Drummer Kohm cited lack of interest from the dancers. Kohm's response refers to the band's present concern with the requests of the dancing audience, but the Soriya band also engages with memories through their choice to omit music by Sismouth. An estimated 90% of singers perished during the Khmer Rouge period

(Shapiro-Phim 2002). In the absence of music teachers, Cambodians have placed the 1960s Cambodian rock musicians such as Sin Sisamouth and Ros Sereysothea as their musical teachers that continually encourage them to continue to play music. In their role as ancestors, these musical 1960s icons index an unmatched perfection only embodied by ancestors. Keane (1997) argues that hazard ensues in the face of performance amidst ancestors. For Cambodian American refugee-survivors, these symbols of these rock musicians are emblems that function as the ancestors that index perfection making all subsequent performances subject to failure. Risk of failure in the face of ancestral perfection generates significant forms of affects that provide continuity of history through music. Thus, though the Soriya band includes music by Sinn Sisamouth in their repertory, during their two concerts did not play any of his songs because Sisamouth holds importance as they engage relationally with each other as a band, and with dancers to continually engage in historic memory about the genocide that killed young musicians of their generation. The Cambodian American refugee-survivor rock band Soriya Band creates a place-based identity through negotiations of their history on their own terms through musical repertory.

Within this context of reductive Pol Pot genocides as defining the Cambodian experience, Cambodian American refugee-survivors contextualize the genocide through their experiences with historical period 1953-1975. Through cultural institutions, survivors do not merely imagine, but rather construct and perform these historical representations while creating a base for the future. Mietophoum Khmer Spirit is a Long Beach-based literary organization that focuses on post-independence cultures of

Cambodia. Socheat Kuch financially supports these ideas with \$400,000 to fund Mietophoum Khmer Spirit Cultural Center over the past twenty years. Thus, refugee-survivors draw from their memories from a post-colonial 1960s flourished with literature and language in Cambodian society to contradict images of merely objects of Khmer Rouge genocides. The band Soriya engages with history through their musical repertory reflective of a period in modern Cambodian history known to survivors as the cultural renaissance following Cambodian independence from France in 1953 which sprouted bands composed exclusively of foreign instruments and dance. Stephen Mamula (2007) calls this modern music hybridized forms of western rock music. The official trailer for the documentary film *Don't Think I've Forgotten* features materials of modernity: tambourines, electric guitars, paved roads, cars, western-style button up blouses and mini-skirts, trains, amplifiers, and motor cycles interspersed with visual depictions of musicians such as Pan Ron and Sinn Sisamouth which are faces of modernity and lost youth. These modern materials demonstrate the affective resonance of modernity as their meanings shift within changing cultural infrastructures, particularly as the band Soriya adjusts their music repertory.

The figure below outlines the Sorya Band’s specific musical rubric:

<p><u>Group 1</u></p> <p>Raom vong (Dancing in Circle)</p> <p>Saravan (Khmer Dance)</p> <p>Kantrum (Khmer Surin)</p> <p>Jerk (pronounced <i>Jack</i>)</p>	<p><u>Group 2</u></p> <p>Kbach (Khmer Dance)</p> <p>Lam Leav (Lao Dance)</p> <p>Twist (pronounced <i>Tweeh</i>)</p>
<p><u>Group 3</u></p> <p>Slow (pronounced <i>Slew</i>)</p> <p>Cha Cha Cha</p> <p>Roam Aop (Hugging Dance)</p>	<p><u>Group 4</u></p> <p>Madison (pronounced <i>Marisohn</i>)</p> <p>Kantrum</p> <p>Paso Doble (pronounced <i>Pasdop</i>)</p> <p>Bolero or Bolero Twist</p>

Though this musical repertory belongs particularly to the Soriya Band, other popular music bands may include similar elements in their repertoires (Campbell and Sam 1991). I decided to maintain the definitions of Kantrum, Saravan and Kbach and linguistic origins of the words, as provided by Sambath the drummer for the Soriya Band. The chart depicts the historic blending of various colonial and postcolonial transpacific histories. Note the transnational linguistic categories which combine Khmer regional dances, French, Latin American, American, Lao and Khmer Surin (a group living near the Thai/Khmer border): Group 1 consists of Raom Vong (Khmer circle dancing), Saravan

(Fast-paced dance), Kantrum (Khmer Surin), and Jerk (American but pronounced *jack* in Khmer). Group 2 consists of Kbach (considered an older tradition of dance). Lam Leav (Lao Dance), and Twist (American but pronounced *tweeh* in Khmer). Group 3 consists of Slow (American but pronounced *slew* in Khmer), Cha cha cha (Latin American), and Roam Aop (French and the only dance where couples touch). Finally, Group 4 includes the Madizone (French but pronounced *marisohn* in Khmer), Kantrum, Paso Doble (Latin American and pronounced *pasadop* in Khmer), and Bolero (Latin American) or Bolero Twist (Combination of American and Latin American styles). These dance styles have become incorporated in the Cambodian rock music repertory to the point where if I utilized the word Twist (instead of the Khmer pronunciation *tweeh*), or Jerk (instead of the Khmer pronunciation *jack*), I was corrected, for these musical representations of transpacific histories have become part of a repertory of Cambodian rock tradition continues to change.

Contemporary constructions of Cambodia paint a binary between Angkor Wat and Khmer Rouge genocides thus few research examines the nuanced linguistic and political debates during the period of independence from France. Through the music repertory, modern Cambodian rock bands engage in history through these linguistic and musical choices. In 1959 when Khmer became the official language (Amratisha 1998:191-2). In Khmer language, rock and popular music is termed *pleng samay* with *pleng* meaning music and *samay* meaning modern, and it remains a vehicle for cultural contestation and engagement.

The emphasis on men in this thesis reflects the gendered postcolonial decolonization origins of Cambodian classic rock and also echoes the necessity of further studies. Women such as Ros Sereysothea, Pan Ron and Chuy Vanna and their Cambodian American contemporaries Laura Mam and Bochan Huy further interrogate Cambodian rock as merely male (Saphan 2013). Contemporary musicians such the band *The Messengers*—comprised entirely of Cambodian female garment workers—continue the labor of decolonization through western rock instruments and music styles with lyrics in Khmer. Future work will extend out of the U.S. to France and Cambodia to study how refugee-survivors mediate poverty through the creation of rock bands. Medical anthropologists such as Hinton suggest symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder accrete in bodies in part due to economic marginalization. A comparative study of Cambodia, the U.S. and France may contextualize the continued efforts of Cambodian refugee-survivors to mediate postcolonial feelings of disillusion, displacement and continued hope through Cambodian rock under different policies of resettlement. Eventually, through ethnographic data I intend to integrate the experiences of Cambodian-American refugee-survivors to the larger processes of Cambodian classic rock and its multiple manifestations as a localized vehicle of processing genocide, engineering futures and decolonization.

