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Tolerable Others: Buddhism and the Cambodian Diaspora in Italy

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Following the 1975-1979 genocide, Cambodian survivors in exile appropriated land, funded and established clear physical boundaries to house sacred religious community spaces. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge had specifically dismantled religious institutions. As a result, an estimated 12-100 monks survived out of 65,000 (Harris 2013:135). This dissertation project examines forms of belonging among Cambodian refugees in Italy through the lens of Buddhist practice. While the Catholic Church resettled 3,000 Southeast Asian refugees throughout Italy in 1979, many of whom were practicing Buddhists (Gheddo 2015), no research has been done on this refugee population to date. My project remedies this gap by pursuing three research questions: 1) How is the temple a site of fraught integration? 2) How does religion mediate refugees' sense of national belonging, as well as their relationship with the homeland and wider diaspora? 3) What does it mean to have

objects and spirits be so crucial in the coproduction of Buddhism and Khmerness? To answer these questions, I examine the everyday experiences of Cambodian refugees in contemporary Italy through a study of a local Buddhist temple which stands at the center of community life.

I conducted fieldwork in Lombardy from September 2019-March 2020. My methods are informed by interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religion and ethics. Grounded in anthropological training, fieldwork is a primary source of data through oral histories with particular attention to reflexivity in the field. This dissertation argues that the constellation of Wat Khmer Buddhist temples transnationally engrosses debates that merit further inquiry within the European and U.S. contexts of noted xenophobia. The findings suggest that, contrary to functionalist models of assimilation that romanticize refugees as resisting modernity through religion, Cambodian refugees in Italy use local cultures and their specific histories to shape their desires to simultaneously belong and maintain difference through the Buddhist temple, a religious opportunity structure that engages local Italian politics, war memories, and transnational Buddhist networks.

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Introduction

> There are those who cross borders more or less permanently—immigrants, refugees, exiles, and expatriates. In their case, the disjuncture of place and culture is especially clear: Khmer refugees in the United States take "Khmer culture" with them in the same complicated way that Indian immigrants in England transport "Indian culture" to their new homeland. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992:7).

The anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) astutely selected the term "Khmer" in their seminal essay on the postmodern turn. Gupta and Ferguson interrogated ideas about perceptions of the nation-state, and how these assumptions subsequently influence the way we conceptualized cultures as rooted in territory with ideas such as "subcultures" reinforcing perceptions of distinct cultures as belonging to certain territories. As an example, in pairing the use of "Khmer culture" with the example of "Indian culture," Gupta and Ferguson understood the malleability of the term Khmer, a site of cultural and religious contestations. They generatively used "Khmer" to analytically engage the contours and boundaries of the field of anthropology and also Southeast Asian Studies.

In this dissertation, I use the terms Khmer and Cambodian interchangeably, with a preference for the designation Cambodian, based on the need to attend to specific histories and places. The Khmer are the dominant ethnic minority in Cambodia among other ethnicities which can all be called Cambodian. [1] In Italian, it is recognized that *cambogiani* comes from the French *Cambodge*. In the US, the term Cambodian is a categorization of being working class; the term Cambodian American centers studies on migration of Khmer as rooted a priori in the U.S. However, the term Cambodian used in Italy, has different implications and is often more appropriate. The switch between the

two terms Khmer and Cambodian is also a metaphor for the fluidity of movements between various spaces that resist categorizations. Drawing on the genealogy of Gupta and Ferguson, I use this slippage in linguistic terms to introduce this project on *Wat Khmer Italy* (or Wat Khmer).

Revisiting Notions of Modernity and Fixity: Tracing Cambodian Buddhism

The sun began to fade early in the winter. I was about to leave the temple one afternoon when, I took three bows before leaving. The monk, Venerable Sokhom Hem said "One bows not to the statue, but to the meaning behind it." With that single sentence, I said thank you and left. The line lingered in my mind as I cut through the fields on my way back into town at dusk. At the heart of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths unite and underlie all the iterations. The *koan*, one-lined phrases are normally attributed to Zen Buddhism and focus on meditation. Crouched in a lowered position, with palms touching the ground, bowing three times is an intentional act of devotion. The first bow is to the Buddha. The second to the sangha or community of monks. The third is the dharma or the truth. One bows with a reverence for the meanings behind the celestial Buddha. To be sure, Buddhism is a 1,500 tradition, yet for practicing Buddhists it has consistently changed (Marston 2008). This dissertation argues that Buddhist practices are entangled with notions with modernity and morality. It is also about struggle and an integral part of the making of Cambodian diasporas.

That day as I left, in the one line, the monk clearly expressed his viewpoint as a part of the Mahnikay *samay* (modern) reformist tradition led by Venerable Chuon Nath, who during the French Protectorate period standardized Khmer Buddhism. For

Cambodians in diaspora, Buddhism is a form of modernity, and reflexivity about their life conditions, about constructing and maintaining a Buddhist selfhood. Rather than merely aching for the past, these practices at the temple are expressions of Buddhist modern subjectivities. Different Theravada traditions also have had their own reform movements, despite being popularly called the Elder School by Buddhists.

That day, the temple complex, Wat Khmer in Lombardy represented itself as Buddhist through the blue, white and orange flag that decorated the front of the villa country house. Next to it were the tricolors of the Italian flag, nestled next to the deep blue and red of the Cambodian flag with Angkor Wat deployed in diaspora with a sense of continuity, imagined as immutable, without time. The diasporic temple in Italy can be placed within the framework of Benedict Anderson calls relics, that denote a fixated Cambodian nation, Buddhism, and Angkor Wat as timeless. Of course, Buddhism has a long history in Cambodia.

The archeological record indicates that Buddhism became a more dominant religion in Cambodia circa 1000 AD with reign of King Jayavarman VII (Sharrock 2009). Angkor Wat has historically, and continues to be, a site of pilgrimage (Thompson 2006:133), along with other Buddhist sites of tourism in Cambodia such as Phnom Sampeau (Trew 2020). Yet, these images of fixity must be continually produced. Cambodian Buddhist practices are part of making modern and moral selves. This dissertation details the processes of making Cambodian Buddhism in Italy as a negotiation of the local, transnational, and next lives through the prism of Buddhist concepts.

The image of fixity of Buddhism interfaced with the late arrival of the printing press in Cambodia in the 1930s (Yamada 2009:111). Print-capitalism provided fixity, subjectivity, and connected a sense of antiquity to language and nation (Anderson 1983:261). Since Cambodia became independent in 1953—just under twenty years after the arrival of print capital—its status as nation has been both debated and enforced in part through notions of sacredness. In *Cambodge: The Cultivation of a Nation, 1860-1945*, Penny Edwards (2007) traces the desacralization of Angkor Wat to become a modern state symbol. Edwards uses archival evidence on colonial expenditures for architectural and educational expenditures in the creation of *Cambodge*. Edwards argues that these fused nation and religion through the figure of the monk as a symbol of nationalism and modernity.

Significantly, from 1848 until his death in 1860, King Ang Duong implemented Buddhist infrastructure such as *wats* to bring order which later set the scene for notions of Khmer modernity (Hansen 2007:50). In *How to Behave: Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930*, historian Anne Hansen (2007) argues that notions of Cambodian modernity constructed in that time frame consisted of intersections between Khmer Buddhism, Mongkut's Dhammayut reform teachings and colonial French political initiatives. In other words, Hansen argues that notions of modernity were a regional movement throughout Southeast Asia. [2] Hansen explains this sense of modernity and Buddhism succinctly, "The French wanted (for themselves and their Khmer colleagues) to be modern in their understanding of Buddhism; the Khmer wanted to be Buddhist in a modern world" (131). I expand on the work of Hansen, who argues that for Cambodians,

Buddhism was a modality for becoming modern. Cambodians borrowed ideas of rationalization of Buddhism through print and translation of texts from Pali to Khmer language to mediate Buddhism as a form of reflexivity.

Buddhist infrastructure continued to be constructed as a framework for state building. In 1926, Suzanne Karpeles set up the *Kambuja Suriya* as a Buddhist magazine, and in 1930 founded the Buddhist Institute. [3] Efforts were perhaps guided by images of antiquity which thus privileged religion and folk lore and tales that were produced, funded, and became products of the colonial era (Edwards 2007:194). Non-Buddhist stories eventually serialized such as Kim Hak's *Dik Danle Sap* (The Water of Tonle Sap) with sections for fiction. In fact, the author of the first novel specifically wrote the novel in part "to counter the words of foreigners who have little knowledge of the Khmer language that the Cambodians have not got any pleasant books to read" (Amatrisha 1998:80-100). During this period, Sihanouk also attended lectures given by the committee in charge of preserving the Cambodian folktale called the *Commission des Moeurs et Coutumes Cambodgiens* (CMCC) (Chandler 1998:198). Sihanouk implemented vernacular nationalism through public education, increased mass communication and increased physical infrastructure to create a stronger national image likely based on these models.

Discourses of nationalism, anti-modernity of Khmer orthography, political independence, and recent trauma, historically position Khmer orthography which employs poetic language littered with Buddhist vocabulary and moral undertones (Amatrisha 1998). Despite these discourses, linguistically, Buddhist words became a

significant part of decolonization. [4] In this period, Sihanouk adopted more than 3,000 Pali and Sanskrit words to replace French loan words (Jacob 1986). This linguistic policy recognized the practice of the institution of Khmer literary language as a form of power. Bourdieu ([1977]1991b) elaborates on the notion of linguistic power, "What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and of those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief" (170). Specifically, Pali and Sanskrit-derived words related to morality such as *kam* (bad karma) and *tanhaa* (suffering) were used. Speakers of Khmer at the temple embed knowledge of different registers of the language, constructed and negotiated in everyday life. In 1959, Sihanouk made Khmer the official language with a national plan in July 1967 to make education in all public education in Khmer including the universities by 1974 (Amratisha 1998:191-192).

The institution of Buddhism played a significant role in the construction of the modern nation-state in Cambodia (Harris 2006). Those who made offerings to the spirits such as musicians have largely been patronized by the ruling party as classical dancers and musicians linked to power in this way (Shapiro-Phim 2002). Monks played a role in nation-state construction due to their proximity to political power but also to their relations to the public. In 1955, King Norodom Sihanouk visited Jawaharlal Nehru in India, and expanded Buddhist infrastructure transnationally through the construction of Cambodian temples in India, which remain significant destinations of transnational Cambodian pilgrimage and tourism today (Marston 2020). [5]

These constructions of Cambodian modernity and religion were decades underway when Sihanouk attended the Bandung Conference. On April 18, 1955, a wavy-haired Prince Sihanouk attended as a delegate for Cambodia at the Bandung Conference. President Sukarno opened the Bandung Conference with a landmark speech. The impassioned Indonesian president harnessed hopes of decolonization movements around the Global South. Sukarno spoke truth to power about sovereignty and dignity, with religion as a site of decolonization and self-determination:

> Small and great nations are represented here, with people professing almost every religion under the sun, - Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroasthrianism, Shintoism, and others. Almost every political faith we encounter here- Democracy, Monarchism, Theocracy, with innumerable variants. And practically every economic doctrine has its representative in this hall- Marhaenism, Socialism, Capitalism, Communism, in all their manifold variations and combinations (1955).

Sukarno paralleled the similarities between political and religious ideologies through the term "political faith." The spirit of solidarity of the conference reassured the prince of maintaining Cambodia's neutrality (Sihanouk 1958; Pradhan 1979). Hardly could he imagine that the secret American war in Cambodia and subsequent genocide would create harrowing conditions of unthinkable suffering for millions of his fellow Cambodians.

From 1970-1975, the US government supported a coup led by General Lon Nol which ousted Prince Sihanouk. Approximately 500,000 Cambodian civilians died in the 1970-1975 war (Chandler 1991:215). 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 at war (Shawcross [1979] 2002). The bombings were along the eastern portion of the country in

search of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Rural refugees joined the then fringe group the Khmer Rouge. Sociologist Jeremy Hein (2010) writes, “The bombing creating more than 1 million refugees in a population of 7 million, and the United States provided only the most limited aid to these refugees under the pretext of not intervening in Cambodian affairs” (23). With 1 million refugees fleeing to the capital following the U.S. bombings, many rural Base People became classified as New People. Yet, because of the displacements during the bombings with refugees pouring into Phnom Penh from the countryside, many were reclassified as New People. From 1975-1979, an estimated 1.7 million perished in the Khmer Rouge genocide.

On April 17, 1975, with celebrations for the Theravada Buddhist New Year in full plenitude, the newly established Democratic Kampuchea entered the capital city Phnom Penh and emptied it. One of the first institutions the Khmer Rouge destroyed in Cambodian society was Buddhism. Within days of taking power, they defrocked monks and destroyed Buddhist temples. Even the centuries-old Buddhist statues and relics in and around Angkor Wat were destroyed. Out of 65,000, an estimated 12-100 monks survived the Khmer Rouge genocides. These numbers however are under debate as most men in Cambodia ordained as monks prior to marriage, thus any portion of the male population could have been classified as a monk (Harris 2013:135-136).

In the early 1980s, as refugees returned to Cambodia from camps in Thailand, they took with them forms of Buddhism that engaged directly with social movements (cf. Skidmore 1996; Poethig 2002). In 1993, the role of temples in Cambodia immediately following the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) elections

were ways for Cambodians to negotiate ideologies such as liberal democracy and communism (Gayallay-Pap 2007:76). Given these rapid shifts in post-conflict Cambodia, these various strands of Buddhism have been added to the diverse practices of Cambodian Buddhism but have not displaced the centrality of the Theravada tradition, which, in the Cambodian imagination are enduring, yet in reality they have shifted. Thus, what is normally deemed the Elder School, or what is regarded as the more conservative version of Buddhism, is really a mass of shifting, diverse discourses on Cambodian modernity, as articulated through practices in music, Khmer orthography, and Buddhism. [6] The opening vignette illustrated how these Buddhist teachings by the monk are woven into daily life in Italy. Buddhism is a modern mode of making moral selves. The experiences of Cambodian Buddhists in Italy are significant to discussions of diaspora and transnational migration.

In the remainder of the Introduction, to address discussions of the field in anthropology, I recount how I came to this research project. Being a Cambodian American woman working in Italy brought up specific questions about reflexivity, race and repatriation in the field. I also researched and wrote the entirety of this project during a global pandemic. My methods for the project necessitated accounting for the digital worlds I engaged in during quarantine in Italy and the US. I follow with an overview that summarizes the chapters. Finally, I end the Introduction with how this project contributes to discussions on the anthropological literature on transnational migration and Southeast Asian Studies.

Secular and Buddhist: Reflexivity and Background

This entire dissertation was researched and written during the 2019-2021 global pandemic. [7] Michael Burawoy (2000) advocates for grounded studies to better understand the processes of globalization by examining the standpoint of the researcher. My current project about Cambodian Buddhism in Italy grew out of my family background, my interests in literature, language and diaspora, and my travels these past 20 years across three continents, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In 1981, my family arrived in Oakland, California, sponsored by a childhood friend of my father's. Like the millions of Southeast Asian refugees that fled an imperialist war, my parents arrived with nothing but a bag of cloth diapers for their three young children. In 2010, while I was in my third year as an English teacher in Fukushima, Japan, I visited Cambodia for the first time. [8] My mother's entire family had perished during the genocide, including her four brothers were killed during the regime. That year, she heard that one had survived. Given the relative proximity of Japan to Cambodia, she asked me to go to Cambodia to take pictures and verify it was him. [9]

As an undergraduate student of linguistics and literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz, I became interested in migration in Italy when I went abroad for the first time in summer 2000. [10] The Institute of Italian Culture in San Francisco awarded me a two-month grant for language study at the University for Foreigners in Sienna. [11] I was the only American in a class of international colleagues. Since I did not fit popular notions of the U.S., it was difficult for my classmates to imagine the diversity of California. Bangladeshi vendors and Filipina housemaids asked me where I was from.

That summer, I began to think more deeply about global diasporas. After my study abroad, I enrolled in courses in Italian literature and completed my B.A. degree. Following my studies in Italy, I embraced a newfound confidence for traveling, and moved east—far East—to the Land of the Rising Sun.

In July 2007, I worked in rural Fukushima prefecture, Japan, as a participant in the government-sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program. [12] I taught English in high schools and special education schools. I stood out as the only foreigner at my workplace in rural Japan. [13] In my fourth year, on Friday, March 11, 2011, I evacuated after a 9.0 tsunami and nuclear meltdown struck. I returned home with a renewed sense of purpose after witnessing so many lives uprooted. Upon returning to the U.S., I created and delivered lessons at a senior recreation center as a volunteer bilingual teacher. Following a grant from the Center for Khmer Studies (CKS) that enabled study in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2013, I became interested in the role of religion for transnational communities in this post-genocide period.