Chapter 3: Sorn Pech and the Making of Modern Man through Music

In this case study on the collective labor of the Soriya Band in Southern California, prominent emphasis on one individual in this chapter remains a contradiction (Ruskin and Rice 2012). In this section, I use the details of Sorn Pich's life to examine

larger topics of music and Cambodian migration histories to the US. I argue throughout this Thesis that Cambodian refugee-survivors themselves narrate histories beyond the 195-1979 genocides to contextualize these traumatic years. In performing the postcolonial Cambodian cultural renaissance (1953-1970) in particular, first generation refugee survivors also perform memories and futures that challenge their invisibility in mainstream US society; in other words, they perform labors of belonging and citizenship reflective of their struggles in the refugee camps, and challenges they face upon resettlement in the US. While Sorn Pech received educational privileges compared to others who resettled in the third and largest wave of Cambodian refugees, his migration patterns mirror thousands of refugees who fled these atrocities. In this sense, Sorn's musical life history bears no exceptionality though his circumstances of survival—as the case for all Cambodian survivors of the genocide—are indeed exceptional. As Ruskin and Rice (2012) note in their theories of the roles of life history in musical ethnography, the individual life history as central to this ethnographic case study on the Soriya Band, reflects my views of cultures as fragmented. While constructions of gendered first generation selfhoods for the Soriya Band members remains interdependent with intersecting hierarchal roles of status during Saturday jam sessions, the individual makes life choices that move the musical tradition in new ways to align with their struggles as racialized Others in various historical periods—as exemplified in Sorn Pech's life. Sorn constructs historical narrative related to lost family members perhaps in part due to his own survivor guilt and trauma. The details reveal the intertwining of affect and trauma behind the individual choices and related rock music performances.

This chapter constructs a musical history of Sorn Pech, the bass guitar player for the Soriya Band. Born in 1947 in Kracheh, Cambodia, Pech experienced postcolonial Cambodian history through all of its shifts in political regimes. As a member of an emerging Cambodian middle class in the 1960s, Pech enacted his aspirations for urban citizenship through modern music. Through Sorn Pech's relationship with music, this chapter traces Cambodian rock as perceived by a modern subject under multiple eras: from *pleng samay* or "modern music" in Khmer language inception as a state tool of creating modern Cambodian subjects in the postcolonial era (1953-1970), to its shifting meanings under the Lon Nol regime (1970-1975), the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), the refugee camps (1979-1981), and finally the continued significance during Cambodian resettlement as refugees in the US. Little scholarship exists on Cambodian rock throughout these periods. Details in the life of Sorn Pech's, the eldest member of the Soriya Band provides a way to begin to understand how refugee-survivors utilize rock music to ameliorate their status as marginalized and racialized bodies in the US based on their struggles prior to resettlement. While the music began as a state constructed project, Cambodians have since performed rock music to articulate place-based identities through decades of continual liminality and displacement.

The Sihanouk Era: Melodies of French Education (1953-1970)

According to Muan and Ly (2005), the Khmer Rouge disrupted a period of the Sihanouk regime's constructions of a Cambodian nation state as expressed through architecture, film, theater and music. Cambodian popular music as a secular form different from localized religious forms of music, played via the medium of radio to

create postcolonial and modern Cambodians. As Brian Larkin (2008) demonstrates the British administration constructed Nigerian colonial subjects through media infrastructures, in the Cambodian case, popular music from this era maintains the name *pleng samay* or modern music. In accounts of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia, Rudolf Mrázek (2008) chronologically constructs Dutch colonial infrastructure. Engineers architected colonial modernity through houses with air conditioning and cameras surveyed subjects in compromising moments. The Dutch educated colonial subjects called “dandies” don modernity through Dutch clothing styles. Radios connected to make a “modern colonial space” emitting Bahasa Indonesian as central to the nation-state infrastructure. The Sihanouk regime created Ros Sereysothea and Sinn Sisamouth as national gendered ideals of urban modernity (Saphan 2013). Thus, music became inextricably connected to state plans of modernity through music, literature and architecture as patronized by the Sihanouk regime.

Sorn Pech became a modern Cambodian subject through French education and rock music in a context of educational policies of urbanization promoted by the Sihanouk regime in the postcolonial period. David Ayres (2000) traces Sihanouk’s educational policies which were designed to create ethical Buddhist Cambodians. As a result, in 1953, Sihanouk declared Cambodia independent through the rhetoric of Socialist Buddhism which promoted egalitarianism and monarchy through allotment of 20% of the national budget to educational infrastructure that would create a middle class of consumers. Sorn has since forgotten all his French vocabulary from that period as English or Spanish now dominate. Nonetheless, he recalls only two phrases. As part of learning

French, each exam included the question “*pourquoi allez-vous à l’école?*” why do you go to school? And Sorn responded each time with the set phrase, “*Je vais à l’école pour apprendre à lire et à écrire à devenir un homme honnête,*” which he then automatically translates for me in English as, “I go to school. I want to learn to read and write. I want to become a good man.” While Sorn speaks only Khmer in our interviews, he translates the phrases into English instead of Khmer. He reveals, “We had to memorize this phrase. When you took a test, you had to write this down and memorize it. I can’t remember any other phrase, but this one is etched in his mind.” Sorn complemented the colonial of becoming an “honest” man through French education through his interest in, and performance of modern music and French colonial subject which continued after formal education, and into his work life.

French education facilitated Sorn’s interest in becoming a modern man, as supported fully by his parents. By the 1969, over two million children attended primary and secondary schools in Cambodia (UN 2011:22). Sorn’s father had moved from Phnom Penh to Kracheh following a divorce, and met Sorn’s mother who had two children from previous marriage. Sorn was the first child of four in this second marriage. In addition to the privilege of stability accorded to starting a family in their early 40s, Sorn’s parents were not *srai* “rice planting” laborers as these parcels of belonged to villagers specializing in rice labor. Like most villagers in his area, his parents primarily planted fruit and vegetables and sold the excess in the markets. Sorn recalls having enough food, and like other families around him, parents wanted their children to pursue French education promoted in during the Sihanouk regime. Thus, Sorn’s mother tutored him

before going to the market to sell excess vegetables such as chili peppers and other greens, *sekdey troev kah* “things we had enough of,” and fruit such as bananas, mangoes. Every morning before 5 am after his mother went to the market, Sorn’s father, who was a jewelry designer, continued the lessons consisting of numbers and basic literacy from when Sorn was 2-4 years old. Sorn could read easier articles in the newspaper at age 5, so his mother suggested he start school. Though Sorn’s family were not heavy laborers, they sought promises of mobility into urban life espoused in the postcolonial period.