Growing up in California, my family went to the temple only once a year during Khmer New Year in April. For this reason, I consider myself secular. [14] Ironically, the lack of my family's involvement at the temple got me interested in the lay politics of Buddhism. My family seldom went to the temple and this remains the case. Yet, like most Khmer, they are decidedly Buddhist. My father is selectively weary of certain temples and at others, he is good friends with the monks and ritual lay specialists. From 2011-2013, the senior citizens in Long Beach I volunteered to teach English revealed similar preoccupations. Through these interactions, I gained a better understanding of the

stake that community members each had in making sure the temples followed what they considered to be Buddhist ethics. [15]

Caretaking runs throughout my dissertation. My mother is pivotal in my research. My mother supports all religions, saying a positive disposition toward everyday life is faith. She assiduously washes dishes at temples. She makes sure her grandchildren have jade Buddhas affixed to their gold chains for protection. Alternatively, my father follows the rationalist strand of Cambodian Buddhism that eschews rituals such as protective tattoos, amulets, and tying red strings around the wrist. In all of my projects, he clarifies Khmer terms for me using a dictionary app on his phone. The Khmer script of Buddhist terms are difficult even for Cambodians as the orthography mirrors the decolonial struggles to preserve markers of Pali and Sanskrit in the language.

Embodied Methodologies: Racialized and Gendered Productions of the Field

From September 2019 to March 2020, I conducted dissertation field work in Lombardy, Italy. With my son in a stroller, I walked to the temple daily, cutting through the fields, a 45-minute walk. On weekends, one of the older Cambodian women would give me a ride for the ritual food offerings. On weekday afternoons, the Venerable Sokhom Hem sat within the tatami style room with the large statue of the Buddha. I would sit at the kitchen table jotting notes, sometimes leaving without speaking to him, if I saw he was on the phone giving advice. I recorded field notes in two forms: jottings in a 5x7 spiral notebook and voice recordings with my iPhone. I typed up my reflections when I got home. [16] Sometimes with the monk, I put my iPhone on the floor near the

raised platform where he sat to get a better sense of his teachings. I am limited in Khmer vocabulary, particularly those related to Buddhism, which tend to derive from Pali.

I audiotaped seven formal life history interviews with five women, one with the monk, and one with an Italian-born daughter of Cambodian refugees. [17] Except for the monk, who is not a refugee, all the women were mothers made secondary migrations to the region of Lombardy for work following fifteen years in the central and southern parts of Italy. I used a digital audiotaped device and my iPhone. I conducted the interviews in Khmer with the women and monk, and Italian with the woman born and raised in Italy. I jotted notes during the interviews and translated them when I returned the US. I transcribed the interview in Italian. I selectively transcribed portions in Khmer. [18]

Following in the footsteps of Bronsilaw Malinowski ([1922] 1984), I established long-term ethnographic fieldwork methods that emphasized linguistic competency. Martha MacIntyre (1993) revisited Malinowski with an analysis of gendered language. In Khmer, gender and status denote knowledge of the local community. The classic "Notes and Queries" (1874) stressed "native terms" for advice on how to write anthropological narratives. In a seminal essay by Maxwell Owusu (1978), he revisits the concept of "native terms" by critiquing structural-functionalist anthropology, and subsequently making a clarion-call for more attention to Nuer resistances to colonization by Arab, English and Egyptian states rather than a static kin state. This is useful for my work on Cambodian diasporas as my descriptions and diction, necessarily involve relations power embedded in representation. I try to use the appropriate Italian or the Khmer term, depending on the situation, but English is my dominant language, so living and working

in different registers of Khmer (religious, formal, rural) and Italian (formal the debates at the book club, informal for the everyday, and I do not understand dialect) was isolating at times. [19] In this dissertation, for Khmer, I use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).[20] With Cambodians who were born in raised in Italy, I codeswitched with difficulty between Khmer and Italian as the languages seemed to mediate my worlds during fieldwork (Cohn 1987).

Understandably, formal interviews may incite concerns over minoritized bodies that the governments would potentially like to monitor (Price 2011). After word got out about my seven audiotaped interviews, someone asked me if I was a journalist. Ultimately, I reckoned with the fact that being the daughter of Cambodian refugees molded my methods. To be sure, I am always clear about conducting research. In the US, my presence is framed within social work discourses, a role that facilitates recorded interviews. [21] In Lombardy, Italy, I relied primarily on participant observation because I came to realize that interviewing people older than me and audiotaping them further distanced me from both Cambodians and Italians. My presence as an American and Cambodian informed by decisions to limit formal audiotaped interviews in Italy. [22] Thus, early on, as a method, I decided to consciously acknowledge my body and feelings during the daily interactions in participant observation, and detail them through fieldnotes nightly at home.

I collected over 200 pages of electronic fieldnotes. [23] These fieldnotes became materialized portraits of my former selves, a reminder of the Buddhist transience of life. Lisa Gitelman (2014) regards the materiality of these forms of knowledge as "epistemic

objects" (1). In particular, Gitelman uses the examples the technology of the Xerox which enabled replication, thereby exposing the Pentagon Papers as scandalous. Thus the technology of the Xerox documents rendered public the workings of state policies (86). In another example, Gitelman, argues that the Portable Document File, better known as the PDF, changes the meaning of document as it becomes a digitized and portable document (124). My fieldnotes are epistemic objects with a window to past selves. Anthropologists have argued that identity is fluid and malleable. Seeing the materiality of what is written on screen there is a sense of attachment to those words, even if they were typed quickly on quiet and cold evenings in Lombardy. It is like mourning that self that was alive in that moment, to realize that one is never the same. [24] I compiled and interpreted, wrote with these epistemic objects that allowed me to negotiate previous encounters with the people I had met, working and reworking the creative thoughts, in a process that elicited different emotions. [25]

According to James Clifford (1997), the field is produced through embodied practices and interactions with relations of power. I draw on Clifford and a genealogy of anthropological feminist scholarship in which research design explicitly incorporates the idea that the researcher produces the field site. [26] The anthropologist Kirin Narayan (1993) thoroughly pinpointed the designation "native anthropologist" as Eurocentric. For those who have spent any considerable amount of time in various languages and places, and misplaced, there is strong personal desire at nonidentification, perhaps out of a necessity to emplace oneself in the moment. Anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) merges personal forms of displacement in her accounts of her grandparent's migration from Cuba

with her role as an anthropologist and its "professional rituals of displacement" (21). [27] For me, doing fieldwork in Lombardy was a gendered racialization of the body.

I situate this discussion on the field as embodied within Gusterson's (1997) analysis of studying up, Laura Nader's (1972) discussion of "up the anthropologist" and repatriating anthropology by tracing this as a feminist method to the 1930s with the work of Zora Neales Hurston (1935), who had already long repatriated anthropology, and in doing so, revealed the gendered and classed differences in collecting African American folk stories of resistance. Additionally, Hortense Powdermaker (1966) described bounded imaginations of the anthropological field site. She is forthright and revealing about concealing her Jewish identity when conducting research in Indianapolis, as well as her decision to study Hollywood. These works illustrate positionality as ways to interrogate the racialized and gendered boxes women researchers encounter in the field.

Digital and Physical Mobilities as an Asian American in Europe

The work of George Marcus (1995) on multi-stied field work became even more evident as Lombardy became the global center of the pandemic. The use of social media became acutely interconnected with the day-to-day lives of those I met in the field. [28] Marcus argues that the digital cannot be secluded to the conceptualization of media as a mere accretion of information. Marcus elaborates, "Studies of the phenomenology of the ethnographically situated awareness among subjects of doubled or multiply constructed selfhood in contexts of new forms of electronic communication" (111). I was in the field in Lombardy during stay-at home decrees and my field site was necessarily inclusive of diasporic digital realms. With Internet from my iPhone hotspot, these technologies were

increasingly deployed from my cell phone (Madianou and Miller 2013:172). I relied on online communities for information about daily life. [29] Significantly, I realized that being an Asian woman during the pandemic began to limit my physical mobility.

Being a woman of color is central to my methods as a researcher in Italy. Lawyer and feminist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) has made clear the significance of intersectionality in analyses of the self in relation to larger structures. [30] Growing up in the US, racialization has always been a visceral experience for me in daily life. In Lombardy, I experienced moments of discomfort walking through the plaza in my small town, when the table was set up with the flags of the Northern League, with 5 or 6 older men, manning the table, pamphlets neatly piled on top. I knew my presence was an antithesis to the values promoted by the event, though minor as it may have seemed to locals, for me, my presence of rather almost a reaffirmation for exclusionary parties like theirs. In these moments of ethnonationalist campaigns, as a woman of color, Otherness on the bodies of women created immoral objects of laziness and prostitution (cf. Bock 1993:164). [31]

> It is 9:58 am, the time goes by so fast. I am putting my stuff together, making sure I have enough bags for my 1) clothes (red backpack and grey duffle bag), 2) my spices and food (Carrefour bag), 3) my toiletries and open soaps plus make-up (orange bag), 4) my shoes (white jewelry bag with each pair of shoes wrapped in a plastic grocery bag), my laptop and research materials will go into my laptop bag along with my small black purse stuffed inside. [Fieldnotes, March 3, 2020]

The above excerpt is a list of the materials I would give away, as I meted out six months things to donate and store. On March 2, 2020, while in my sixth month conducting ethnographic field work in Lombardy, I received a phone call from the Italian Fulbright Commission, with instructions to vacate the region before the following

afternoon, due to the concentration of COVID-19 infections in the region. I left uneaten food with neighbors and donated my clothes and books to the local Caritas organization. The following day, I took the train to Rome, and awaited further news. While walking the nearly empty streets to get groceries, I sensed fears of my Asian-bodied self. In stark contrast to my arrival in Rome for orientation six months earlier in September 2019, people feared me. The Fulbright Italy program was suspended, and after many cancelled flights, I caught a late flight to Charles de Gaulle, and arrived in Los Angeles on March 17th. This highlights the intricacies of my experience as a Cambodian American woman in academia. [32]

I am trained in anthropology, Asian American studies, Italian Studies, linguistics, and Southeast Asian studies. To address the undertheorized Asian refugee in Italy, I employ an analysis of the Asian body which includes comparative perspectives through interdisciplinary scholarship. I am not a scholar of religion thus the Buddhist terms I use are basic. [33] My goal is to describe the practices of one Buddhist temple in a transnational network of many. This dissertation contributes to the anthropological literature on religion and transnational migration by ethnographically examining how Cambodian refugees in Italy deploy Buddhist, modern, and local cultures and their specific histories to shape their desires to simultaneously belong and maintain difference through the Buddhist temple, a religious opportunity structure that engages local Italian politics, war memories, and transnational Buddhist networks.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One contextualizes how Cambodians make themselves modern and Buddhists in the contemporary politics of Lombardy, Italy. Building on the anthropological work on Lombardy by Silvia Yanagisako and Andrea Muelebach, it details the specifics conditions for the formation of the Cambodian diaspora in Lombardy. The chapter also details local perceptions of the temple and how they are framed through Catholic discourses. It argues that understanding the experiences of Cambodian refugees in Lombardy could move conversations in Italy beyond the North and South oppositional binaries that frame bodies of color as unassimilable and abject. The temple is a place where Cambodians and Italians produce racial meanings and negotiate difference daily beyond the national categories of difference. The chapter lays the groundwork for explaining how themes investigated in the subsequent chapters (Chapter Two--transnational monies, Chapter Three--spirits and objects, and Chapter Four--daily embodied performances of gender) inform the ways in which Cambodians in diaspora practice Buddhism. In this chapter, the focus on racialized differences reflects the fact that the Buddhist temple is not merely a religious space separated from daily life.

Chapter Two expands on the Nina Glick-Schiller's 1992 work on "lived simultaneity." Here, the notion of simultaneously negotiating Italian and Cambodian selves produces generational differences of what it means to be a Cambodian Buddhist in Italy. Anthropologists have begun to examine transnational migration through diasporas. This approach acknowledges much of the groundwork laid out by geographers through the concept of scalar perspectives (cf. Charles 1992). [34] Following the work of Glick-

Schiller, the chapter ethnographically details and analyzes the processes of local and transnational negotiation of the funding decisions of the temple's lay governing organization: the Buddhist Council. The chapter argues that Buddhist notions of merit and caretaking of the monk are central to funding decisions locally and transnationally.

Chapter Three closely follows two community events at the temple: the autumn *Pchum Ben* (Autumn Feast of the Spirits) and a funeral commemoration event seven days after the death. While no one entity was responsible for the Cambodian genocide, premeditated and state-sponsored mass atrocities are reminders of the limits of modernity (Williams 2004:243). For some, the genocide left disengagement with Buddhism with survivors stating that karma does not ease pain (Wagner 2002:62). On the other hand, on *tgnai sel* (holy days), some Cambodians venerate statues associated with the monarchy of the past (Chan 2004). This chapter engages the work of art historian Boreth Ly, in that the temple is an object of art that produces Khmerness. Since temple attendance is not just community politics, but centered on Buddhist notions of a better rebirth through placemaking with the spirits, it is necessary to include Bruno Latour's work on the human and the nonhuman. The making of Buddhist space at the temple necessitates the ritual of intermittent communal acknowledgment of objects and spirits. The chapter ends with Michel De Certeau's work on haunted spaces to explore how the temple is a communal space for the everyday lived experiences with spirits. It argues that for many Cambodians globally, any form of national commemoration must include Buddhist rituals of cremation that lay to rest the dead.

Chapter Four uses one audiotaped interview and participant observation to understand how Cambodian Buddhist women reconcile dharma and karma. This chapter focuses on a Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia as a form of distributed agency. Through daily socialization as they speak, talk, and play cards together, they mediate Buddhist ideals through ideals of being Khmer and Italian through language, processes that counter forms of racialization they may face in daily life. It ends with ways in which codeswitching may be ways in which Cambodian Buddhist women engage with state sanctioned forms of violence such as the American period (1970-1975), the Khmer Rouge period (1975-1979), and forms of everyday violence as racialized subjects in second asylum countries such as Italy.

Contributions

The dispersal of these refugee Buddhist temples globally is an impetus for rethinking the role of religion in Europe. With reformulations of Weberian views of religion, scholars in religious studies have theorized that religion did not disappear from the public sphere with the advent of modernity (cf. Casanova 1994; Berger 1999; Cavanaugh 2009). Berger (1999) revisited secularization theories which presumed that religion would wane with modernity. Jose Casanova theorized that religion became privatized before reentering the public sphere. Casanova noted that religions interrogated norms of state and economic systems. Cavanaugh (2009) revisited the binary secular and religious notions of violence. He argues that religion was constructed as an irrational culprit to privilege modern state as rational. Though the dissertation is couched in these discussions of modernity in Europe within religious studies, it takes an anthropological

approach to the study of modernity and religion through Cambodian Buddhist practices in Italy.

In Cambodia, modernity inextricably interfaced with religion. Scholarship has largely focused on the methods of state violence during the Khmer Rouge genocide with few studies addressing the relation between religion and state power. In particular, this dissertation will specify state power through populist practices in Lombardy. These forms of Buddhist infrastructure historically enabled the formal and communal practice of Khmer notions of merit as both Cambodian, Buddhist and modern, what Khatharya Um (2015) calls *bon-barb*, defined as: "In the Buddhist *Weltanschauung*, the concept of bon-barb, karmic merits and demerits accumulated through one's actions, informs how most Khmers assess, understand, and rationalize their social positions" (97). From the time that Cambodia fell to the Khmer Rouge, Cambodian refugees and those in exile sought to sponsor monks in order to rebuild temples and a sense of community. Even though some Cambodians have converted to Christianity, [35] Theravada Buddhist temples are places where Cambodian culture and community building thrive. This dissertation traces the works of Cambodian Buddhists in Italy in continued practices of reflexivity and moral selfhoods.

This dissertation contributes to Southeast Asian studies in Europe. The Southeast Asian refugee is already absent in contemporary discourses of migration in Italy. Historically, the implementation of Southeast Asian Studies programs have been in places that have former colonial relations. [36] In Italy, the two major universities with Oriental studies are University of Venice Ca' Foscari and University of Naples with

diverse regions covered in the curriculum. [37] Films such as the Killing Fields, a UK made film, have Italian equivalents such as *Urla del Silenzio* (Joffé 1984). This dissertation contributes to the small but growing need for Asian Studies and migration studies of a long-resettled population of Southeast Asians. The Cambodian refugee is marginal to Southeast Asian American studies.

Endnotes

[1] I use the terms Khmer and Cambodian interchangeably to refer to people living in the Cambodian nation-state which encompasses 38 ethnolinguistic groups 95% of whom identify as Khmer the dominant ethnolinguistic group (Schliesinger 2011:97).

[2] Feminists such as Mohanty (2003) have made clarion calls for culturally specific forms of feminism. Notions of modernity are of course gendered and religious. Ong and Peletz (1995), for example, argue for a closer examination of gender through religion in Southeast Asia. Ong (2006) examines discourses of Catholicism and NGOs for Filipina housemaids in Hong Kong. Several scholars have ethnographically detailed gender, modernity, and Islam in Southeast Asia (cf. Lindquist 2004; Smith-Hefner 2007), but less scholarship exists on Buddhist women and modernity in Southeast Asia as part of a regional movement.

[3] Suzanne Karpeles was a French colonial administrator and well-respected by Cambodian Buddhist monks. When the French Vichy government came to power, Karpeles was sent back to France because of her Jewish background. According to Edwards (2007:188) her efforts shaped Cambodian Buddhism particularly in constructing Buddhism as a central institution for sovereignty and identity for the Kampuchea Krom. For more on the Kampuchea Krom in contemporary Vietnam see Taylor (2014), and Kampuchea Krom in the US (Thach 2003).

[4] See, for example, Schieffelin and Doucet (1998) for decolonization and orthography in Haiti and Eiselohr (2013) for digitization and language revitalization. See Wright (2010) and Needham (2003) for Khmer language maintenance efforts in the US, and Yamada (2009) for the revitalization of Khmer language short stories.

[5] Marston (2020) uses YouTube videos in addition to participant observation at temples to detail the pilgrimages to Cambodian Buddhist temples in India and Sri Lanka. Marston traces this Buddhist infrastructure to King Sihanouk. Of course, India is the birthplace of Buddhism and it would make sense to build Cambodian religious infrastructure there, but I would also add that because this diplomatic work was done during the period of decolonization, in formalizing these connections to India, Sihanouk was likely informed by the specific historical moment, that is, by colonial discourses on race, and Cambodia in the so-called Indic sphere as coined by Orientalists. In Southeast Asia, modern nationality and race have historically been intertwined in a hierarchy of identities. For example, the use of the construction of race as a form of economic policy implementation by colonial powers in Southeast Asia is perhaps most evident in British Malaya. In response, some nationalists utilized social theory to deconstruct race. The Literary Generation of 1950 discussed Malay nationalism through literature “to awaken the Malay reader to social injustices such as poverty, corruption in politics, and the backwardness of the Malays in comparison with the perceived prosperity of other races in the country”

(Lim and Koon 2009: 196). The import of Chinese and Indian workers to British Malaya perhaps made the concept of race and class more salient in the social consciousness in the construction of modern Malaysia. The race classes and proportions are also more distinct in Malaysia, include quotas (SarDesai 2010: 284), and can be recognized as an artifact of British colonialism. Independence from colonial rule for Cambodia was relatively quiet and equally unnoted, comparable to Laos and British Malaya (SarDesai 2010: 178), and all three experienced their own forms of resistance and struggle. The situations between Malaysia and Cambodia are quite different, as Cambodia is comprised of mostly dominant Khmer ethnic and linguistic majority, but patterns of class, race and its Orientalist origins, and Cambodia's role in the Indochinese hierarchy could aid in the mapping of Cambodian nationalism and religion.

[6] For more on revitalization of Cambodian music and constructions of modernity, see for example, Chambers-Letson (2011), Chan 2014, Chorn-Pond and Ungar (2012), Dariotis and Lee (2011), Giuriati (2005), Grant (2015), Hamera (2002), Kallio and Westerlund (2015), LaFreniere (2000), Lee (2014), Mamula (2008), Marston (2002), Muan and Ly (2001), Narom (2005), Pecore (2004), Saphan (2012), Sam and Shehan (1991).

[7] In writing the reflexivity section, I am inspired by Richard Handler's (2014) work on autoethnography in anthropology. He writes, "Drawing on memory, personal documents, the telling ethnographic incident, and relevant social theory, each brings to light some of the ways that current neoliberal socioeconomic policies constrict people's life chances" (585). With a sense of added isolation during the writing process, I also benefitted from anthropological works on class and academia that Handler recommends. Shamus Rahman Khan (2011) returns to his elite preparatory school to examine privilege. As a first-generation student and anthropologist Christine Walley (2013) recounts her father's job loss led to her interest in cultural anthropology. Of course, like so many other graduate students, throughout the 2020-2021 global pandemic, in trying to write the dissertation, I worked for tuition remission, health insurance, and a stipend to stay afloat and take care of my family. I taught three courses in the summer. On a laptop on loan from my university tech center, I wrote in my parents' one-bedroom apartment. Unable to secure funding for dissertation writing, I wrote when I could, and ate and slept little, to wrap it all up. I hope that nonetheless, this project will eventually contribute to an increased compassionate awareness of Buddhism in the symbolic heart of Catholicism.

[8] In Cambodia, to quote a woman in a documentary on Cambodian Americans, I was an "American learning about Cambodia." http://www.der.org/films/seasons-of-migration.html. See also Socheata Poeuv's *New Year Baby* (2007), an award-winning documentary about a Cambodian American woman from Texas who investigates family history in Cambodia. Other films include Greg Cahill's *Two Shadows* (2012) about a Cambodian American from Long Beach who goes to meet her sister. The Cambodia Town Film Festival has featured many others which I have not seen yet, but there is a growing number of productions in diaspora that produce images that differ from films such as *The Killing Fields* (1984) and *City of Ghosts* (2002), though as far as I know,

they are recognized as part of Cambodian American film. Matt Dillon was invited to the Cambodian Town Film Festival in 2014 for a Q&A. https://www.ocweekly.com/matt-dillon-crocodile-man-and-cambodian-cinema-at-cambodia-town-film-fest-this-saturday-6475461/ For an analysis of The *Killing Fields* and imperialism, see *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* by Cathy Sclund Vials (2012).

[9] I found many ironies: in Phnom Penh, many of the shanty towns were occupied by countryside villagers; the streets are had trash, yet there are expensive-looking Cambodian flags and patriotic beer commercials everywhere; a whole fish was $4 USD, but my schoolteacher aunt's middle-class monthly wage was $50; the absolute beauty of the ancient temples in Siem Riep stand contrast to Cambodia's modern tumultuous history; and above all, it's amazing how everyday Cambodians still seem to be able to survive among the dizzying changes. I discovered that my dad is ethnic Chinese. I was unsure how to address my aunt and cousins as they used Teochew kin terms. I visited beautiful and ornate Buddhist temples with my paternal cousins throughout Phnom Penh. I took a week-long trip alone to Siem Riep to see the celestial Angkor Wat. I became interested in the role of Buddhism for everyday Cambodians.

[10] Road to Italy: I am the first in my family to go to college and struggled academically as an undergraduate. I was about to take a leave from school since I was on academic probation. I only picked a major in languages because three faculty members and a teaching assistant from that department separately reached out to me with a plan to finish up with the major. I retook all the courses I had failed. At the time, students in the major were required to pick two languages. Out of practicality, I selected Spanish because I had studied it in high school. I picked Italian because it seemed like the language that most resembled Spanish. Seeing I was ineligible for funding for study abroad due to my grades, my Italian language teacher suggested I apply for external funding through the Italian Cultural Institute in San Francisco. I had no interest in study abroad, but she said that it would make the upper division courses in Italian literature more manageable (she was right; upon repatriation I actually enjoyed reading Dante, Boccaccio, Montale, Maraini, and other works in original language while writing, speaking and debating in Italian. I took extra courses on Italian film and began to listen to music in dialect, and regularly attended special events at the Italian Cultural Institute as well as Italian festivals at UC Berkeley as an undergraduate). I took my US citizenship test and got a passport. I just wanted to graduate and never return to school, and Italy surprisingly became that route. Angela Duckworth (2016) famously coined the term "grit." As a first-generation college student, as well as an ESL student in elementary school with no teachers or aides who spoke Khmer, on the one hand, I am proud of my unique skill set. On the other hand, there were added internal blocks during the writing process of the dissertation. Gradually, I came to realize that the dissertation write-up process evokes duress in all graduate students, at some point. Luckily, Peg Boyle Single's *Demystifying Dissertation Writing: A Streamlined Process from Choice of Topic to Final Text* (2009) validated my fears, "You may experience blocking if you are pursuing a dissertation topic that exposes weaknesses or airs the dirty laundry of a group with which you affiliate. I have heard this

concern from minority graduate students and graduate students who were raised in low-income settings" (149). During the writing process, I took advantage of any free online books I could access through VPN. I benefitted immensely from my Los Angeles public library card that enabled me to check out e-books, lit by my Kindle to read at night before bed. I read various books on writing. Looking back, in 2020, reading books that had nothing to do with my dissertation sustained me in the wake of racialized violence of George Floyd and the Atlanta murders. My narrative writing-style of the dissertation is likely informed by these fictive worlds. Under normal circumstances I would have probably spoken day to day with classmates in the teaching assistant office about parts of my work, but in quarantine, I created a network of mentors through these books. I was Zoomed out and did not want to maintain social ties through the computer and rather preferred to read at my own pace. I selected books based on my mood, what I felt like reading at a whim. The books included parenting, pandemic science fiction and Asian American novels, include them here as part of this reflexivity section by theme. Parenting: Duckworth (2016), Faber (2012), Faber and King (2017), Druckerman (2012), Wong (2019); Writing: Becker (2012), Clark (2020), Elbow (1998), Lamott (1995), Strunk and White ([1920] 1999); Time-Management/Professionalization: Kelsky (2015), Acuff (2017), Berg and Seeber (2016), Burka and Yuen ([1983] 2008), Newport (2016; 2019; 2021); Mothers as Protagonists Fiction: Ng (2017), Moriarty (2012; 2014; 2016; 2017; 2018); Pandemic, Apocalypse or General Science-Fiction: Ma (2018), Atwood (1985; 2004; 2019), King (1977; 1978; 1979; 1986; 1987; 1998; 2010; 2013; 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2018); Critical Race Studies/Asian American: Borshay Liem (2000), Cho (2002), Davis (2016), DiAngelo (2018), Hong (2021), Lahiri (2004), Lee (2019), Wong (2011), Yamashita (2010), Yoo (2021), Yu (2020).

[11] https://sfiis.org/ The Italian Cultural Institute (*Istitituto Italiano di Cultura* ICC) is the cultural arm of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with centers around the globe, including San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington DC. Scholars of Italian language and politics such as Tatiana Zonova (2013:227-228) argue that because Italian language is produced as romantic form of *dolce potere* (soft power), it elides the fact that Italian was an official language of Libya, Somalia, and Ethiopia during the colonial campaigns of Mussolini in the 1930s. See also DeDonno (2006) for a discussion on the construction of race during Mussolini. The University for Foreigners in Sienna trains Italian language teachers from around the world and offer certificates of fluency. Though it was a beginner's course, the summer program I attended was rigorous, with Italian language teachers from Switzerland, Germany, Korea, Japan, Poland, and Jordan, among other places in my class. Ironically, I benefitted from a program started during the Mussolini era, and my classmates were probably confounded by the fact that I was selected as a representative of the US.

[12] The anthropologist David L. McConnell (2000) describes the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) as the largest exchange program in history. In *Importing Diversity: Inside Japan's JET Program*, McConnell ethnographically details how school districts implement the mandated program locally. As a top-down process from Tokyo,

McConnell argues that despite the tensions between the local and the national, the program has been a success. One of the difficulties with the program is the lack of Japanese language skills of the participants. For example, I arrived with rudimentary Japanese skills so I was placed in high schools. I was able to learn enough Japanese to pass an exam in my third year there, level 3 of the Japanese Language Placement Test, a step away from level 2, which is the ability to read newspapers, but it was still very difficult. Working in Japan for four years sparked an interest in Asian American studies, and I returned to the US to attend a Master's program. Prior to living in Fukushima, I had never been under the purview of the police ever, neither in the US or Italy, but in Japan, I was stopped by the police in Fukushima because my bike had the name of my school on it and was asked where I had gotten the bike. In Tokyo, I was stopped and had my passport checked. My apartment in Fukushima was near the *koban* or the local police office. Only looking back do I realize that on the way to work every morning, I would ride my bike behind the *koban*, so that I would not be stopped again. I was clearly racialized differently as a Southeast Asian American woman. See for example *Illicit Flirtations Labor, Migration, and Sex Trafficking in Tokyo* (2011) by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. The work of Iris Chang (1997) *The Rape of Nanking* delves into how women were constructed under imperial Japan. At the same time, I read widely about Japanese American histories (cf. Uyematsu 1969; Omatsu 2016). In short, my interest in diaspora and religion grew from lived experiences locally and globally; this deeply informs my interdisciplinary approach to anthropology.

[14] I use the term secular as part of my reflexivity because it informs the ways in which I represent Cambodian religious practices. I grew up in a Buddhist habitus so-to-speak so the practices are normal to me, but when writing about them, it is difficult for me to gauge whether the prose verges on exotifying Cambodian Buddhists to a larger audience. I use the term secular inspired by Malinowski's work on science and religion, as well as George Gmelch's (1971) claims on baseball magic that these rituals are often heightened in times of uncertainty, such as an impending pandemic, and right-wing politics for minoritized refugee Buddhists.

[15] In working with Cambodian seniors for over a decade, I notice that at the temple, they carry themselves differently. Unlike the existence of Asian Buddhists in mainstream society, they do not seem to ask for acceptance, but instead expect that society allow them to exist with dignity, on their own terms in these spaces. As racialized subjects these demands are risky. Unapologetic ornate statues and flags at temples proudly parade religion, ethnic status, and long history of Buddhism. In the context of US, as Asian Americans, these religious displays render them visible and vulnerable, as they overstep societal expectations of silence and second-class citizenship, ascribed to them through decades of US colonial and imperial wars in Asia. Korean American novelist Cathy Park Hong (2021) jokingly calls her latest book about being a self-hating Asian and sums up the sentiments of being Asian American and visible well: "Unless we are read as Muslim or trans, Asian Americans are fortunate not to live under hard surveillance, but we live under a softer panopticon, so subtle that it's internalized, in that we monitor ourselves,

which characterizes our conditional existence. Even if we've been here for four generations, our status here remains conditional; belonging is always promised and just out of reach so that we behave, whether it's the insatiable acquisition of material belongings or belonging as a peace of mind where we are absorbed into mainstream society. If the Asian American consciousness must be emancipated, we must free ourselves of our conditional existence" (289). For more on surveillance and the racialization of Muslims and South Asians see Maira (2016), Iyer (2017) in the US and Tarlo (2010) in the UK. As Hong reveals, there is a sense of guilt for speaking about being racialized subjects which Hong argues makes Asian Americans perfect neoliberal subjects. See Lee (2015) for a comprehensive of Asian American histories. Of course, political organization would have to address these hierarchies of conditionality (Smith 2016). In Lombardy, Cambodian Buddhists navigate a different set of politics (See Chapter Two).

[16] Feminist scholar of science Donna Haraway (1991) notes that we have always been fictive cyborgs, arguing that the notion of "we" is itself constructed differentially across space and time. The embroidered tan and muted pinkish roses and dark green stems as the tablecloth provided the foundation for my messiness, my broodings, my field note writing, a psychological foundation. In these moments in Lombardy, I envisioned myself as a cyborg in field site constitutive of platforms such as social media, my fieldnotes, online novels via apps that allow access to fiction and literature. I developed a nightly ritual to type fieldnotes in earnest when I returned to my apartment. This typing at dusk became a mainstay of in-depth participant observation. I organized my entries clustered by date, location, and time, single-spaced, in 11-point Calibri. When I got home, I methodically took out my notebook, laptop, from my bag, and arranged twenty or so thin colored markers and pens, to the right of my laptop on my dining table. I typed as it got dark, with the computer glow reflected on my reading glasses.

[17] Per HRRB regulations, participants provided explicit consent. Per EU GDRP protocols, all names are aliases. I also changed the names of the location of the towns where the participants live. For the privacy of the participants, I do not feature any images in the dissertation.

[18] Celia Roberts' (2007) discussion on the politics of transcription to render the voices of the participants in ways that represented them with depth, though this work is never really easy. For some, Khmer was the dominant language with Italian used regularly. For others, they chose to use a substantial amount of Italian.

[19] I am sometimes told I have an accent in English. Of course, everyone at some level has an accent (cf. Esling 1998; Preston 1998). However, my sense is perceptions of my having an accent while speaking English are undergirded by language ideologies about Asian bodies, what Rosa (2016) calls being languageless in the case of Latinx communities in the US (see Chapter Four for race and language and Khmer-Italian codeswitches). For example, in a study by Rubin (1992), the same voice by a white

woman was played for undergraduates. First, they were shown a picture of a white woman while listening to the voice. Then they were shown a picture of an Asian woman while listening to the same voice. Students said the second voice had an accent.

[20] http://sealang.net/khmer/dictionary.htm I use the transliteration provided on the website at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

[21] In 2012-13, as an archivist in Long Beach, California, I videotaped life oral histories with over 25 seniors at the Cambodian American History and Archive Project.