According to Sorn’s memories, normally children begin French school at age 7. To test whether a child is old enough for school involves having the child raise an arm over their head and touch the ear. Sorn was too small to reach over and touch his ear, so his mother asked the principal to allow him to attend the village elementary school. From the third grade, all classes were taught in French. Sorn recognizes his privilege as the youngest male in his village, and attributes his scholarship not to any innate abilities but to his parents who prepared him for school at an early age. Sorn says, “I was lucky my parents could read. You may have two children one smart and one not so smart but put both children in one country and they both learn all the complicated rules of the language and both can speak the language. Sure, someone else may be quicker at learning certain things, but people are basically the same.” Sorn attended school unofficially for two years but was the number one student. Because Sorn’s mother was an older woman and well-connected, Sorn accessed secular education in his village which shaped his music preferences. Sorn recalls his first experience with rock music, “When I was 12 or 13 in my village at Khmer New Year, I saw a long haired man playing Cambodian music and I

wanted to be *loy* cool, just like him. I wanted to be modern.” The French established secular schools and imported instruments such as the violin, the contrabass, the accordion and the guitar (Narom 2005). Though Sorn did not receive formal training in music at school, his secular French education paved the way for urban modern urban citizenship purported by the postcolonial regime.

Acceptance into the agricultural school near Phnom Penh further facilitated an interest in modern music. At level 5, equivalent of 8th grade here in the US, Sorn passed an exam to enter high school which moved him closer to the urban center. Away from his village, Sorn began his performance as an urban “modern man” through his musical performances at the Agricultural School of Preak Liep just outside of Phnom Penh. When Sorn lived in a student dorm in Phnom Penh, he recalls seeing another Cambodian rock band when he was 15. “I saw the man with the *barang* pants (French pants) and shaggy long hair and I wanted to be like him. I knew I wanted to play the guitar.” Only 1-2 people stood intently watching the performances as most people danced. Sorn purchased an acoustic guitar with a classmate Sovanna to share the costs for a guitar for 150 Cambodian riels. Sorn cannot remember where in Phnom Penh he purchased the acoustic guitar, but he recalls biking to the store that also sold nick knacks. Sorn enrolled in a private school for guitar lessons that met once a month for three months as about 30 riels a month. In moving up from the countryside and the guitar for Sorn made him feel *loy* or cool and modern. At his school only 3-4 people were also interested in Cambodian rock music and one of them Sohn also attending the private lessons to learn the rhythm guitar. Another student named Leng Tieng played the solo guitar and the three of them practiced

together, selecting Khmer ballads such as “Champa Battambang” or the “flower of Battambang.” While they were never an official group, Sorn recalls these music memories as formative to his current membership as bass guitarist for the Soriya band.

Increased US Militarization: Music in the Lon Nol Regime (1970-1975)

Economic decline prior to the coup resulted in a lack of civil service jobs for recent graduates causing more opposition to the Sihanouk regime (Chandler 2000: 199). For Sorn, while in Phnom Penh at agricultural school, there were two courses of study called *kahleak*, one lasting three years and the other six years. Sorn pursued the latter route which led to a position in the Battambang region of Cambodia. Though fully employed, he continued to oppose the Sihanouk regime as many of his generation. The French controlled and created through modern Cambodian subject through King Sihanouk as the figurehead while indirectly ruling through educational institutions that would revive a degenerative mythic Khmer culture (Edwards 2007). Seeking alternatives to what he viewed as continued French colonialism, Sorn, like many young Cambodians appreciated Sihanouk’s cultural contributions but opposed his repressive political policies. Increased militarization in Cambodia culminated in the US supported Lon Nol coup on March 18, 1970. Though Sorn supported the US supported Lon Nol coup, he recalls the violence, “I was so young. I didn’t understand anything.” Sorn justifies his beliefs through descriptions of his preferences for rock music. While Cambodian rock began as a state plan in colonial subject formation, with increased US militarization, Cambodians began to incorporate rock from the US in the repertory as a filter for understanding violent imperialism.

Employment signified a transformation into adulthood that meant consumption during free time. For Sorn, life continued normally following the coup as he continued to attend dance bars, but never danced because he stood watching the band closely. Sorn had arrived in Battambang with a classmate whose uncle lived in the center of the region. The uncle directed him toward acquaintances who rented out an empty wooden house on stilts. Sorn moved in with two other young government civil engineers both named Saphoun. Through his job as a land surveyor in Battambang, Sorn lived with rural families like his parents, but Sorn viewed his job as transfer of skills became a part of the nation-building process along with the music. While Sorn benefitted from Sihanouk's educational infrastructure which facilitated his studies, Sorn opposed the monarchy due to French colonial associations. As a result of this disillusionment, Sorn supported Lon Nol as a reform political regime. Sorn remembers being struck by Santana's "Oye Como Va" and "Black Magic Woman." In his formative years, Sorn played primarily Cambodian music on his acoustic guitar, but when speaking about his early 20s work as government land surveyor in Battambang, Sorn speaks only of American music. He reveals, "When I heard "Oye Como Va," I couldn't get the guitar out of my head. I'd bike everywhere hoping to hear even a part of the song play on someone's radio." Sorn regards his work in Battambang as a high point for his development as a modern Cambodian which he couches in terms of music.

Sorn spent his free time in places called bars where a rock band played music. While his friends danced with women, Sorn paid to stand near band just to be near the band members and their instruments. He recalls, "I was obsessed with the band. I'd listen

to “Beautiful Sunday” and slower songs like “You’ve got a Friend. I didn’t understand the meaning of the songs, only that they were American.” The processes of formal, secular French education and Cambodian modern music converge in Sorn’s work as a government land surveyor in Battambang. As an emerging middle class urban subjects in postcolonial Cambodia, Sorn became a modern man motivated Sorn in his music pursuits which complemented his French language education. Colonial media infrastructures created class-based music preferences and fashions which in turn some modern subjects performed through pleng samay, modern music in Khmer and increasingly in English with militarization. Since then, modern music has become a modality for Sorn to retell his own story, about his fixation with the band and intent to become a modern man through performance which complemented his job as a land surveyor.

Sorn was in his early 20s and recalls the US supported Lon Nol coup. Like many Cambodians educated in the time period, as a staunch Lon Nol supporter, Sorn continues to identify with Lon Nol. Cambodian Americans despite knowledge about the American-supported Lon Nol in the 1970-1975 civil war that killed 500,000 and weakened the popularly elected Sihanouk regime. As Lon Nol continued Sihanouk’s policies, the music from 1970-1975 evokes the period following independence in 1953. Nonetheless, as a French appointed figurehead, Sihanouk garnered disapproval from young educated Cambodians such as Sorn who perceived him as inept. Sorn codes his memories of the period through his continued interest in modern music as shaping his political beliefs, particularly when he reflects on his life during the Lon Nol period which were formative to his political beliefs and increasingly American musical preferences in the onset of

militarization into Cambodia through a US coup. As civil servant for the Lon Nol coup, when the Khmer Rouge came to power on April 17, 1975, Sorn decided to leave Battambang as people might recognize him as a former land surveyor for the Lon Nol government.

Extreme Censorship: Music During the Khmer Rouge Period (1975-1979)

During the Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea, these symbols of modernity were banned in favor of localized forms of music (Marston 2002). During this period, musicians such Sorn played occasionally for the Khmer Rouge. The Democratic Kampuchea regime while often cited as a communist regime, recent scholarship also describes the regime as a postcolonial, ultranationalist regime to counter French colonial policies when created racialized hierarchies between Vietnamese and Chinese labor over Khmer in the civil service. While nearly all of Sorn's family including his parents perished under the Khmer Rouge, his life under the regime further complicates the narrative, and serves as a departure for more research in this period. This study of Cambodian rock as a product of Sihanouk's social engineering may facilitate a more nuanced analysis of the Khmer Rouge period beyond the lens of communism/imperialism and toward a perspective inclusive of survivors' experiences. This section follows Sorn's survival through his role as a substitute musician. After his parents and two older siblings were killed, Sorn built houses for the regime. When one of the houses crumbled, he lost his ability to walk. Attached to his favorite book Orwell's *Animal Farm* he hid it in the camp. When confronted by soldiers he tore a page out of the book saying he used them as cigarette paper. The soldiers nicknamed him Tha Bak or the Broken Old Guy in reference

to his legs. Unable to work and without medicine, Sorn was allowed to watch the Khmer Rouge band.

The soldiers knew that Sorn was a New person, but the head soldier who was called Tha (Old Man) Mak was secretly a former Lon Nol soldier and thus New “thmey” too but posed as *prachiechun chah* or Old People who “had more rights than the new people,” according to Sorn. The former Lon Nol soldier, Tha Mak revealed his identity as a former Lon Nol soldier to Sorn because he trusted him. Five people played music and Tha Mak lead by playing *tro* as the lead instrument. Sorn describes the *pleng boran* or old instruments he played during the Khmer Rouge era as the *tro* and the *takhe* which he had seen in his childhood village but had never seen anyone play these close to him. On their breaks, the music troupe allowed Sorn to play songs such as Svay Chantee and propaganda music. Sorn tried the *takhe*, a two stringed instrument, the *khem* with 16 strings, the *tro* and a small drum made wood and either cow hide or snake skin. There was an acoustic guitar that no one played so Sorn played it but could only play very simple chords which he describes in English as “the bass level, and no solo as this was seen as too many notes and too Western.” Altogether the band consisted of *yothea khmer kraham* or Khmer Rouge soldiers: two *tro* players (big and small versions of the instrument), one person playing *takhe*, one person played *khem*, one mandolin player and one person who played the hand drum. All were male except the singer who rotated from a group of 7-8 girls aged 14-17 who were also dancers and cloth weavers.

During break time he would play his guitar and they ignored him because he posed no threat as no one wanted to play the guitar and he was handicapped. The leader

of Sorn's region Pursat, was named Tha Luy, a 50 year old man who Sorn describes as brutal. Tha Mak, the former Lon Nol soldier played the tro but asked Sorn to play the guitar to replace the accordion guy would hit the wrong key and subsequently the singer could not sing because of the wrong pitch which would make the audience upset at the performances which were attended by three leaders that oversaw Battambang, Pursat and Siem Riep. The accordion player made mistakes, so the former Tha Mak asked the Pursat regional lead Tha Luy if Sorn could substitute for the accordion player with his guitar to which the regional lead said, "I don't want anyone from Phnom Penh to even touch the stage no matter how good he is." Nonetheless, the accordion player continued to make mistakes halting the performance so Sorn was allowed to play once.

On the day of the performance, a 4 wheel drive stopped by to get Sorn to play perform. Sorn describes himself as lucky because he borrowed soldier's clothes whose father was the medicine man. The clothes were nylon and brand new. Sorn recalls, "I was happy to have new clothes, look good and perform. I played well as I was able to make small notes like 'starts with a, b' and so on because I knew some notation." After the performance, in a case of mistaken identity, the driver took Sorn to get two pairs of new clothes and Sorn pretended to be part of the old people. He would change places to sleep because he was afraid he was afraid of being taken in the night. After two weeks, Tha Luy saw him and asked why he was there to which he replied, "The driver forgot and dropped me off at the wrong place and it was his mistake." The head asked Sorn about his exact job prior the Khmer Rouge regime and he said he was just a student at a Buddhist temple. Sorn heard that Tha Luy hired a New person for electronics so he

claimed to be a cousin of the mechanic and thus a New person with necessary skills. Sorn survived under this identity as a New person working as a musician and an assistant to the medicine man. When Tha Luy was transferred to Battambang, Sorn refused as he was afraid people would recognize him. Tha Luy was later taken to Phnom Penh to be killed as the Khmer Rouge executed their favored rural Base People toward the end (Heder, 2002:180). The accordion player was later killed as he was also a high ranking official.