[22] Nonwhite anthropologists have experienced different ethnographic encounters where locals try to emplace them. Erica L. Williams (2021) who identifies as African American in the US, was racialized as white in Venezuela. In her fieldwork in the Andes, Chinese American Christine Lee (2021) found that though she was not perceived to be a *gringa*, structurally she still represented hegemonic institutions of the Global North. For me in Italy, I found that depending on the situation, being Asian American seemed to be constructed as around Cold War discourses of the Model Minority which justified American imperialism. Historically, Model Minority discourses in the US emerged during the Cold War which facilitated policies of family unification and privileged classes of migrants primarily from Asia with the 1965 Hart Cellar Act. Robert Lee (1999) expands on the lasting impacts of this legislation on constructions of race in the US, but these discourses on the US seem salient in Italy as well for Americans of Asian descent: "The logic of liberal universalism required an adherence to a doctrine of racial equality (160)." Interestingly, I did not find the logic of the Model Minority discourse on the bodies of Asians in Italy (see Chapter 2).

[23] My fieldnotes are mostly diary entries with musings over my health. These epistemic objects reflect the emplacement of my physical body in the field. I was inspired by the work of anthropologist Lochlann S. Jain (2013) who begins with an analysis of knowledge of the body, of a breast cancer tumor, as a site of knowledge production. Jain discusses the various ways in which, in the US, breast cancer has been culturally constructed as an identity, commodified with pink bows, with the reconstructive surgeries for breasts that then seek to reaffirm notions of femininity. My fieldnotes are replete with minute details about meals and dimpled rolls of fat. In 2018, I gained close to 65 pounds during pregnancy. When I repatriated to the US following fieldwork, I scoured through the nearly 200 pages of fieldnotes, and as the weight came off, it was difficult for me look my other 225-pound self. I had lost most of the weight prior to fieldwork. Because of the weight gain, I have learned to become more attune to my body. Jose Van Dijck (2005) discusses the role of the images on perceptions of her kidney following a surgery. Van Dijck argues that images are technologies that propose to examine bodies directly, yet they must be interpreted, and also, are more cultural products of the need to discipline certain bodies. The field was different because my body had changed. In the cold Lombardy afternoons, my legs and joints ached as I walked through the fields from the temple. My wrist hurt, the injury on the right side and my back too from carrying all

those groceries and water. I engaged with the field differently because my body had changed so much since I had studied in Italy as an undergraduate.

[24] Regarding diary entries as epistemic objects, I borrow from Malinowski's diaries ([1967] 2013). I particularly like the candid style of Elizabeth Chin (2016), who documents her own spending habits in examining consumption through detailed diary entries. Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa Malkki (2007) construct emails as epistemic objects. In doing so, they demystify the ethnographic research process as Cerwonka writes from Australia again producing a field site that is constitutive of these email exchanges. In these email correspondences, Cerwonka reveals daily anxieties about field work. Chin, Cerwonka and Malkki draw on a genealogy of anthropological feminist scholarship in which research design explicitly incorporates the idea that the researcher produces the field site.

[25] Ivana Macek (2018) argues that, though difficult, it's important to recognize emotions, and her own movements during participant observation, and the trauma, to remember and write about her fieldwork in Sarajevo. She writes, "In order to verbalize, symbolize, conceptualize, organize, structure, abstract, and theorize around fieldwork, we need to create a certain level of distance from the field" (238). I did not have much time to reflect on or be distant from the field given the time constraints of the pandemic and repatriation, but I can relate to Macek's discussion on mediating trauma in the field during the writing process. Here I racialize the word trauma from Cathy Schlund-Vials (2015), who in reclaiming the term writes, "Affective turns, which take emotive shape in vehement calls for sociopolitical recognition, vociferous pronouncements about equal representation, and determined criticisms of systemic oppression, collapse the temporal bounds of long-standing anti-Asian American racialization" (237).

[26] Anthropologist Anna Zadrożna looks back at declassified records that rendered her as a spy. See also Verdery (2018). As a woman, Zadrożna did not fit popular notions of academic work, and in the context of surveillance, her methods of tape recording and asking questions were suspect. Additionally, as a woman, she relates, "I attempted to negotiate my bodily presence in the field by controlling the way I looked. I associated a 'humble' appearance with equality, and I wanted to 'immerse' in the field; hence, I tried to avoid modern or formal clothing. I avoided make-up and wore long skirts, loose trousers and t-shirts covering my shoulders, lest I looked too feminine (especially among men). I took pains to appear modest. I had my own romanticized image of an 'anthropologist in the field', probably inspired by old black and white pictures of classic ethnographers" (223).

[27] I like that Ruth Behar merges the personal and professional but she also often obfuscates the object of inquiry bordering on the lines of autobiography. As a result, she decenters the narratives of those she studies, such her friend Marta and the village in Spain and the funeral rites. Nonetheless, Behar makes statements on what she terms "stretching the limits of objectivity" (12). In this regard, Behar adds to Haraway's

discussions on partial knowledges and reflexivity as valid and objective, rather than merely subjective (Haraway cited in Marcus 1995: 112). Behar's work can be embedded into Harding's (1987) discussions of utilizing method in validating women's experiences with feminism as a methodology. Harding explains, "class, race, and culture always categories within gender" (7). Behar's work maps onto "feminist ontology" (Gailey 2000:206).

[28] Anthropologists Samuel M. Wilson and Leighton C, Peterson (2011) argue that face-to-face encounters and media are not disparate modes of research but propose a seamless analysis along a "continuum of communities, identities, and networks" (456). Before the official decree came out in Lombardy, already, I began receiving WhatsApp messages from Italian friends in other regions. During the pandemic, the multi-sited field was increasingly amplified to include online as central during stay-at-home orders globally. The moment spotlighted the seminal work of Walton and Jafee (2011) who reformulated Habermas' public sphere as online in which the pictures, messages publicly posted to position stance.

[29] I conceptualize social media and my phone as a "polymedia," which recognizes shifting ideologies toward technologies as they morph (Madianou and Miller 2013). The differential meanings of Facebook changed in accordance with other media such as WhatsApp. In Lombardy, I noticed that everyday conversations around the pandemic also began to be framed within the normative North and South discourses through humor. Through WhatsApp, an Italian friend sent a comical picture of a man with a hairy potbelly. He was shrouded in a string of large, red chili peppers with the caption in *calabrese*, a dialect in the South of Italy. The punchline was that dried chili peppers kept the virus out of the South. These media platforms were crucial during the social distancing of COVID-19. Most of my Italian friends are from historically leftist cities in the North, such as Genoa, and Turin. They posted critiques about the policies of deregulation in Lombardy. On social media platforms, they pointed out that decades of industrial pollution and austere regional policies left the residents of Lombardy unprotected and prone to infections. In the context of Lombardy, they emphasized the continued significance of the North and South narratives in the making of Italian national identity during the pandemic, but also a critique of the long-standing policies of liberalization in Lombardy (see Chapter One).

[30] Erving Goffman (1989) amusingly lectured on the flexibility necessary for unexpected encounters in participant observation. Despite a shared perceived sense of transparency on the bodies of women, I do not collapse the experiences of all women of color. I identify as a cisgender Asian American woman, a Cambodian American and move through different spaces according to how I sense the situation. The sociologist Kimberly Kay Hoang (2015) wrestled with various performances of racialized and gendered notions of morality in her fieldwork in Vietnam and presentation of it. Hoang writes about heeding the advice of her dissertation chair, "I needed to make sure to desexualize my own body with suits or dresses that covered most of my skin. She told me that as an

Asian American woman, I could not afford to give a presentation that was undertheorized, because a presentation that lacked theoretical and empirical rigor would allow audience members to ask questions about my positionality, sexualize my body, and ultimately delegitimize my project. She was right" (20). In Italy, I had the opportunity to sit in coffee shops but in the end, it was a space I clearly did not fit into alone. Though it is the center of life in the small town, I avoided it:

[Fieldnote Excerpt, December 21, 2019] I had a cappuccino at Bar Diana. At my table was this old fat pervert looking man named Lorenzo, who I learned started to work at 14 years old in the sock factory, but then decided to attend a culinary school for two years when I think he was 16, cannot exactly remember. It was the second time I had run into him, the first time was when I was looking for Mailboxes Etc. on Via Rossi. Nonetheless, I sat with him as he told me with his beer belly sticking out that he retired at age 37 and was a hospital cook in the day while also working at the restaurant at night to make ends meet. The other men at Bar Diana seemed to be regulars and know him. I would rather not see him again, just hate sitting down with old perverted looking men. I already had to deal with that toothless prune, the custode, at the temple. I found out yesterday from Chandra that he was fired for alcoholism from his job and I'm not surprised. He is a shady character that I am happy not to see anymore.

[Fieldnote excerpt, January 18, 2020] There is a pig worker here, works some farm nearby. That gross guy Lorenzo who tried to kiss me at Bar Diana work as another steel worker.

[31] In the presence of the ethnonationalist campaigning of the Five Star Movement in town, in these moments walking through the piazza, I felt my mere existence to be a threat as a woman of color. But it's not just about these moments, as I already knew that as an Asian woman, I would have to navigate racism and sexism as a mode of being while abroad. I suggest, from my experiences in fieldwork, that these political movements in Italy could be further examined through a comparative lens that would bring a crucial intersectional critical race and gendered analyses to this brand of populism. Though each situation is unique in its historical specificity, through the lens of gender, one can see that in Cambodia, similar to Bosnia, Rwanda, the Holocaust, as well as forms of settler colonialism, heteronormative militaristic masculinity underscored these practices of violence. In Bosnia, morality campaigns amplified societal sexual/double standards which stems from a whore/virgin dichotomy that naturalized women's otherness (Kesic 2001:33). Women who could bear children become the symbolic collective (Lentin 1997:2). In imperial Japan, as reproduction was the focus, militias dehumanized women as bodies that produce children specifically targeting their reproductive organs (Chang 1997:91). In Rwanda, Hutu nationalists viewed Tutsi women's bodies as polluting the pure postcolonial Hutu nation (Burnet 2012:96; Taylor 1994). I do not suggest that Italy is similar to Cambodia, Bosnia, or Rwanda as each situation is unique in its historical specificity. What I argue is that, through the lens of gender and race, one can see that in Cambodia, similar to Bosnia, Rwanda, the Holocaust,

as well as forms of settler colonialism (cf. Smith 2005), heteronormative militaristic masculinity underscored these practices of violence, including Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Libya, and that the historical repercussions that remain, lived on the bodies of women of color in Italy (Angel-Ajani 2002). These histories could also inform current discussions on migration, produced in the national imagination as explicitly gendered and racialized.

[32] Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) describes borders as embodied using the term *la frontera* as an "aperature for theorizing about subordination from an ethnically specific Chicana/mestiza consciousness" (6). To be sure, I am weary of a priori interpellation, that is, Althusser's (1970) transposing forms of racialization that I learned in part from schools and institutions in the US on to my experiences in Italy. But Anzaldúa's notion of *la frontera* is useful in theorizing borders and belonging. I had experienced forms of racism in Italy twenty years prior and saw it in a sense as part of my embodied existence. As Lombardy became the center of the pandemic, I started to stay indoors not merely because of COVID-19, but more because of my feelings about constructed as a threat. When I first arrived in Lombardy, I had loved to walk around alone because I could go unnoticed in the city of Mantova but later stopped. Though different, I could relate to Bonilla and Rosa's (2015) discussion on the role of Twitter as a platform of activism particularly for bodies of color. I was supposed to go to Milan to meet Amanda, the director of a multicultural center, but I hesitated. I was aware of Asian faces on TV and in newspapers framed as threats. It was indisputable that I was experiencing forms of racialization, but they were small things that built up. The following fieldnote excerpts a timeline through a narration of feelings:

[Field note excerpt from January 20, 2020] Mantova, viewed from above, like a pair of squared, cramped, with maybe fifty people total in two small rectangular spectacles. Stepping out onto Piazza Sordello and then under the architectural arches of the *centro*, with its bustling yet understated lights and shopping, it felt like a different world, with the brown, the workers, the smell of sweat crammed waiting for paperwork, disorganized. Among the *popolo*, or the citizens, the ones who belong, the ones who shop for Christmas, in the open air, was a contrast. I enjoyed walking around Mantova, being anonymous, surrounding by Christmas lights, and people but not having to talk to anyone, just feeling warm at having people around me. Living in a small town nearby, feels so damp, grey, cold and harsh, but it's home, for now at least.

[Field note excerpt February 1, 2020] The fresh air would be good but I do not feel like going in public anymore. I was waiting in Mantova on via Garibaldi and saw this old Chinese lady with a cane limping, just felt sad for her, in a society that probably does not care for her. I am sure she has family though in Mantova who I hope love and care for her dearly.

[Field note excerpt February 24, 2020] I honestly would not mind if Amanda still wants to meet elsewhere than the immigration center since it is closed. I think what is keeping

me from traveling to Milan is the fear of being racially profiled and detained. With the coronavirus stuff, I feel like I am reading a Margaret Atwood science fiction novel. I just saw a picture of two Italian police outside of the Duomo, just feel like I would be entering a militarized zone of search and seizure, not to mention the heavily racist stares I would have to endure. But if Amanda wants to meet, which I doubt, I will go I think. I cannot help but beat myself up for being so proud of being organized, spending hours researching hotels before choosing one.

[Field note excerpt from February 25, 2020] Again another newspaper with a European man in a facemask and blurred but visibly Chinese or Asian young couple also in facemasks a few steps behind him. Same with the Gazzetta di Mantova, a Chinese woman maybe in her 30s or 40s, thin with short hair with a shopping cart getting food in a supermarket with her presumably Italian boyfriend also in a facemask.

[Field note excerpt February 26, 2020] I went to Milano on Thursday, then on Friday took a train to Adda and back in the evening, then on Saturday left to Mantova on the train. Since there are now suddenly six cases of the coronavirus in Mantova, the mood on Saturday as I was walking and catching the bus was suffocating. I have never experienced this level of racism in my life. As I was heading to Milano on Thursday, things were calm in Mantova as I walked around the city center for about an hour as I was waiting for the training, wanted some fresh air. I saw a newspaper heading in bold black that said zero cases which could probably explain the relative calm. In Milan, by now people are probably used to it, so it was also somewhat calm. I really do not want to travel anywhere in Italy alone anymore as I do not want to put that type of stress on myself. Plus I have no money. I know it is about perception, but I am not there yet.

[33] For work by anthropologists who are also Buddhist monks, see for example, Chowhudry (2019) and Pamutto (2017).

[34] For more on scalar perspectives on transnational migration, see for example, (Riccio 2000), Salih and Riccio (2010), Schlee (2010), Goode (2010), and Feldman-Bianco (1992; 2010).

[35] See Smith-Hefner (1994) for Cambodian American conversions to Christianity

[36] The construction of Southeast Asia is subject to specific knowledge regimes at the university. This depends on the location of the academic department (Wang et al. 2015). In the US, Southeast Asia is delineated as eleven nation states formed after the Second World War (Emmerson 1984; Steinberg 1987). Winichakul (2003) cautions against nationalist arguments in area studies. These details are part of an ongoing project within a Global Asias framework on diaspora that points to how specific experiences should be detailed beyond imposing categories.

[37] One summer when in Venice several years ago, I found a Khmer-English pocket dictionary at one of the local shops. The University has a wide array of languages offered, including Thai and Vietnamese. https://www.unive.it/data/1021/

Chapter 1: Cambodian Refugee Buddhists in the Heart of Catholicism

The presence of Cambodian Buddhists is potentially contentious in the context of emerging Italian populist nationalist politics of Lombardy, yet no anthropological studies to date details the experiences of Asian bodies. While considerable research exists on migration, anthropologists (cf. Bava 2011) have begun to urge for the studies of migration from through a religious perspective. In the process of movement across borders, migrants bring with them their religious interpretations of the movements. This chapter builds upon the scholarship in ethnic studies and anthropological research on religion to explore the following question: How is the Buddhist temple a site of fraught integration?

While I use theoretical frameworks that come out of ethnic studies, my work can nonetheless be placed squarely within the anthropology of religion. The Buddhist temple is not merely a religious space separated from daily life. Contrary to national discourses of migration to Italy as an ahistorical crisis, through the shared symbol of the temple, Italians and Cambodians construct a shared vision of futurity, alternative notions of alterity that represent their everyday lived experiences. Anthropologists Jane Collier and Silvia Junko Yanagisako (1989) contend that analyses of religious symbols need to be connected to everyday practices beyond the binaries of the sacred and profane. They write:

> It is an irony of history—and a testimony to the continuing power of Durkheim's sacred/profane distinction—that practice theory, which deliberately set out to analyze the 'practices of ordinary living' rather than the rituals that concerned most of Durkheim's followers, should nevertheless sometimes lead to the labelling of only some actions as symbolic, thus reproducing the sacred/profane opposition (32).

This chapter explores the various meanings of the temple for those who encounter its physical presence daily. The temple is a nexus at which worshippers and locals produce cultural meanings in their everyday lives. Like all collectivities, beyond integration, these interactions are fraught with individual desires to belong and to disengage from one another beyond national discourses of belonging.