Reconnection with Music: Refugee Camps (1979-1981)

In April 1979, Sorn learned that the Vietnamese army had toppled the Khmer Rouge through his younger sister Mari who he reunited with in the Pursat camps. She verified the death of their parents and older siblings. Sorn became a parent to his younger brother Chun who was 17 years old and Vanna who was 12 years old. Sorn, Chun and Vanna walked from Cambodia. It took two days as Sorn had to rest his legs, and they slept along the road and in front of houses. Mari had gotten married and decided to go to Phnom Penh where her husband's family managed to survive so she left a letter. Chun went to Phnom Penh to see how she was doing. Chun went to Vietnam to make a living but then got robbed and lost everything, but left with jewelry. After returning from the Thai border back in Pursat, Sorn took a van to Battambang. While in Battambang, Sorn lived in an abandoned house, but the original owner returned after a month, so he took up residence in a Buddhist temple where he met a Cambodian named Seth, who was working for the CIA. In this temple, Sorn reunited with a female second cousin who had become a Buddhist nun. Prior to the genocide, she was one of nine siblings, and now was the only survivor in her family. Sorn reveals, "My only regret was not taking her along

with me to Thailand. I didn't know how to talk to her because she was so sad. She eventually stopped being a nun and when went back and met her boyfriend and she died from some type of stomachache. That *pouch* "family seed" completely disappeared after her death." In this period, Sorn left his wife Somali and youngest brother Vanna and daughter with the wife of the Cambodian CIA agent and their two young children. Sorn crossed the Thai/Cambodian border to buy cases of noodles such and fish nets to sell in Cambodia. Sorn talks little about music as he spent this period crossing the border to buy goods to sell in Cambodia. He describes the multiple crossings as dangerous with fears of Khmer Rouge soldiers, Vietnamese soldiers, Thai soldiers and land mines with people traveling back and forth sometimes in groups of 4-5 people or 20-30 and sometimes with a *neak noam pleuv* coyote guide who was Khmer who accepted gold. Sorn crossed the border several times alone because there was no other way to earn money to feed his family.

Sorn initially resettled with his wife, daughter and youngest sibling in *churum thmey* the New Camp on the Khmer side of the border where he constantly tried to earn money by selling stolen cigarette butts and vegetables. He recalls, "The soldiers would come every morning and we had to hide our goods." After reuniting with his wife in the refugee camp, they were allowed to have a place in the camp, it was a 100 square feet bamboo bed with a triangular palm roof where four adults and one child slept but she said that it was normal to have ten people crammed together. There were around 200 of these huts in a square and at the center there was the building where families received rations of rice and salted fish called plateau but Sorn says there was never enough as Thai

workers pocketed the food to sell to refugees. In this camp, Sorn does not speak of music as he was arrested by Thai soldiers and beaten for money. He reveals, “The soldiers would beat you for money. I was nothing to them but at that point, of course I had to let them kick me.” Sorn recalls lying down and feeling death imminent but said he could not die because of his wife, young daughter, and 12 year old brother Vanna, who had been shot by soldiers along the border, and had undergone amputation of his left leg without the required anesthesia, and thus suffered daily. Life in *Churom Thmey* or New Camp was difficult with no memories of music for Sorn.

War continued along the border including *Churom Thmey* among different military groups which forced Sorn to plan for resettlement in the US instead of continued political activity. Old friends from the Lon Nol regime asked Sorn to work with them along the border, so he served as a middle man because of his experience crossing the Thai/Cambodian border. However, after Sorn reunited with his brother Chun, they found out that the UN Thai busses refugees from Khmer border to go to the United Nations refugee camp Khadoang. Sorn, his wife, children and brothers rode to Khaodang with about 60-100 people in large buses. However, when Sorn was about to get on the bus, a soldier from Lon Nol side did not want Sorn to leave. The CIA friend Seth lied that the women were pregnant and needed Sorn’s labor, and the guy demanded money and gold, so they gathered all gold and gave it to him. The man had a machine gun and was upset and did not want to be left to fight alone. A year later he was also in Khaodang. When Sorn found out about the UN refugee camps, he reaffirmed the decision to migrate to the US at all costs.

Sorn retells life in Khaodang with fond memories because after the Khmer Rouge, Khaodang was a dream encoded in music. Sorn watched *lakhoun* theater and also went to see people dance to modern music with one person electric guitar solo, a bass guitarist, drummer, keyboardist, and a pair of singers male and female who performed outside on the yellow dirt and the UN brought in reddish dirt to make roads once or twice a week. People also played soccer. Sorn's friend who has now resettled in Belgium wrote short comedy skits 15-30 minutes long about Americans speaking to Khmer people who did not know English. The playwright needed a song before the story and asked Sorn to play for him. Sorn played the acoustic guitar at home with his younger brothers Chun and Vanna and Seth who purchased the guitar that cost about 200 Thai baht. Seth earned money undercover as a CIA agent which enabled him to purchase the acoustic guitar which was light brown, dark yellow with six strings. Sorn's favorite genre of music was *chung seh* (literally "horse leg") which was also called cowboy music but his favorite song was "House of the Rising Sun" by the Animals. He also longed to play childhood Cambodian songs such as "Champa Battambang," a white flower that they use to put in Buddhist temples "Champey Siem Riep" the white flower of Siem Riep and "Reatrey Hong Kong" (Hong Kong nights) by Sisamouth. Neighbors in their 20-30 years old who were young men were in the audience clapped their hands or sang in Khmer spontaneously. Following the Khmer Rouge regime, Sorn became increasingly pro-American as evidenced in his music preferences and work in Khaodang.

Set on the US, Sorn denied offers of resettlement in Australia and France and waited for two years in Khaodang to resettle. A friend he met during the Lon Nol era and

lived in Australia during the genocide, arrived in Khaodang in search of his brother who was dead. He offered to take Sorn and his family to Australia but Sorn declined because he wanted to go to the US. Sorn's childhood neighbor who shared his birthday and became a veterinarian studying in France in 1970 and remained there throughout the civil war and genocide. When in Khaodang, Sorn saw her letter and replied telling her what he knew about her family, so she asked if Sorn needed to go to France as a sponsor but he decided to wait for the US. As a bilingual French/Khmer speaker, Sorn initially worked as an interpreter for a French medical organization, but after two months he quit to learn English in preparation for resettlement in the US. Sorn discusses his choices for resettlement with his US musical preferences. When asked about any regrets, he said he has none related to resettlement in the US.