I build on the work of anthropologists who address the production of racial meanings in contemporary Italy through religious practices. [38] In Rome, anthropologist Valentina Napolitano (2015) traces the lives of priests and nuns from Mexico, sponsored by the Vatican. These religious bodies from the Global South are envisioned to replenish its perceived nonreligious Catholic Italian body politic. Napolitano finds that many of the clergy invariably end up as caretakers of the elderly due to the marginalized labor market. In Turin, anthropologist Donald Carter (1997) details the religious practices of Senegalese merchants in the northern city, once the center of Communist movements in western Europe. In his ethnographic study, he traces the network of mosques in Turin created by Senegalese vendors. Carter argues that the men who follow Mourid in deindustrialized zones embed their daily economic and religious activities. In Italy, as a result of Catholic humanitarian policies throughout Italy, the visibility of religion in the public sphere is highly racialized. To date, there are no anthropological studies on religion and migration in Italy through the lens of Buddhist practices. There is a glaring absence of Southeast Asian refugees from national discourses on immigration and religion.

Ksae Secondary Migrations: The Making of Refugee Buddhism in Lombardy[39]

I arrived in Lombardy on a muggy afternoon in September 2019. In the scenic city of Mantua, I crossed the protruding rocks to find the *agenzie delle entrate* (tax office) for my *codice fiscal* (tax identification number). I rummaged for the paperwork in my laptop bag, then handed the tax agent documents. As he sifted through the papers, I stared at the banner above my head that read, "if we all paid our taxes, we'd have enough." Smelling of old cigarette smoke, the man, with his hollowed-out face, looked through my documents, as he asked me why I just didn't take the Fulbright scholarship and go to a beach in Sicily for the year. He bellowed. "Here it's polluted, everyone works too much, there are mosquitoes everywhere, and it's expensive. In Sicily you can get a three-course meal for eight euro. This is the China of Italy." I smiled and told him the population I worked with lived in the region of Lombardy, in a small town of Adda. He scoffed at the town and said there are only *pensionati* (retirees) out there who evade taxes.

Lombardy is home to *Wat Khmer*, the country's only Cambodian Buddhist temple. The region of Lombardy is also Italy's wealthiest region, and, though immigrants comprise 2% of the total population of Italy, 25% of the nation's immigrant population resides in Lombardy (OECD 2011). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic funneled many of the temple's religious activities online through social media platforms, leaving some of the temple's founders worried about its continued physical presence without the donations that visitors bring in. An online solicitation of funds brought money to go toward a leaky roof at the temple. Though shifting to a digital platform, these merit making opportunities to transnationally donate, are reflective of the temple's

transnationalism that was established at its founding in 2005. In autumn 2019, one month after I arrived in Italy, I asked Chandra, a 64-year-old Cambodian mother of three adult sons, and retired factory worker about the history of the temple. Though not one of the initial founders, I regarded Chandra as a dependable guide to the region of Lombardy and its location as a point in a Cambodian Buddhist transnational network in Europe.

Chandra retold the story of the founding of Wat Khmer in 2005, as a series of events that fold in the notion of *ksae*, the Khmer word for "string." In 1979, the Catholic Church resettled 3,000 Southeast Asian refugees throughout Italy, many of whom were practicing Buddhists (Gheddo 2015). In this context, *ksae* also references the linkages of patron client relations that are necessary to find employment in Italy. Families told me one by one that initially, the Cambodian refugee population resettled as seasonal agricultural laborers in the South of Italy. The families spent three months in Rome, housed in hotels, then were dispatched to various farms in the South of Italy, and marble industries in Tuscany. According to Chandra, most of the Cambodian refugee families, including hers, migrated to Lombardy in the early 1990s. Following a series of secondary migrations, they relocated to Lombardy, a region in the North, to work in textile industries, making it a center for Cambodian refugee migration and Buddhism.

In the context of Lombardy, the term *ksae* intertwines the local economies of Italian, family-based textile factories noted in the region (Yanagisako 2002). Chandra reiterated, "in Italy, the families have *ksae*" using the Khmer term to show her knowledge of local Italian businesses. Her three sons, now in their 30s, were able to garner contracts as plumbers in nearby Venice through gained trust with local families in the north. The

contract with the plumbing and hydraulic firm included a van that took the laborers to Venice inclusive of room and board. The 1990s coincided with the coming of age of the second generation of Cambodians who were born in Italy. By the early 1990s, Chandra's three sons were in school and did not need her anymore, she said. Her husband was working as a miner of marble in Tuscany. They had Cambodian friends in Lombardy who were working in the textile industries in the region, with *ksae* networks that specially asked for Southeast Asian women to work in the factories, in work and spaces separated by gender.

These *ksae* also refer to the Chinese and Italian transnational collaborations that continually produce Italy as a global symbolic center of fashion through the construction of *italianità* which Lisa Rofel and Silvia Junko Yanagisako (2019) define as: "an intuitive feeling for design, fashion, and more broadly aesthetics that they construe as having acquired by growing up in Italy" (ix). [40] For Cambodian refugees in Italy, the term *ksae* signifies their labor contracts with these Italian textile firms, their own sense of *italianità* that is also distinctly Buddhist in the context of a Catholic country. Without an explicit state ideology on migration such as fraternity and egalitarianism in France or multiculturalism in England, in Italy, the Catholic Church takes on the role as mediator of relations with migrants. Nonetheless without detailed ethnographic studies of the role of the Catholic Church as a mediator, there is a vision of a static Catholicism that stems only from the Vatican, rather than in the everyday lives of locals and migrants who actively engage in these symbolic meanings.

The majority of the Cambodian textile workers live in adjacent town of San Pietro, with 10,000 residents. The town municipality provides forms of social support for the working population. Italian language courses are offered in the afternoons (4:00 pm-7:00 pm), along with intermittent English lessons, six days a week, housed at one of the elementary schools. Local intercultural organizations in the area work with newcomers. As part of an expansive list of courses offered at night as part of cultural classes, one included cooking lessons on how to prepare lotus root, jointly taught by a Cambodian refugee and a Japanese expatriate. Though the temple is in a rural area outside of these networks, Cambodians in the area incorporate it as a significant mode of belonging in Italy through the *ksae*.

As a region in northern Italy, Lombardy is geographically closer to Germany, France, and Switzerland than to the nation's capital Rome. This makes the temple in Lombardy a node that builds its networks with Cambodian Buddhist temples in these neighboring countries, and as far away as Norway. Chandra proudly pointed out the neatly hung pictures of visiting monks in her living room, showing that Buddhism traveled along with Cambodian refugees to Lombardy from their initial resettlement regions of Tuscany, Campania, and Calabria. Even before there was a formal temple, the community made merit and celebrated being Cambodian at Khmer New Year in April, sometimes held in the barn in one of the countryside homes. Cambodian monks traveling from the US on their way to France, stopped in Lombardy, as guests in Chandra's family home, which her husband distinguished from other homes, by emplacing two concrete elephant heads to mark its entrance. Various members of the community organize to

drive the monks to nearby Venice, just two hours away. When the community found an old countryside villa for sale in 2005, their economic *ksae* or transnational social networks were already in place for over 25 years throughout Italy.

As we sat in her spotlessly clean duplex, Chandra narrated the history of the Buddhist temple over a lunch of autumn seasonal soup consisting of slices of pork, diced orange squash, and mushrooms that her husband had foraged nearby, as custom for both Cambodians and Italians in the area. Orange squash is a regional specialty in Lombardy, normally pureed and stuffed into large tortellini, served with a butter sage sauce. Chandra had taken local ingredients and created a Khmer-style soup with Jasmine rice. The mushroom, with its ubiquity throughout the landscape in Lombardy connects Khmer refugees to the diaspora. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) elaborates on the chain producers and consumers of shitake from the Pacific US Northwest to Japan, and links Khmer refugees who forage them in Oregon through communities for lucrative sums of cash. In Lombardy, foraging for fungi is similarly a skilled art, and a form of caretaking as gifts of compassion, gingerly sliced, boiled or stir fried into everyday autumn dishes. The mushroom is a particular display of Khmerness and *italianità* in autumn in Lombardy; it is one of many symbols in this postwar semiotic system diasporic Khmerness as mediated through objects and spirits (see Chapter Four).

Able to flourish in conditions of plenty and scarcity, the mushroom manages to populate global terrains and serves as an apt image for the specific transnational temple in Lombardy, one of many Cambodian Buddhist temples that proliferated along with others following the flow of refugees into their spaces of permanent resettlement. Like the social

ksae Chandra spoke of, or knowledge of local Italian connections to garner employment, the knowledge that surrounds foraging varieties of mushrooms in Lombardy is gained through decades of resettlement in the region, and also viewed as a sense of *italianità* for Cambodian refugees. Wat Khmer Italy bloomed through the amalgamation of secondary migrations of Cambodian refugees to Lombardy for labor, bringing their experiences and knowledge of the Central and Southern parts of Italy as plantation laborers. Wat Khmer Italy has its transnational European connections to Cambodian temples in Germany, Switzerland, Norway and France. In formalizing a Buddhist temple, Cambodian refugees in Lombardy challenge articulations of belonging in Italy as solely Catholic.

When I was with Chandra and her two grandkids in the pediatrician's office waiting room, I noticed a group of Italian mothers staring at us as we spoke Khmer. Since the conversation was a continuation of our lunch chat that took place in her living room, that was in Khmer, I continued with Khmer. Chandra recounted how she had lost a white gold necklace that her dear friend had made for her from the U.S., an old friend from the refugee camp. After the lunch with mushrooms, squash, and pork soup, Chandra drove us to the afternoon neighborhood hangout coffee shop, Café Sport, a Chinese-run coffee shop where we met up with her retired husband as he played cards. In the afternoons we stood at the counter, and had a Ginseng coffee, an espresso with syrupy sweetness. Before we left her house for the Café Sport that afternoon, her son Marco came into the kitchen. He had taken the 5:00 am shift and was done for the day. He told me that he had manned twenty-one machines at the sock factory. He took a swig of beer from his amber colored bottle and paused as he told me that some days go fast and others slowly in the

eight-hour workdays. Looking outside the car window at the dreary grey industrial buildings as we headed to the historic center, I pondered Chandra's history, and the specific conditions for the formation of Cambodian diasporas in Lombardy.

When I was with Cambodians in Italy like Chandra and her friends, I felt like I was in the US because of the similarities in stories and Khmer language. Chandra's rendering of Khmerness and *italianità* can be contextualized within the ethnographic studies on Cambodians in the United States, where resettlement patterns also figured significantly into religious practices. In the United States, a similar pattern of initial resettlement in rural hinterlands in states such as South Dakota and Utah, led to secondary migrations to Long Beach, California, Tacoma, Washington and Lowell, Massachusetts, producing booming centers of Cambodian community formations with various Buddhist temples that dot these urban areas. These American communities, too, grew out of secondary migrations. [41]

In the US, secondary migrations created Long Beach, California, Lowell, Massachusetts and Tacoma, Washington, as three of the largest populations of Khmer in the US. The resettlement of Cambodians in the United States as a permanent second asylum country is well-documented (Mortland 1996). In the first wave from 1975-1979 approximately 6,000 Cambodians, mostly the urban and upper classes, relocated to the United States. In 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. 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). From 1975 to 2010 a total of 145,230 Cambodians migrated to the United States. Up to this point, Cambodians have been in the United States for nearly forty years. [42]

In Lombardy, the temple is in the town of Adda, a rural area of less than 2,000 residents, who are further split into four distinct districts. The temple is in the most remote district of Adda, outside of the historic center. Adda has no Cambodians, except for the monk and the lay caretaker. In the central area of the town, the cold weather kept people indoors and the cobblestone piazza empty. Placed in the middle of the belltower, and near the main *tabacchai* (a place that sells tabaco, bus tickets, newspapers, snacks) and café, the piazza afforded no intimacy or privacy. Occasionally teenagers waited on one of the concrete benches, but for short periods for their parents to pick them up. It was normally quiet except the familiar chiming of the bells at five minutes before the hour. The zones right adjacent to the historic center resembled concrete industrial wastelands.

The temple is an old villa that is spacious and secluded. In the autumn, the slanted sienna-colored roofs featured pockets of tiles filled with white frost that melted as the sun came out. White-bellied birds flew around and fat cats lounged outside on the tiny pebbles in the temple courtyard, waiting for chunks of leftover raw meat innards and delicacies like liver. It was silent except for the sound of someone cutting down trees with a motorized saw in the distance. When the weather warmed, a large green tractor passed daily leaving behind the ripe smell of dung. The rains often made the fields too muddy to walk through. In the temple's dining area, out the window, stood bushy trees

that looked like long and tall bamboo stalks. Clusters of birds chirped away as spring approached. In the autumn, grey clouds moved in, foreboding the upcoming days of rain. The monk often strolled in contemplative meditation along the empty fields.

Southeast Asians: Beyond the North and South Binary of Alterity

Labor migrations transformed the cultural composition of the region of Lombardy. From the 1850s to the 1970s, Italian migrations were largely internal, often from rural areas to the cities of Rome and Turin, with Milan the capital of Lombardy destinations (Vezzoli 2020). The region of Lombardy comprises historical layers of laborers from rural areas throughout Italy, such as *salentini* the lower portion of the heel of Italy called Lecce, and from Caserma and various outskirts of Italy. The internal migrations from plantation labor in the South to join other Cambodian refugees in the northern industries, follow the flow of previous labor migrations from the south to the north of Italy. Antonio Gramsci was the most famous, coming from a Sardinian village, and moving into the industries of Turin, where he was later imprisoned and died under fascist Mussolini (Gramsci [1926]1967; Crehan 2002). While the arrival of Cambodian refugees as laborers in the textile industries in Lombardy may seem new, the Industrial Triangle cities of Milan, Turin and Genoa have a long history of attracting laborers from the south of Italy. Cambodian refugees impress prints of Buddhist reverence to the cultural landscape of Lombardy.

Previous generations of Italian laborers who migrated from the South to work in Lombardy prominently, created a national narrative of labor as a North and South divide that undergirds national images of Italy, but also elides the racialized experiences of

Cambodian refugees. [43] In addition, the North and South dichotomy produces stereotypical racialized images as Northerners. The model conceals the work of locals in Lombardy to grapple with recent shifts in immigration to the region. The North and South debate undoubtedly captures hefty ideological sympathies for Italians with Orientalist discourses that undergird these perceptions. That said, it is debatable whether the legacy of the southern labor migrations to the north provide a blueprint for this new wave of migration and the potential processes of racialization for groups such as Cambodian refugees.

Southeast Asian refugees do not fit into the North and South national discourses even though the refugees perform the labor in the factories historically done by Southerners. The subaltern in Gramsci's context, was a figure that was prominent in a specific historical moment related to the history of dispossession internally through nationalist constructions of Italy as at the expense of the southern regions. However, rather than merely just the North and South lens which is framed on the industrial capitalist model during the life and death of Antonio Gramsci, the labor by Cambodian refugees in these textile companies in Lombardy need to be considered within a global capitalist framework. Spaces of work in the textile companies are gendered and racialized. Anthropologist Patti Meyer (2015) finds that within the context of Italy, racialization processes intersect with a gendered labor market filled by immigrant women. In her ethnographic research in city of Genoa, conditional belonging in Italy is envisioned in the national imagination as Catholic women from the Philippines or countries in Latin America, who are imagined as close to the home and hearth. [44] In

contrast, Muslim men are imagined as outsiders and non-working bodies. Race, gender and class intersect and are played out through the idiom of religion.

Southeast Asian refugees are absent from national discourses on Chinese residents. In Italy, the areas surrounding Prato in Tuscany, near Florence are normally associated with Chinese migrants (Parbuono 2016). Southeast Asian refugees in Lombardy do not necessarily fit neatly into this profile. They work for primarily Italian-run small companies and their work is largely unionized. Italians tell me that Milan has the largest Chinatown in Europe. The zona Navigli in Milan is touted as a space of tolerance where one can find products such as Peruvian peppers (Manzo 2012). Yet, Southeast Asian refugees do not figure into these contemporary narratives on migration. The experiences of Cambodian refugees, long resettled in Italy for four decades, with no studies done on them thus far, shows how Italians in Lombardy have been engaging in difference for decades. Cambodian refugees in Lombardy do not necessarily fit into the fears of China, as they do not own businesses.

Though markedly different from the experiences of Italians from the South who migrated to Lombardy, when Southeast Asian refugees arrived in the late 1970s, they too partook in these modes of becoming racialized subjects in Northern Italy through discourses of hard work. Sita, a Cambodian factory worker in her mid-fifties retorted when I asked her about racism and COVID-19 in February 2020:

> They [Italians] cannot work like us. The company I initially worked for in Lombardy had specifically requested Cambodian women, that's what Paolo [a Chinese friend], told me. About the coronavirus, they beat someone up from Sri Lanka, he screamed *non sono cinese* [I'm not Chinese] as they pummeled him. Actually, I think it turned out he was Filipino. They [Italians] do not listen to their

> government. They go out without masks, they exercise like that, walk with no mask. They don't listen to their government, even with the multa [fine to be paid].