Sorn applied for asylum only for the US. The American Refugee Committee hospital needed Khmer speaking nurses. Sorn passed the exam and went to learn nursing in an 8 month course, 8 hours a day, four classes, in accelerated courses in English. Sorn's brother Chun and friend Seth failed the exam. Prior to the genocide and subsequent work with the CIA, Seth taught English in private school in his native Battambang but could not pass the exam. Sorn audited Seth's makeshift English lessons in Khaodang, and with knowledge of French, Sorn says, "I guessed my way through the English." At the American Refugee Committee hospital, he later became head Khmer nurse after about 9 months. After dinner he played the guitar three to four times a week while other young men who liked the guitar who could not afford one would come over and listen to the music. Sorn narrates:

I know it sounds strange but Khaodang was more fun than life in the US. Battambang in my 20s was the best but Khaodang was special too. People played cards, and Thai soldiers wanted money from the gamblers, so they would throw you in jail and threaten you to find out where to get more money. I knew the head gambling guy with the money but of course I wasn't going to turn him in. He was dumb enough to walk around wearing a big gold chain so of course the soldiers were looking for him! He was good guy though. But those incidents were exceptions, just bad luck. Pol Pot was horrible so Khaodang felt like *tansou* heaven. *Chamrom Thmey* was terrible. But in Khaodang, sometimes there was pork too. Sometimes Khmer people went to buy stuff in Thailand like pork, fruit, vegetables, goods, like 20 baht a day to buy this illegal stuff, toothbrush, food, noodles, jewelry.”

Sorn played the acoustic guitar three-four times per week in the evenings after work. His work with the American Refugee Committee as a nurse consisted of following the doctor's orders, giving medicine every four hours, cleaning wounds daily, administering pain killers and giving IVs. The doctors were American usually with one main doctor and 4-5 American students. Two Cambodian nurses worked with one American nurse. Everyday Sorn went to look at the names before they closed at 8 or 9am to see their appointments for resettlement to places like Switzerland, France, Germany, US, Belgium, New Zealand and Australia. Sorn sent letters to the American embassy in Bangkok through his American nurse coworkers which he remembers as Diana, Dave and Michael. He sent over 100 application letters and started to worry when there was no reply after two years. Sorn mixes his memories of work in Khaodang with those of music.

After two years in Khaodang, Sorn and his family were transferred to Mai Ruth camp to learn English. There Sorn discovered his name had appeared for resettlement two years earlier at the wrong refugee camp. Some went to the Philippines following Mai Ruth but Sorn already knew English because of his job as a nurse so he stayed only two months at Mai Ruth. Sorn says he had no problems with the physical exam, but Thai workers abused some of the women. He recalls, “They looked down on the Khmer especially after Khmer Rouge.” The Americans interviewees did not believe that his younger brothers Chun and Vanna were his blood-related brothers because of their age differences, so they were separated in different rooms for questioning about their parents and their home. Sorn said it was luck that their answers matched because Vanna was only 8 years old during the Khmer Rouge period, 12 when he was shot by soldiers which resulted in an amputated and infected leg, thus his memories were not clear. Nonetheless they passed the questioning which Sorn attributes to luck.

From the Mai Ruth camp, Sorn and his family took a bus to a transit camp before being sent to Bangkok airport. While Sorn was excited to see the Thai freeways and Bangkok, he worried throughout the ride because he heard stories of Thais bringing Cambodian refugees back to Cambodia and giving the paperwork to Thai people to go to the US. Some Cambodians who did not want to go to the US sold their spots to rich Chinese Cambodians who had money to buy it. Sorn worried throughout Mai Ruth until the he boarded the plane and everyone screamed on the plane with relief and joy when it took off. Sorn recalls the Bay Area city lights at 5am which he describes as beautiful. He reveals, “I can’t stand being in the dark now. During the Pol Pot regime it was always

dark. They wouldn't let us use electricity." It was Sunday morning in 1981 and Sorn slept on the living room floor with his wife, two children, and brothers. Before dozing off that morning he recalls, "I knocked on the wall and realized it was hollow. I said to my brother Chun, 'American houses are hollow!'" Sorn is not sure why he remembers this but perhaps it meant, "We made it." Sorn arrived with his wife, two daughters, and younger brothers in Oakland, California holding a bag of homemade diapers, his blue medical uniform, the flip flops he was wearing, and his paperwork.

Resettlement: Music and Labor in the US

In his low-income apartment complex, Sorn encountered a regular gauntlet of men who kicked him while yelling racial slurs as he pushed his shopping cart of food for his family. He recalls with laughter, "After everything I lived through, that was nothing." However, one incident at the supermarket made him realize he was unwanted. Sorn narrates, "The office told me to use my meal tickets to buy food for my children but the American lady at the cash register and everyone looked at me and I felt awful. Everyone hated me for using food stamps." Educated in French, and having studied nursing in Khaodang, Sorn picked up more English in order to attend a trade school in electronics. Sorn found a program that offered government subsidized daycare for his four children and enabled him and his wife Somali to work and go to school at night. Drawing from perceptions of postcolonial modernity and his youth, Sorn purchased an electric guitar to start a band with friends he had met in the Khaodang refugee camp. Thus, despite the realities of poverty, trauma and racial discrimination, Sorn utilized his

postcolonial history to form a Cambodian rock band that celebrated the wedding of his younger brother Chun through music from the 1960s.

Sorn utilized the music to validate his histories and perform them with other Cambodians through a wedding, an event of regeneration. Kay Shelemay (1998) documents Syrian Jewish diasporic performers in New York City accompany events of renewal such as the birth of a child. Music in diaspora in part may serve as memory but also expressions of the future through events that emphasize rebirth. In her ethnographic work in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, parents of the couple consider live music significant in imbuing power to the wedding rituals which subsequently revives *pleng boran* or ancient music. Live rock bands accompany events such as evening wedding parties. Following arrival in Oakland, Sorn relocated to nearby Mountain View, California, music became a center for weekend gatherings with friends who had resettled in San Francisco and Modesto. Occasionally friends from Long Beach would spend three day weekends where performance of Cambodian rock music entailed entanglements of postcolonial Cambodia, the genocide, the refugee camps, and contemporary US political life through music performances.

Though Sorn mostly enjoyed his secure job with Los Angeles County, he retired early because his body and mind ache from a lifetime of “too much work,” he says in English. Sorn also worked in a garment factory as a steam ironer to earn extra money for his children when they were in high school. His second daughter Sokha was a cheerleader and class vice president as well as on the cross country team and the uniforms were expensive. The work in the garment factory aggravated the leg injuries he had incurred

during the Khmer Rouge and he could no longer earn extra cash. Sorn's job for an electronics company in Orange County entailed a long commute and which put his weight at over 200 pounds. Many of Sorn's friends who survived the genocide had died prematurely of heart attacks and strokes. Some had died in jail while serving terms for welfare fraud. Sorn needed to change his life so he took an exam to work for the county which entailed a shorter commute to work so that he could join a gym. He explains, "I smoked cigarettes since I was 14 years old. At first I wanted to keep mosquitoes at bay as I used the outhouse but I became addicted and smoked until I was 57. I had to quit." Sorn blames himself for being a terrible example of health because all his four children became chain smokers, each smoking for over a decade throughout their 20s before quitting. Sorn reveals, "You know, it was my fault they copied me, but they all quit smoking. They made mistakes and learned and they're independent now so I'm proud. My eldest daughter Sinath travels too much but as long as she stays out of Cambodia, it is fine with me." After his four children had already left for college, Sorn decided he could work just one job as they no longer needed him, and he wanted to dedicate more time to reading daily news about Cambodia, listening to podcasts in Khmer, workouts at the gym and of course the his music.

I attended the Soriya Band's debut Khmer New Year concert on April 17, 2016 along with his wife and adult children. On this day, Sorn's granddaughter was born at a healthy 6 pounds, with long legs and arms and Sorn's facial features. He reflects, "In the refugee camp the doctors offered a large chicken to women if they were immunized with an unknown vaccine. My wife agreed to be immunized because we were so hungry.

Other women miscarried after the immunizations. After the shot, my wife found out she was three months pregnant so we were worried, but my second daughter Sokha was born with all her fingers and toes, and she looked exactly like my mother who had just passed. Now that Sokha's child is born, my granddaughter looks just like me and I couldn't be happier." Sorn is retired and sleeps in late, plays Sudoku and brain enhancing games that involve colorful shapes on his iPhone so that he does not "*plech plech plech* or forget, forget, forget" with age. He practices music daily as he is in charge of typing copies of music in Khmer and English for the band members. Sorn's daughter Sokha surprised him with Santana concert tickets in 2004 which he describes as one of his best days in the US. Sorn had seen Santana live in concert with his brother Chun in 1986. Sorn adds that he has admired rock musicians since he was 14 years old his preferred singer was a Cambodian named Lieu Tuk. Sorn says, "Sisamouth is irreplaceable but actually my favorite was Lieu Tuk because of his sraek, sraek or 'screaming, screaming' style similar to the western rock." Sorn would like to see Eric Clapton perform live in the future as he would like to see "Cocaine" performed live. He adds that his favorite songs are "Hotel California," "You've got a Friend," "Proud Mary," "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and John Lennon's "Imagine." Sorn maintains his identity through maintaining health and music and dedicates all of his time primarily to rock music and keeps afloat with young Cambodian American musicians such as PraCh Ly who he sees as the future.

Conclusions

This thesis is not to forget the genocides or the trauma but to remember these events through music in layers of forgetting and remembering. In fact, it is about

remembering in ways that survivors themselves have chosen to remember their lives—through live music performances—as valuable not just because they survived the genocides but because they continue to survive the refugee camps and life after resettlement. It is not just mere survival, but their past and youth informs the way they organize their lives. Statistics show the extent of the genocide on intellectuals in Cambodia. In describing the lives of Cambodian American refugee survivors, this Thesis details Cambodian musical histories and changing contemporary repertoires as challenges to marginalization in mainstream US society.

The focus on infrastructure and the post human in Chapter 2 of this thesis is in no way meant to diminish the lives and experiences of Cambodian refugee-survivors. Rather, infrastructure provides space for their continued musical endeavors at creating place. Scholars such as Anna Tsing (2015) in her ethnographic study of the infrastructure of ruin through the matsutake mushroom, begin to frame the experiences of Southeast Asian American refugee laborers such as Hmong, Mien, Lao and Khmer in Oregon. Tsing's use of place in the aftermath of the Oregon forests regeneration following the logging industry gives a sense of place for what Tsing terms the precarious labor of seasonal work performed by the refugee survivors in picking matsutake mushrooms. Tsing's focus on the forests as entangled global histories offers place for Khmer survivor refugees as laborers. Thus in her narrative, Tsing integrates first generation Cambodian Americans into a narrative of Asian American history through their precarious labor in the Oregon forests. Tsing incorporates Cambodian Americans not as just survivors of trauma but also as producers in a longer narrative of Asian American history that

necessitates continued inclusion of first generation Southeast Asian refugee experiences following resettlement. In the case of Cambodian American refugee-survivor musicians, their cultural productions exist in tandem with their multiple contributions.

Infrastructure—musical or otherwise—creates this space for examining genocide and related memories and experiences which often necessitate expressions beyond linguistic modalities for survivors.

Chapter 3 detailed the life history of Sorn Pech, the rhythm guitar player and the eldest member of the Soriya Band within the perspective of life histories in musical ethnographies (Ruskin and Rice 2012). While the narrative is temporal, the details are fragmented and varied. Refugee-survivors perform these moments creating a history of continuance through music. Each of the sections of Sorn’s life corresponds with *pleng samay* or modern music. Sorn’s life illustrates the role of media infrastructures in creating the “modern Cambodian” during the postcolonial period. Cambodian rock emerged in the 1953-1970 post-independence period that produced this music termed “modern music” in Khmer. Through state-sponsored initiatives, Sihanouk attempted to create music, literature and architecture that combined multiple influences to create a national identity. Perceptions of modernity began through secular French education which this section outlines. In interviews with Sorn, he narrated his life prior to schooling as also formative to his realization as a “modern Cambodian.” Cambodian modern rock created an urban citizenship and belonging that was separate from rural villages, decidedly urban, and these cultural histories inform Cambodian American refugee-survivor identities. Because of the Sihanouk’s association with French colonialism, his purported modern architecture

and linguistic changes were highly contested as exemplified through Sorn's life. The French had selected Sihanouk for his youth and suppleness but he later refused to accept figurehead status (Um 2015: 84). Thus, while some survivors remember this postcolonial period under Sihanouk (1953-1970) as the Golden Age, others remember the postcolonial period as corrupt, particularly young French educated youth such as Sorn who says, "Sihanouk took aid or *chomnuoy* from different countries but you cannot live on aid. You have to import and export. We just kept getting poorer and poorer." While colonial media created modern subjects, the subjects bring their own experiences. Different postcolonial groups to negotiate the construction of "Cambodia." In terms of language, Sorn assumes the "traditionalist" approach symbolized by the late Cambodian Buddhist monk Venerable Chuon Nath. Sorn represents many Cambodian American refugee-survivors who support Venerable Chuon Nath as a modern reformer of language in response to colonial pressures to Romanize Khmer script. Sorn opposed what he calls the "Van Molyvann group" because they were "too French." Chapter 3 illustrates how Sorn Pech similar to other Cambodian refugee-survivors, interpret experiences in the US from their various historical experiences and not as liminal refugees.