In Sita's response to ideas about racism, she countered racializing discourses through identifying herself first and foremost as a laborer, by saying that Italians cannot work hard. Here, Sita took those discourses of gratefulness, and constructed herself a moral compared to Italians who do not wear masks. Sita mentioned Filipinos and Sri Lankans. In Lombardy, *al nord, noi lavoriamo* (We work in the North) became a phrase I heard often from local Italians in constructing differences between the North and the South.

Sita's reply also points to the limitations of Orientalism of the North and South of Italy has on the working bodies of *extracommunitari*, a code word for those bodies from the Third World. For Cambodian refugees in Italy, Orientalist discourses are globally circulated that produced gendered and racialized meanings throughout, that trace imperialist and Cold War histories. These images of Oriental womanhood as localized in *Madame Butterfly*, are embedded in larger global neoliberal notions of Asia that elides histories of colonialism in the region (Wilson 2002:565). Specifically to Italy, in the opera *Madame Butterfly*, Giacomo Puccini employed the figure of Cio-cio san, the figure of the geisha that draws on the dying Asian body that produces images of the Oriental woman that resonates globally (Kondo 1990:18). Scholar of Southeast Asian performance Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns expands on the circulating images of Oriental womanhood through productions such as *Miss Saigon*, which largely star Filipina actresses, thereby conflating and subsuming the US imperial violence in Vietnam with romanticized images of the dying Asian woman. The 2001 popular Italian film by Turkish-Italian Ferzan Özpetek., *His Secret Life* retells the story of a recent widow's

discovery of her husband's life as a gay man in Rome. Though the Indonesian housemaid plays a minor role, her figure is juxtaposed against that of the normative white Italian woman. There is a notable absence of the model minority discourse about Asian bodies. Asian refugees, particularly in places like Italy, where Asian migration is relatively recent, and Asian has arguably not yet become a recognized subjectivity. These Orientalist images inform the presence of these bodies as Asian Buddhists. [45]

Digital Italian and Cambodian-Italian Modes of Touristic Placemaking

Regions throughout Italy strive against the dichotomous North and South characterizations through the regional pride called *campanilismo* which informs many of the everyday experiences. Linguistic anthropologist Jill Cavanaugh (2005) suggests that like various regions throughout Italy, Lombardy resists these classifications through a self-emphasis on the concept of *campanilismo* or a sense of local pride as expressed through balancing local inflections of spoken Italian. Since the image of the person from Lombardy is male, a farmer, and racist in the national imagination, Cavanaugh demonstrates that young people in the region mute their Lombardan inflections for social mobility. [46]

One frigid afternoon, the rain lightly fell at an angle slightly to the left of my garage view. I was hosing out and scrubbing the mold that grew on a white pail bin. My neighbors, Mauro and Lucia, a retired married couple walked into the garage cowering under the drizzle. They were both cookie cutter versions of Mr. and Mrs. Chris Cringle with pale skin, pink cheeks, with short white hair, and smiles that form wrinkles around his eyes. In Lombardy and regions throughout Italy, the sense of local pride is significant.

They liked to start or "enquote" (Jones and Schieffelin 2009) each conversation with, "You've studied. Tell me what you think about this." [47] My retiree neighbors Mauro and Lucia regularly researched and jotted down train schedules on square, cardboard cutouts for me. They urged me to see all the regions of Italy and try local versions of lesser-known Italian dishes such as couscous in Trapani, Sicily, and breaded, stuffed olives deep fried in Umbria, and cheese and flour deep fried in Pescara. [48]

That morning, Mauro had noted a series of trains for Venice, suggesting I visit for Carnival. After speaking with Mauro, when I got home, I perused the hotels in Venice hoping to book a room to see the events that feel on the most part on February 20th. I looked forward to taking pictures of the creative masks and visit national museums which were free for me as Fulbright scholar. I had been to Venice years ago but only in the summer. Winters in Venice are supposed to be an entirely different place.

For Italians too, Venice has an allure of being the romantic Orient of Italy. The film *Bread and Tulips* (2000) was popular in the both the US and Italy. In this lighthearted and funny film, the director Silvio Soldini on the one hand made feminist references to Boccacio's characters such as Mirandolina, and also a sense of fantasy with Orientalist romanticism of Venice, home of Marco Polo. [49] One of the lead characters, Grazia, is a masseuse who sports a bindi. One of the characters who employs the protagonist Rosalba in his floral shop says, "Tulips are from the Orient, not Holland." The Oriental aesthetic is a staple of the appeal of the film, producing an affect of romanticism. The film is also decidedly a celebration of Venice, through the Venetian

inflection of one of the main characters, as well as the winding paths and hanging sheets to dry that are not normally under the purview of touristic Venice.

The cultural and political mapping of Lombardy must be read against the backdrop of *la questione meridionale*, or the "Southern Question" (Meridiana 1993). Political theorist and anthropologist of Italy, Jane Schneider (1998) contends that a central notion of alterity in Italy is created around notions of the Southern Question, a form of Orientalism constructed to mark the South of Italy as problematic, particularly through focus on the island of Sicily as Other. The region of Lombardy is normally named as part of Northern Italy, which also includes the regions of Veneto, Piedmont, Trento Alto Adige, Emilia Romagna and Ligure. In the 1990s, the right-wing Northern League Party added these regions to Central Italy in order to expand its political base through rhetoric that further alienated the South of Italy (Giordano 2001). In recent years, the populist parties have called for an end to the North and South differences, to focus on the immigrant (Celiksu 2018). The North and South delineation exists but simultaneously with an emphasis on *campanilismo* (local pride).

In colloquial Khmer language, Italy is called *srok Italie*, with the French words for names of western countries. For Germany, it's *srok Aleman*, the US is *srok Amerique*. The term *srok* may also mean "village" and depending on the context, also state or region. The more formal version of the term *srok* is *prateh*. *Srok Khmer*, means Cambodia, and *prateh* Kampuchea, is the more formal version of Cambodia. These terms map the transnational migrations of Cambodians globally. As gendered refugee bodies, they may be viewed as actors in cities of different scales, with opportunities and

constraints based on the global positioning of the city, such as language programs, and small business opportunities. Participants in this site are, Khmer, Thai, and Sri Lankan monks from other parts of Europe, invited by Wat Khmer, thereby creating and reaffirming Theravada Buddhist religious networks through the mobility of monks. The temple also actively maintains transnational networks through online social network sites and sponsorship of visiting monks from Khmer temples in the US, Australia, the outskirts of Paris, France, Switzerland, and Phnom Penh, Cambodia. As the only Khmer temple in Italy, over 200 people from all over northern Italy attend the religious celebrations.

Cambodian Buddhists lay claim to a sense of *campanilismo* through tourism in Venice. Lombardy is cushioned next to the region of Veneto, where the scenic tourist destinations of Venice and Verona are located. When I told the Venerable Sokhom Kem about my plans to go to Venice, he informed me that there were Thai Buddhist temples that dot the landscapes of Northern Italy, in case I wanted to visit other temples. He recounted visiting Venice several times, at least twenty times. As usual in the afternoons, he sat in the heated room where the Buddha statue is housed. I sat on the straw floor, with my feet tucked under so that my toes do not point toward the monk or the statue, while he sat in front of me on his usual raised seating area. The monk showed me his cell phone full of pictures of himself and other monks standing in Piazza San Marco in Venice.

Crispin Thurlow and Adam Jaworski (2011) explore how tourists both consume and make meanings of place through posting vacation pictures of themselves with iconic monuments such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Despite the study's focus on Flickr, the processes of identity making through sharing these pictures on platforms could be applied

to the practices of monks in Venice. Through social media platforms, the monks also make identities in relation to place. Several times a year, the Venerable Sokhom Kem moves back and forth from Lombardy to Venice when visitors tour Italy from abroad as a reference point for his orientation or mapping of Buddhism in Italy and across Europe. Venerable Sokhom Hem showed me profile pictures of monks who posed in front of the Eiffel Tower or the Leaning Tower of Pisa. They consume middle class tourism while engaging in forms of local and global placemaking. Through sharing these pictures online, Buddhist monks in diaspora construct their notions of selfhood through digitized platforms with creativity, extending Buddhist practices to Europe. [50]

Venice figures into the transnational Cambodian Buddhist networks as the preferred place to visit when friends in the diaspora are in Italy. In discussions of the Orient, the mappings of place in the imagination of Venice, is also historically connected to Marco Polo and China. The presence of monks in orange clad robes may seem like a paradox on the European streets, in piazza San Marco in Venice, taking pictures. In fact, these robes do not contradict symbols of modernity for Cambodians in diaspora. These Buddhist expressions of modernity have to be understood within a larger historical context of modernity and religion in Southeast Asia as a region. In Italy, the existence of the monk indicates a long-resettled community of Cambodian refugees who have the political knowledge, culturally embedded in Italy, and the material wealth to sponsor a monk, and take a group of monks to see the sites. The existence of a Cambodian monk in diaspora with the orange robes among the concrete and stones of old Europe, is also a celebration of Cambodian survival, resilience, and modern religious practices.

Temple Matters: Articulations of Catholic Forms of Buddhist Belonging

> Yesterday or the day before yesterday, I went to the *tabaccaio* to get a lighter for my stove, ended up with a tomato red one large, and saw I think the sister in law of Giuseppina, and I mentioned something about seeing that there was some kind of attempted robbery here in town, and the *tabbaccio* owner said it's not an island or isola to which I said, well there's only 1,500 people here. [Fieldnotes from November 13, 2020].

After buying my stove lighter, I returned home taking my usual path along the industrial asphalt road without a sidewalk on some patches. I watched the fog roll in as I crossed the cobblestones in the piazza on the way to my second-floor apartment. My next-door neighbor was a pig famer who smoked in his house. I never talked to him or his wife, but there was sense of knowing them from the communal spaces we shared. Our water came from the same well, smelling heavily like iron. The water was severely contaminated and oily leaving a film even after soaping the dishes. In the mornings, my neighbors' goats made noises like motorboats accompanied by a crowing rooster. They also kept ducks, geese, and a type of large avian I could not identify in the yard adjacent. With shared walls, the smoke wafted into my bedroom. The farmer and his wife would start the day at 5:00 am, clanking pots and pans, as the wife would start to make breakfast early for her husband before heading to the factory. Some nights the farmer would come home drunk and his wife would yell about his late arrival. I had no privacy as the walls were thin. To escape the musty old house and the cigarette smoke that seeped into my apartment, I would slip out into the fresh air whenever, descending the marble stairs with specks of rain.

As I neared my *casetta* (little house) apartment, I ran into my 86-year-old Italian neighbor Debora. As a survivor of chemotherapy and cancer, plus the removal of part of a portion of her intestine, she liked to talk about her dietary restrictions. The first time I met her, I liked her immediately with her white curly bob, and kind eyes. She had invited me to Sunday lunch to meet her children and grandchildren, but with the passing her husband during my time there, she renounced into her first-floor apartment across the street. She was sorting through her mail then looked up and waved. As we stood there on the road, she proceeded to talk about the history of the temple. I was surprised to learn of the history as the Cambodians all told me they had purchased the villa from Chinese pig farmers who were chased out of the region for their business practices. In Italy, these anxieties played out as fears of perceived unethical Chinese business practices without labor protections, and the lack of knowledge of Italian language. Cambodians told me the history of the temple in ways that incorporated narratives of transformation. Unlike the unclean pig stalls owned by Chinese patrons, the Cambodians managed to transform it into a celestial space of worship. In contrast, for many local Italians, place-based articulations of racialization in this postindustrial area Lombardy are framed within Catholic discourses.

While religion alone may not be sufficient in an analysis of relations between Cambodian Buddhists and the national Italian population, it is assuredly indispensable in the region of Lombardy. Catholicism is produced in Italy through supranational institutions such as the European Union which fund religious organizations such as the Catholic Church in processes of economic liberalization (Muehlebach 2011). In this

region in Italy, it is equally important to consider the religious lens with the socioeconomic forces in the production of perceptions surrounding Cambodian Buddhists. Focusing on the region of Lombardy, Muehlebach (2013) argues that Catholic discourses of charity are ways in which the Italian state continues policies of liberalization that started in the 1970s. These Catholic discourses in Lombardy also figure into the ways in which Italians negotiate ethnic difference, as I learned from elderly neighbors who were mostly in their 70s and 80s. The proposed project is the first detailed ethnographic study of Buddhism and refugees in what is arguably the symbolic center in the world for Catholicism: Italy. As Muelhlbach demonstrates, though Lombardy is less popularly associated with Catholicism in the national imagination, in fact, it plays a key role in process of neoliberal policies. Within the EU, Italy is continually produced through funds that are funneled through religious organizations. Though the region of Lombardy is known for being populist and conservative, with the realities of highly visible immigrants that have resettled long term, while migration may be new for the rest of Italy, those in Lombardy are aware of the polarity of national discourses on immigration and are versed in the everyday negotiation of difference.

Catholicism shapes an uneasy tolerance for Cambodian refugees' practices of religion (cf. Sciortino 2014: 368). Debora reminisced about the villa when it was constructed. She and her husband raised five children in that home. She began with details about the spiral staircase that winds up from the dining room to the attic. I was touched by her eagerness to describe the temple as a model of morality from its inception. Debora asserted a Catholic narrative through the religious pilgrimages of four daughters

and one son to South America in their youth. Now in their 50s and schoolteachers, two of her daughters worked with the children of boatpeople, she explains, by organizing school events for their parents to be involved. [51] Throughout the years, her children spent years in Bolivia as volunteers with the Church. For Debora, the temple continues to be a space of faith and mutual aid, a place for her to negotiate the shifting demographics in Lombardy. There are no Cambodians in the town, except the monk and the groundskeeper, who rarely leave the premises. Debora connects the history of postwar Italy, one of the most traumatic eras for Italians (Gingborg 2003). In Tuscany, anthropologist Elizabeth Krause (2001; 2005) and Krause and Marchesi (2007) find that cultural memories of the period inform the decisions of Italian women in planning families. Many are deterred by family histories of rations and poverty during the war. Debora relates her connection to the Cambodians through the local history of the temple that elicits memories and reiterations of resilience through the caretaking of her family.

In the context of dire poverty in postwar Italy, Debora uses a religious lens to incorporate the Buddhist temple into the domestic space of her family home, a special place purchased following the war. This domesticity lends a sense of nationalist Italy. During the Mussolini era, the nuclear family was a symbol of the building of the Italian nation (Ginsborg 2014). From a regional perspective, Debora's narrative provides a view on how residents in Lombardy create new ties that mimic forms of social protectionism that existed in the Fordist era. Thus, in this postindustrial area of Lombardy that has been restructured with the retreat of the state, the presence of a Buddhist temple allows residents to negotiate race and ethnicity through Catholic discourses of charity. In doing

so, Debora evokes the spirit of Catholicism in negotiating embodied racialized difference. Debora and several of my retired neighbors regularly organized deliveries of clothing, shoes, scarves, and even jewelry to my doorstep, so that I could be prepared for the unpredictable weather. They also wanted me to look Italian during my conferences in Rome. These gifts were ways to take care of me, and socially locate my presence as an Asian American in populist Lombardy. The presence of the temple impacts the extent to which Cambodian Buddhism is constructed as an acceptable difference in local perceptions of belonging.

Debora's idiom of belonging borrows from Catholic practices that are perceived to be part of her past and present in layers, her response to dramatic changes in the region. Archeologist Shannon Lee Dawdy (2016) describes these feelings as forms of emotional stratigraphy. In her study of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Dawdy describes how residents of the historic part of New Orleans mourn and orientate themselves through a keen awareness of change through the city's historic buildings. Dawdy explains:

> Locals seem to share a particularly well-developed folk phenomenology of the space-time continuum. On the one hand they have a hyperalert sense of living in history (being aware of changes over time), and on the other they positively value continuities wherever they can find them (37).

In addition to being a place of worship, the temple is a continual space for mediating local histories, as the region grapples with economic and environmental policies that leave many of the elderly residents without protections. National discourses on immigration play out regionally. For local Italians such as Debora, Mauro, and Lucia, discourses of Catholic charity and religion allay fears of the shifting demographics of

Lombardy. The global image of peaceful Buddhists has been deployed by long-resettled Cambodian refugees in Italy in order to claim purchase on Catholic citizenship.

My neighbors Mauro and Lucia would normally start out the conversation with a proposed broad topic. It ranged from *gambaretti*, shrimp farmed in Southeast Asia, Jim Crow, climate change, US imports of GMO products into the European Union. Lucia hesitated, then told me *occhio*, meaning be careful of the 5G waves as she was convinced they caused tumors. That day in the garage, they asked what I thought about Trump's plan to invade Iran, an excerpt from my fieldnotes:

> Mauro asked me about Iran and Trump's invasion. While I was leaving my apartment, my neighbor Mauro came out to put his sheets on the line. I hope I explained my scholarship properly don't want to misrepresent my work. I explained that I didn't sleep well because of the news on Iran. He went into the 1979 revolution and is definitely for the U.S. though he didn't say anything about war. I am sure my landlord is pro-war especially since he is so Islamophobic, at least according to his social media posts. It's almost 10am and at first I felt like going for a walk, but now I don't really feel like it, just too lazy, though I think the fresh air would help me sleep tonight, [Fieldnote excerpt, January 4, 2020][52]

Mauro liked to show me latest weather forecast, and claimed Christmas was just a worship of the winter solstice. I asked the couple if they participated in the clerical district in which there were nine dioceses under the jurisdiction of one bishop. Lucia replied, "absolutely not" and cited the abuse accusations of the Catholic church as a deterrent. They both believed that Islam was an imminent threat to Italy, as indicated by their use of Iran to produce the Orient.