Cambodian rock performances both extend postcolonial Cambodian history in the US, and also allows for refugee-survivors to construct and express selves in contexts of low-wage labor and political marginalization, with hope for a future. The French colonial government intended to subdue the Cambodian population by appointing King Sihanouk as the figurehead while indirectly ruling through educational institutions that would revive a degenerative mythic Khmer culture (Edwards 2007). Thus, Cambodian history

in terms of colonial framework largely focused on Angkor Wat with narratives of a declining Khmer population. Following the Khmer Rouge genocides, discourse on Cambodians continues on an Angkor Wat/Khmer Rouge binary with an absence of Cambodians as actors in their own histories, in the creation of their own political parties, as well as the young group of modernists that opposed these groups. However, Cambodians who came of age in the postcolonial period, then survived the Pol Pot regime and resettled abroad utilize multiple layers of memories and experiences under divergent regimes. As modern subjects of French Protectorate Colonial Rule (1863-1953), Sihanouk Buddhist Socialism (1953-1970), Lon Nol Republicanism (1970-1975), Pol Pot Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), and the Thai refugee camps, the members of the refugee-survivor group, the Soriya Band, negotiate their degree of modernity and meanings of Cambodian modernity through cultural constructions which they perform.

The music from this period evokes the period of the only elected Cambodian government following independence in 1953. Simultaneously, life in the US with low-wage labor, realities of stresses, but despite or because of this, the practice music with a repertoire from Santana, Led Zeppelin, Sinn Sisamouth and popular romance ballads. Like Mains argues, the musicians of Soriya Band are not merely neoliberal subjects to the U.S., but rather they engineer music that imbues a sense of hope from the period of a Cambodian cultural renaissance to their urban contemporary lives in the U.S. Cambodian musicians sustain the infrastructure of Cambodian classic rock to maintain these feelings of hope despite low-wage labor.

Performance spans beyond national agendas toward localized meanings (Lewis 2013). Scholars have traced accretions of violence in the bodies of genocide survivors. Jennie Burnet (2012) demonstrates how genocide accretes in bodies of survivors of the Rwandan genocide. This thesis includes the work of Cambodian refugee-survivors and their contributions through live rock music performances. Nonetheless, little literature incorporates the multiple low-wage jobs Cambodian refugees found in the US and how these jobs may contribute to symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder following resettlement. Nearly all of the members of the Soriya Band spoke weekly of physical pains likely from the genocide and exacerbated by their marginalization. Survivor of the Cambodian genocide, Boreth Ly born February 14, 1967 in Phnom Penh. Ly was 8 years old on April 17, 1975 when Khmer Rouge soldiers emptied his family home. After four years, only Ly and his grandmother survived the atrocities. Ly explains his embodiment of the genocide and how art serves as a form of narration:

“It is this necessary narrative process that explains my desire to narrate for myself and subsequently to perform my traumatic and painful memories to a group of empathetic friends and strangers; in turn, this process contributes to the remaking of a self for me. This is not to say that my traumatic experience disappeared as a result of this externalization; quite to the contrary, this painful experience is forever imprinted in my body and mind” (2008:128).

Ly writes about art and performance as a means of expression that is “forever imprinted on my body and mind.” Members of the Soriya Band speak in embodied historical fragments through performances of modern Cambodian rock music. Future iterations of

this research will include detailed interviews with all members of the Soriya Band, who are literate in Khmer language in varying degrees, and whose jobs range from truck driver to construction company owner. Pilzer (2012) compellingly tells the stories of three Korean comfort women through their musical performances. Extended interviews and continued field work would assume Pilzer's sensitive focus on the lives of three individuals. In tracing transnational Cambodian survivor practices, future work on this thesis will highlight the voices of Cambodian musicians across multiple countries. Music renders these life histories communicable through localized experiences of performers.

Cambodian American refugees as survivors utilize their skills learned throughout their lives—not just in the 1975-1979 period—to build alternative places of belonging in the US states as racialized bodies Southeast Asian refugees. Despite Sorn's active anticolonial efforts in Cambodia in his 20s, as a Cambodian American refugee survivor excluded from US political efficacy, Sorn draws on layered cultural and musical histories through performance of Cambodian rock music. For Sorn and the members of the Soriya Band, the musical practices entail the temporal expression that in these circumstances become political acts or remembrance (Um 2012). In his study of Cambodian refugee-survivors, Tang (2015) emphasizes continuity in the lives of Cambodian American refugee survivors from the Thai refugee camps to resettlement in the Bronx, New York. Tang offers a framework of Cambodian American narratives that extends after the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge genocides, into the years in Thai refugee camps and finally Cambodian American resettlement into the Bronx public housing. Tang accentuates a

continuity in the narratives and lives of Cambodian American refugee- survivors as marginalized economically and socially in the United States.

Cambodian rock in Southern California emerges from histories of the Sihanouk regime patronage of rock music in 1953. Cambodian musicians thus perform labors of revitalization that extend from the postcolonial period of hope in their current endeavors of building a future. Kallio and Westerland (2015) in their research on the sustainability of traditional music in Cambodia find that Cambodian traditional music teachers envision themselves as preserving culture (7). Teachers view music instruction and performance as reconstructing the nation state. In other words, musicians continue to see themselves as engineers of nation state construction through their local place-based identities.

Cambodian rock music in particular with its amplified materiality furthers the idea of labor of constructing a transnational identity through music. Grant (2015) conducted fieldwork from 2013-2014 on two month-long trips in Cambodia to understand some of the challenges of teaching youth how to play traditional instruments. Master Seng Norn says he will not allow a national music to phase out. Chum Ngek is a Cambodian American refugee survivor who arrived in the DC area in 1982. Ngek teaches pin peat. He works as a truck driver and stocker for a garment store and spends all of his free time with traditional music. Though Ngek is not a professional he continues to teach music so that it won't disappear (Campbell and Lum 2008). Local Cambodian rock bands such as the Soriya Band work alongside other amateur musicians in memorializing and rebuilding within a context of specific places with perceptions of national identity and refugee-survivor identity in the U.S. The Soriya Band as Cambodian refugee-survivors

who migrated to the United States utilize these multiple historical and musical identities to confront their own marginalization in mainstream society with continued hopes for a future of acceptance.

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