Orientalism in Europe is relational to constructions of the Orient as the Middle East (Said 1978). The arrival of largely Muslim migrants provides impetus for the formation of new categories of belonging that, arguably, places the political binary into a

black box (Kipnis 2016), an otherwise groundless framework for analysis on transnational migration in Italy, and in particular, this region in Italy. [53] Given these circumstances, the construction of the Buddhist temple in 2005, was a key moment in Islamophobia which allowed the temple to be supported as an alternative to Islam. Michael Herzfeld (2007) finds that in the working-class neighborhood of Monti, Rome, fears of miscegenation underlie the animosity of Eastern Europeans moving into Monti, with some Italians using the crowded housing conditions to claim that they are helping the new arrivals. In Lombardy, tentative public support for the Buddhist temple communicates that one is not Islamophobic, yet the acceptance of Buddhism is conditional on images of Orientalism, of which there are several historical and contemporary iterations (cf. Proschan 2002; Lowe 2018; Chong 2015).

Forms of White Supremacy: Global Populisms and Race

In this political context, Buddhist modes of belonging continue to be fraught. Anthropologist Hugh Gusterson (2017) makes a clarion call for ethnographic research on the global rise of nationalist populist regimes, as these processes need to be understood locally. In the town of Adda, local politicians campaigned around resources such as a town aqueduct and bikeable paths along the slippery two laned highway that cuts through the town. Cambodians established the temple in 2005 during these two previous political terms. The political group was in their 30s and early 40s. They campaigned on environmental initiatives, managing to pave the *pista ciclabile*, a short bike path and footpath along the main road. They also implemented a system in which residents could receive a *tessera* card from the mayor's office and have funds put on the card. One would

then take reusable bottles to get either sparkling or still water from the town's water aqueduct.

Town politics is voluntary and thus, as my Italian friend Barbara revealed, everyone worked full time elsewhere, while raising kids. Eventually, the mostly retired constituents voted in an older mayor who was already retired. I was told that in small town politics, there is an expectation that politicians stay all day at the municipality. In 2018, the town voted in a mayor who was populist and right-wing, part of the Five Star Movement. Barbara told me that the new mayor fit the profile, as she is retired with grown children, and able to dedicate herself to politics, but that she is officially not part of the Northern League.

I had met Barbara at the town's book club and we became friends exchanging WhatsApp numbers and messages. The club consisted of 12 women seated around four rectangular tables pushed together to form one. Though from Lombardy, Barbara was considered an outsider who had married into the town because her husband grew up there. Barbara had graduated with a *laurea* from a prestigious university in Milan. Each week the librarian would lend us copies of a contemporary Italian novel, and we would discuss the book, then give it rating on a scale of 1-10. Prior to meeting Barbara, for me to head out to meet Cambodians in the nearby town, I would wake up in the dark. I rode the *corriera* or work bus, looking out the window at a dreary, cold grey with fog. It was difficult to leave the town without a car because the *corriera* or bus was designed for kids in high school. To get five kilometers out of town, on frigid mornings, I would already be awake at 5:00 am in the morning, walk twenty minutes to the main road near the town,

then wait by the roadside in the dark cold. I would have to change two kilometers at another stop. When I would take a later bus, this meant sometimes the second bus would not arrive. I would have to return home after hours of waiting.

Barbara worked with immigrants in the nearby town and knew several of the Cambodians as she had worked on their cases. With Barbara I would head out and be at the gym parking lot by 8:00 am. On these days, I would then go visit Chandra and Café Sport a few times a week, when the temple was empty. Barbara invited me to Sunday breakfast with three other Italian women from the book club for cappuccinos and cream filled pastries. The coffee shop was spacious and located on the outskirts of a nearby town. She constantly asked to host me for the remaining six months in Italy as her family had an extra room. I often had dinner at her house with her husband and kids, and sometimes watched movies like *Harry Potter* dubbed in Italian with them. I attended school plays. We had made plans to go see the lakes in the area and take historic trips around Lombardy. Barbara and her in-laws were a sounding board for town politics and a friend.

As we got to know each other, Barbara invited me to her in-laws for an afternoon coffee break. They offered me two generous slices of sweet raisin panettone. Giulio the father-in-law, with warm smiles and curiosity carried on bantering with his wife Enrica, as if I were not there initially. This put me at ease, then Giulio with his square shaped glasses, dark rimmed perched on his nose said, “Just like in the US with Trump, in areas like this 70 percent of the people are fascists. We are part of the 30 percent. “He used the word *extracommunitari*, literally outside the European Union, but a code word for Global

South, but then flushed red in using the term. Their house was comfortable, spacious, and the couple had traveled to the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, among other places. They gathered chattering in the afternoon at their house, as I munched on the spongy panettone full of raisins, likely leftover from Christmas, then I downed my espresso. I felt welcomed and do love the Italian style of cooking, eating, and being in company. Admittedly I also admired how people were dressed nicely all the time, regularly, with a sense of style. Later, whenever I ran into Enrica, the mother-in-law in town and she would give me a kiss on each cheek and asked why she had not seen me since that day I was at her house.

The dilemmas of unemployment facing Lombardy are similar to the rest of Italy. [54]The discourses around migration in Lombardy is region-specific as it has one of the largest populations of *extracommunitari* communities. The migration of refugees from the Global South carry subsequent fears of loss of national sovereignty in their Global North destinations (Caglar and Glick Schiller 2010). My friend Barbara, a civil servant who administers residency for foreigners, fears losing what she calls the *civiltà* of Italian and regional culture, and not necessarily a fear of non-white bodies. As Brexit passed, I asked her what she thought migration might look for South Asians, if she thought many more would remain in Italy, and she hesitated, then said *vedremo* (we will see). According to Barbara, it was a matter of individual choice whether to learn Italian or remain in Lombardy:

> Bangladeshis are problematic because the women do not work. They also don't learn Italian because they all are here to get to England. But the Indians work hard, both men and women, but they go to England and don't learn Italian. I don't understand why some men speak for women during these interviews for residency.

> We just don't do that in Italy. Southeast Asians such as the Vietnamese and Cambodians learn the language. Chinese follow the work and do not bother integrating. They just come and go in their own worlds and don't integrate at all.

As I became acquainted with Bangladeshi agricultural workers, I learned a different story. Nearly every Cambodian I met was taking Italian language lessons at night, in addition to their factory jobs. Volunteers teach the evening classes for foreigners to learn Italian. Cambodians told me I could eventually find factory work if I wanted to apply for a work visa, but Bangladeshis did not have this option. Bangladeshi men do most of the agricultural labor, often not having enough after sending remittances. The men were also overcharged for rent.

After Barbara dropped me off, on my way to Café Sport, I regularly passed by a house where six Bangladeshi men live. They rented it for 800 euro a month, and previously it was offered at 1600 euro but no one rented it, so the owners lowered it to 800 euro. Italians had previously rented it for 500 euro. Without labor or housing protections, the workers are charged exorbitant prices in rent. Barbara differentiated among the Asian groups, but without knowledge of their various economic constraints. With the assistance of Cambodian refugees, I also became acquainted with agricultural workers from Bangladesh who socialized daily with Cambodians at Café Sport, a Chinese-run coffee shop, where the men played cards and shared information about organizations such as shelter and employment training daily, to better understand interreligious solidarities and their limitations.

I realized that by minimizing the mayor's campaign to close the temple, Barbara indicated to me that she may have voted for the rightwing mayor, but the political party

did not seem to make a difference locally. It must be noted that analyses of only Italian political parties of the region has its limitations. As a result of the historical prominence of leftist parties in the region with interjections of right-wing policies the northern regions, the local mayor is registered under a civil party with no stated political affiliations. Furthermore, on the issue of migration and refugees, both sides argue for a socialist state and who will receive the benefits has increasingly become a point of unity (Melossi 2020). When I attended Barbara's son's school play, the mayor made an appearance but no one greeted her. The parents were busily looking for their children on the stage. The Northern League began in the Lombardy, and though the party won, the margin was rather slim.

In the early 2000s, more migrants began to cross the Mediterranean, becoming the deadliest border in the world, making Italy a significant arrival point to Europe (Albahari 2015). Albahari's work details the "boot" region in the South of Italy. He argues that the unregulated role of the Italian navy makes uncertain the fate of arrivals who make it alive. According to Albahari, along the southern Italian coasts, the ships are gesticulated by the state-funding Italian navy. The police arbitrarily manage decisions regarding asylum. Lombardy can be described as the region geographically opposite of Sicily. Despite being initially resettled in the South of Italy, and then migrating north for work opportunities and joining friends and family, Southeast Asian refugees are absent from this national narrative of arrivals.

Despite the significance of Lombardy as a destination for secondary migration, the narrative of Southeast Asian refugees in Italy is completely absent from contemporary

discussions of race and difference in Italy. In Italian, the term 'i boatpeople', taken directly from English to describe Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in the late 1970s. The 'i' which denotes the definite article for plural and masculine nouns in Italian, marks it as an Italian noun phrase. This term refers to the Southeast Asian refugees who fled on boats, that is, Asian bodies in Mediterranean waters, but as something in the past, and elsewhere. I was surprised to hear the term only in conversation with my Italian neighbors. The term widely used in newspapers and also in every day speech is *i barconi,* (large boats) which stand in for racialized images of bodies in the Mediterranean arriving on the southern shores of Italy. While the English use of boatpeople specifically indicates a relation to US imperialism, the image of the *barconi* the large boats, in fact in Italian, looks at it in a European Union painting it as an ahistorical crisis in Italy. An ethnographic study on Cambodian refugees in Italy lends a much-needed critical race analysis to the changing demographics in the EU. Through Buddhism, Cambodian refugees impress spiritual practices onto the strong Catholic forms of caretaking in region.

Conclusion

Vivid and startling changes in refugee migration have occurred in Europe in this millennium. One key case is Italy, which has increasingly become a destination as opposed to a country in transit for refugees (cf. Caponio 2008; Perlmutter 2014). Italy remains at the center of debates on refugee migration in Europe and the integration of refugees are predominant in the news. The national population continues to grapple with in the context of economic liberalization as refracted through regional and local policies

on migrants. In Lombardy, as in the rest of Europe, discourses on immigration began to be delineated between White and Other *extracommunitari*, in what is termed the new Savage Slot (Silverstein 2005). The recent migration of refugees from Africa and Syria has become a national point of strife. In Lombardy, as in the rest of Italy, the demographic shifts of increasing numbers of *extracommunitari* has spurred institutes and studies that address notions of integration into Italian society. Though the upsurge in migration may be more recent on the front pages of newspapers, they speak to long standing migrations into the region of Lombardy, that began to increase sharply in the 1990s. Around this time, Cambodian refugees who were resettled in Rome then dispatched to the southern regions to work in agriculture began to make secondary migrations to Lombardy. Cambodians in exile appropriated land and established clear physical boundaries to house sacred religious and community spaces.

The chapter historicized the resettlement of Cambodian refugees in Lombardy through the term *ksae*. As the tax agent suggested, in Italy, the fears in part come from the racial meanings produced surrounding labor practices. European anxieties about the global economic dominance of China and the "Asian tigers" play out locally (Pieke 2014). Cambodian refugees in Lombardy do not fit the profile of dominant narratives surrounding the Chinese in Italy. During my research, the families I encountered were for the most part unionized workers in Italian-owned textile factories. For Cambodian refugees, the temple is emplaced in the Khmer concept of *ksae* (literally 'strings' or relations) to resist processes of racialization that construct them as Chinese, and elide their experiences as refugees. The connotation in Khmer behind the term *ksae*, is the

cultural know-how in social relationships and within society. The *ksae* connections brought Cambodians to Lombardy for work opportunities following initial resettlement in other parts of Italy. The concept of *ksae* makes cultural sense as a point of connection between being Cambodian, Italian, and Buddhists that are part of global diasporas that extend around the globe. The *ksae* is also a way for them to differentiate themselves from being racialized as Chinese, by attending to their specific religious and work identities.

The Buddhist temple is in a remote area with no Cambodians and other Asians, within increasing xenophobic rhetoric. Despite the outward support of the temple, this acceptance is conditional. Though the mayor welcomed me with open arms, I sensed that as a woman of color, I did not fit her Five Star platform. Barbara later told me she ran on a 2018 platform, though not publicly announced in the newspapers, everyone was aware of her plan to remove the temple. Barbara assured me it was just politics, but there were moments when on my way to the temple, as I crossed the grey cobblestone plaza, that the Five Star supporters would wave their flags with slogans and pictures of Salvini. I would walk quickly not looking up. The presence of Cambodian Buddhists in this region illustrates the value of examining how religion figures into global movements against forms of racialized and gendered state violence in the face of rising populist politics.

In Lombardy, the Cambodian temple had previously invited local Italian politicians to their celebrations. Buddhist practices became a way for Cambodian refugees in Italy to mollify European anxieties about the economic decline of the West and the fear of transcultural forces such as Confucianism. As textile workers for national unionized companies, Cambodian refugees differentiate themselves from Chinese in the

area as dedicated workers in unionized Italian firms, jobs they have secured because of local knowledge of *ksae*, both Italian and Khmer. At the same time, they frequent Chinese-run establishments such as Café Sport, preferring them over Italian ones. For the local Catholic community, the temple is framed within seemingly innocuous Orientalist discourses that pit Buddhism as a tolerable form of Otherness, that officializes fears of Islam through tolerating the peacefulness of the temple.

The final section engaged in the fraught meanings of Buddhism for the national population in town through the idiom of Catholicism. The temple is a space of negotiating localized identities that narrate their experiences in postwar Italy, and the deregulation policies in Lombardy that leave many unprotected in retirement. National discourses on migration paint the interests of the *extracommunitari* (outside the community, EU) or code word for Global South and the national population as polar opposites. In Lombardy, however, questions of integration and racialized difference have long been at the forefront of daily life. Lombardy has the highest density of extracommunitari in the nation. I argue that for the local population, the temple is a space where they negotiate the disjuncture between national discourses of difference, and the everyday realities of a region that has long been a sought-after destination for labor both from the South of Italy, and around the world.

I also examined the various iterations of Orientalism in Lombardy. At the national level, Orientalism is a framework that views the South of Italy as backwards. Through religious practices, the Cambodian diasporic temple negotiates the interplay of politics and religion in a region where the populist party the Northern League began and remains

strong. I suggest that these forms of belonging exclude the experiences of Southeast Asian refugees because they allow for continued programs of austerity by the Italian state.

Though I did not conduct detailed ethnographic research at the factories because they shut due to COVID-19, I was told that salaries were regularly delayed for five or six months at a time. The women assured me they were eventually paid in full. The monk on the other hand, revealed that sometimes these wages were never paid. The disparity between what the monk recounted in relation to the wages and Chandra made me realize that these narratives were packaged for me as an outsider. [55] I became familiar with the town residents and gained trust but always within limitations. Moreover, these are family-run and unionized positions that are supported by the Italian state, but salaries and union involvement seem to be mediated by race. With an emphasis on the economic structures, studies on transnational migrations run the risk of replicating the periphery/core model which often neglects the roles of states, which is particularly significant in the context of the Italian textile industry in Lombardy

Following an afternoon Sunday ritual offering of food to the monk at the temple, Chandra and others pruned the trees. In the orchards, the orange trees narrated a history of seasonal labor in the South of Italy on plantations. Inside the villa, only the monk was seated as everyone else stood around the dining table with their assorted dishes assembled with care on the lilac dotted tablecloth. After lunch, the worshippers cleared the weeds and haul large garbage bags of these to be according to the local trash calendar. These merit making practices revolve around caretaking of the grounds and each other.

Behind the temple, the stretches of lemongrass are part of a tradition of papaya, mango trees and mint leaves that dot Southeast Asian diasporic gardens planted by the many Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Cham, refugees who had fled their homes for new lands. The Buddhist laity in Lombardy have built *ksae* by adapting to, and drawing from, local cultures in continuing Buddhism as a sense of modern and Buddhist selves. That is, as an Italianized population, they mold Buddhist practices with their specific histories to shape their desires to simultaneously belong and maintain difference from an increasingly populist politics. As religious and racialized minorities, they inadvertently engage in a local politics of worthiness. In doing so, they extend and amplify transnational worlds of modern Cambodian Buddhism.

Endnotes

[38] In the US, sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) contend that race must be included a central factor in analyses of alterity. Though Omi and Winant focus on the US, their theory of "racial meanings" which are produced discursively and through imagery, may also be generative in the Italian context. This chapter begins to trace the "racial meanings" produced through interactions with the temple through ethnographic details as mediated by religion. I propose that in Italy, racial meanings are produced through three main binaries, all of which exclude Southeast Asian refugees: 1) representations of the crisis of migration is produced through images of Black bodies coded as barconi in Italian; 2) discourses around religious difference are underpinned by Islamophobia in Europe, without any studies on Buddhists; 3) and alterity in Italy is historically between North and South regions through the lens of industrial capitalism, despite the fact that global capital and gender figure significantly into Italian policies of liberalization. Currently, the dominant modes of belonging exclude Southeast Asian refugees entirely as they are equated with fears of China and its economic rise.

[39] After waiting for a while, I was led into an adjoining room with a counter, and where, the official business seemed to take place. I produced my documents, passport, letter for the scholarship. The skinny man, tanned with longish hair, maybe in his early 50s, it's hard to tell as the leathery skin from too much sun seems to age people prematurely. He had unsightly moles on his neck and cheeks maybe from sunbathing so often in the hot sun and getting burned at times. Nonetheless, I think there was some kind of large banner, which I wish I could have taken a picture of, which said something like, if everyone paid their taxes, we wouldn't be in this mess or something like that. The leathery thin tax guy, shaped like a tree branch on the ground, dried out, and smelled of cigarette smoke. In fact, on the way out of the building he was smoking with some other people as I waved goodbye, passing them. I heard him tell the other men I was American. It felt somewhat like a gauntlet walking through there. [Field notes, September 23, 2020]

[40] The definition of *italianità* by Rofel and Yanagisako is grounded in ethnographic research that traces the transnational coproduction of *italianità* by Italian and Chinese firms as collaborations, rather than invoking images of these groups as inherently antagonistic. It is important to note that the term *italianità* may also be associated with fascism. Historian Philip V. Cannistraro (1972) explains, "The Novecento movement, with its emphasis on Roman styles and *Italianità*, its rejection of the recent past, and its embracing of cultural nationalism, clearly reflected the nationalist basis of fascist cultural theories" (124). When Cambodians in Italy perform *italianità* it turns these images of nationalist purity on its head, thus I use the more expansive and transnational view of *italianità* as defined by Rofel and Yanagisako. Their definition makes visible the

processes of global capital that brought Cambodian refugees to Lombardy. I was consistently told that the Italian firms that employ Cambodians has requested Asian women. This prompted the families I met to make secondary migrations to Lombardy in the 1990s from other parts of Italy.

[41] See Douglas (2005) for Cambodian Buddhist practices in Seattle, Smith-Hefner (1999) for Boston, Massachusetts; McLellan (2009) and McLellan and White (2015) for Ontario, Canada; Yamada (2004) and Lee (2010) for Long Beach, California, and Ong (2003) for Oakland, California. Becker, Beyene, and Ken (2000) mention the role of Buddhism and premonitions for Cambodian seniors in the Bay Area of Northern California.

[42] http://www.searac.org/sites/default/files/STATISTICAL%20PROFILE%202010.pdf For more on secondary migrations among Cambodian Americans by US region: for Long Beach, California, see Chan (2004, 2010), Curtis (2013), Chhim (2003), Quintiliani and Needham (2013), Needham and Quintiliani (2010); for the East Coast, see Khoeun (2003), Kiang (1994), Lam (2003), Nol (2003), Shah (1994); for the Pacific Northwest, see Meas (2003) and Tauch (2003). For Cambodians resettled in New Zealand, see North (1995).

[43] Alessandra Corrado (2011: 196-197) discusses how the seasonal laborers of Rosarno, a town of about 15,000 in Calabria, a region in the south, is done primarily by those from Eastern Europe, Africa and Maghreb. The workers are further subjected to the regulations of organized crime in the town. The Cambodian refugees describe their years picking oranges and making shoes as plantation labor in the early 1980s. It is surprising how these recent histories are completely unknown in Italy. Corrado's findings are useful for my study because in looking at the South as a destination for labor, she is proposing a model beyond the North and South model, with an emphasis on the South as a destination itself.

[44] See Parreñas ([2001] 2015) for more on Filipina migrant workers in Italy

[45] Perhaps it was the advent of COVID-19 in Lombardy, but I did not find the Model Minority to be useful at all as a framework for describing the experiences of Asian bodies in Italy. For this reason, I use the term Orientalism as produced through these popular images in Italy. Asian American scholars have long argued that the term Orientalism has to be located in space and time. For example, in the US, within the discourses of multiculturalism, it is not just merely about being a Model Minority, but also functions to create discourses of criminalization of Black and Latinx communities. James Kyung-Jin Lee (2015) explains this process of racialization of Asian Americans as "the racial innocence of the Asian American subject" (172). The discursive innocence of the Asian American works to dialectically produce and reproduce the criminalization of Brown and Black bodies.

[46] See also Thea Strand (2012) for a discussion of the changing role of dialects in Europe as claims to celebrate local pride. Strand ethnographically details the celebration of a winning dialect contest in rural Norway.

[47] I borrow the term enquote from Jones and Schieffelin (2009) who explore how the use of be+like in Instant Messaging signals a form of emotion to follow. For me, when my neighbors Mauro and Lucia would approach me, instead of be+like, they said "You've studied. Tell me what you think about this" and it would be followed by a broad topic that they waited for me to expound on. This surprised me because in the US, I am rarely asked for any opinion on academic topics. This could be anti-intellectualism in the US, but also, in Italy, there is a practice called *fare discorso*, which for me feels like the art of discussing topic in everyday life. I noted that after dinner, Barbara's older son stayed at the table to *fare discorso* with the adults while the younger middle schooler left the table to watch TV. See Ochs, Pontecorvo and Fasulo (1996) for a comparative study of discourses surrounding food during dinner at Italian and American families. In the case of Mauro and Lucia, I think class played a role in how they tried to negotiate my physical presence as an American academic but also Asian. This happened often with Italians I knew as they would ask for my thoughts on topics like inequality, race, and overall American society. But also, people wanted to know my thoughts on Italian society. In my book club, I mostly listened but the moderator and the other women wanted to know my opinions on each of the books and contemporary Italian topics and would ask me directly.

[48] Probably due to the rural area and isolated feelings I intermittently experienced, during my fieldwork, I relied on old friendships in nearby regions for support. I have known my Italian friends Mirko and Elena for twenty years. They are proudly from Turin. They invited me to spend Christmas 2019 with them. It is always interesting to listen to Italians talk about other regions. They checked up and asked with a laugh *in mezzo alla pianura* (in the middle of nowhere) how my research was going living with the *leghisti*, or those from the Northern League political party, basically how life with the right-wingers was going. I arrived in Turin to join them on Christmas Eve. They made fresh wheat pasta topped with tomato sauce. It was followed by gelatin meat that was Elena's grandmother's special dish. Their vegan 23-year old son Emmanuelle who was visiting from Florence, looked disgusted at the gelatin. I helped peel and arrange slices of oranges for dessert. We played cards. Dinner was followed by an evening mass. They took me to a beautiful church with candles and thick smoke. We stood up and down several times in the dark ancient building in the historic center of town. After mass, we had glasses of prosecco at a local bar, with mostly friends of Elena. We chatted and drank until 2:30am and then returned to the apartment where I immediately passed out on the couch. The next day, Christmas lunch was seafood (and Emmanuelle's vegan onion baked concoction) at the grandmother's and fifteen extended family members. They invited me to go skiing in the alps of Courmayeur for New Year's, where they had a cottage, but I declined, telling them I needed to do my fieldwork.

[49] For more on Boccaccio see for example Levenstein (1996). Giovanni Boccaccio was an Italian author who lived in the 14th century. He is most known for the *Decameron* which centers on stories while quarantined during the Plague. I read the *Decameron* in original language as an undergraduate as all my upper division courses were written, read, and debated in Italian. I read and researched a lesser-known work of his, *Caccia di Diana* for my final paper. I fondly recall the debates in class always centered around gender. I found it somewhat fitting that I revisited his work as I wrote in quarantine during a pandemic, and his theme of regeneration seemed more salient than ever.

[50] See also Tom Boellstorff (2008), who refers to online games as spaces that bridges the gap between technology and the world. He elaborates, "In using the term "techne," I will draw upon a philosophical distinction between knowledge (episteme) and technology or art (techne), examining how virtual selfhood is becoming predicated on the idea that people can craft their lifeworlds through intentional creativity" (25).

[51] For more on policies of immigration and the Italian education system, see for example Liddicoat and Díaz (2008), and Santagati (2016). More ethnographically detailed studies of immigrant children in Italian schools would be useful to better understand the relationship of immigrants to the Italian state. For example, Allison (1991) ethnographically details how mothers in Japan make elaborate lunches for their nursery schools. Using Althusser's work, Allison argues that Japanese mothers engage with the state through crafting these lunches, and their subjectivities as moral, gendered citizens. When Pich said that "Khmer food smells" as a reason for cooking it outside of her home, I wonder if she was also performing a sense of gendered italianità. In every Cambodian house I visited, people wore shoes in the house. The self-conversions to Catholicism by the second generation may also be related to these policies at the *asilo* (daycare) both for the national population in the making of the Italian, but also by extension, immigrants in Italy. Vanna for example told me that her two children were involved in various milestones that were administered by the local elementary schools such as learning to ride a bike.

[52] Mauro and Lucia had a newspaper article cut out about the fires in Australia, describing the koalas and kangaroos, and then asked me about my views on climate change [Fieldnotes, January 3, 2020]

[53] Davide Però (2007) ethnographically details how in Bologna, historically one of the largest centers for Communist movements, without a critical lens toward race in Italy, the Left is unable to effectively meet the needs of the Moroccan laborers in his study.

[54] Italy has one of highest youth outmigration numbers in the European Union (Montanari and Staniscia 2017). During my field work, Brexit passed and discussions loomed around the status of Italians working in England. See Ricucci (2014) for a sociological study on second generation immigrants in Italy. As far as I know, there need to be more detailed ethnographic examples of the experiences of immigrant youth in Italy, and their

motivations for leaving the country. My sense is that young Cambodians who were born and raised in Italy, such as Alice and Alessandra, the daughters of Pich, moved to English-speaking countries as part of a larger trend in Italy of high rates of unemployment among youth. One of the Cambodians who were born and raised in Italy told me that without a car, he cannot even work. I completely understand having tried to use the *corriera* busses in the area. If I did not take the 6am one, the following bus was so unreliable that I would end up waiting for hours if I did not take the first one. If the national Italian population of youth faces high rates of unemployment, I imagine for Italian-raised Cambodians, there must be an element of race in the hiring processes. One of the Cambodians raised in Italy I met, worked as a Korean-language teacher, having studied it for her laurea degree. In part, knowing an Asian language and taught by an Asian body likely would garner more employment opportunities.

[55] See also Zavella (1993) for an example of the limitations of insider and outside

Chapter 2: The Buddhist Monk Negotiates the Local and Global

> Practices are not simply the result of an individual having been placed in a physical, economic, or material space, but of the attempt to live socially in ways which reflect how we understand and experience our circumstances. Those forms of experiencing have been built into the ways human beings live, into their practices (Stuart Hall [1983] 2016:33) [56]

This chapter expands on the seminal work of Nina Glick-Schiller (1992) who coined the phrase "lived simultaneity" in which she argues that transnational migrants negotiate between national, local and transnational spaces simultaneously. It ethnographically details the opportunities and constraints available to Cambodian refugees as they co-constitute Buddhist subjectivities. I detail the decision processes of the Buddhist Council to highlight the experiences of Cambodian exiles in their constitution as belonging to the moral world of the Buddhist through discussion, and transparent temple expenditures. The Eight Fold Path of course is aspirational for all lay Buddhists, and for this reason, many controversies arise at temples. The disagreements arise because of potential breaks in the interdependent relations and reciprocal financial exchanges that collectively finance a Buddhist temple. Stories abound about the mismanagement of funds at temples. [57] In Italy, however, with only one temple, how monies are funneled must be agreed upon by the majority, otherwise the temple will cease to exist due to lack of financial support from the community.

The disagreements over funding a band to perform in the evening following Khmer New Year at the temple were generational, but more so, reflected the differing interpretations of Buddhist reciprocity. The anthropologist James Ferguson (2015) argues for ethnographically recognizing culturally informed ways of caretaking and reciprocity:

> A self-consciously "African" socialism explicitly distinguished itself from Marxism by making distribution central to its concerns, taking practices of sharing and mutualism that were understood to be positive legacies of African tradition as a paradigm for a sharing, distributive socialist society (53).

The funding decisions of the Buddhist Council negotiate the moral trajectory of the temple through the caretaking of the monk. The processes of the political and religious decisions need to be examined, in terms of how practitioners embed and change the structures around them. At the monthly Buddhist Council meetings, they produce spaces of egalitarian planning. The local politics of Lombardy, Catholic discourses, and Cambodian refugee histories shape desires to simultaneously belong and maintain difference as Buddhists through lived simultaneity.

In this chapter, I discuss the various perspectives at a Buddhist Council meeting. I propose that detailing how Cambodian Buddhists work within their local and transnational constraints and opportunities provide ways to rethink the figure of the refugee within anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies. I also trace the mobilities and constraints of Venerable Sokhom Hem, the monk at the temple as he travels across the European Union. The caretaking of the monk by the community is directly at odds with the figure of the monk as a Noble Savage living within a Utopia within Christendom, as coined by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003).

Local Caretaking: Negotiations of Merit and Funding

On a grey, overcast, and gloomy morning in October 2019, the Buddhist laity council invited me to observe their monthly meeting. About twenty people had driven through the foggy narrow roads, from as far away as Milan and Verona, to huddle on the

couches in their leggings, sweaters and brown loafers. The formal Buddhist Council meeting began with a morning ritual offering of food to the monk. The monk took leave to the room with the Buddha statue. Each person had brought a dish and cut up fruit. Everyone took turns scooping mounds of stir fry of red bell peppers, pineapple and chunks of pork with black pepper, and a sour tamarind soup of beef and celery into their bowls. For dessert, the Buddhist council had arranged a platter of peeled orange slices and pineapple chunks neatly ordered on a white plate. I waited my turn to scoop rice and pieces of pork. Following dessert, the president of the Buddhist Council took out a *moka*, a colloquial term in Italian for a stove top coffee maker, and little white plastic cups were passed around for shots of espresso. Two women washed the dishes then everyone went to the room that housed the Buddha statue to start the meeting. The table denoted careful community planning to make merit.

Following the meal, everyone retreated to the room that housed the Buddha statue. This was the only room at the temple where one had to take off their shoes. In the kitchen, dining room and other areas of the first floor, it was customary to wear shoes. It was dark in the house as the wooden shutters were closed to save energy. Inside of the room with the Buddha statue, on the wall to the left of Venerable Sokhom Kem hung between 25 and 30 framed pictures of shaved-head monks, some with orange robes while others were framed head shots. Pictures were lined in rows of 4 or 5 in columns that aligned all the way up to the ceiling delineating a genealogy of monks. The room felt like the home of someone's grandparents, filled with ornate objects I knew I could not touch. In a sense, it produced an aura of respectful sacredness.

The temple is a religious space to build community in diaspora through the caretaking of the monk and a reaffirmation of relations between different members. The monk was seated on a couch waiting for each person to grab a square cushion from the stack in the corner and placed it on the floor. On the table in front of the monk, there was dried powdered ginger someone made for him in Cambodia, a glass thin tall bottle of *preeŋ kyal* (common essential oil sometimes made of eucalyptus),[58] and some powdered turmeric mixed in with honey, as well as some already sweetened chamomile tea. Some of the women later told me they were concerned about the amount of lemongrass tea the monk consumed daily. Apparently, drinking lemongrass tea causes loose stools, they said. When talking about the weather, the monk told me that sometimes when it was warm, he walked the path along where the concrete canal runs, along the fields for exercise. In Italy, the monk took care of himself physically through nutritious foods and drinks that were a part of his life in Cambodia. The temple space where the monk rests in the afternoons was furnished with care.

The flowers and candles formed an appropriate de facto personal space where monk Venerable Sokhom Kem seemed most at ease surrounded by Buddha depictions embellished with aesthetic markers in the *vihara* main worship area. White roses in a vase complemented the wall of the five depictions of the glittered deities sitting in meditation position. Venerable Sokhom Kem sat behind four, white unlit candles half a foot long, two white candles were closer together and paired off while the other two stood upright coupled off apart. Three curved copper holders with covers all identically football-sized to the left of him near the vase of white roses completed this sacred space.

Coming from a warm climate, Lombardy was freezing. It took an entire day to heat up the house with a radiator thus the heating was never turned off. The community made sure to maintain the material comforts of the monk. I noticed that a space heater in the temple was placed in the bathroom downstairs. In his first year of tenure, the monk had a serious cold that lasted several weeks. Unaccustomed to the cold, he made sure to stay in the heated room which houses the Buddha statue, where I normally found him on weekday afternoons. [59] Venerable Sokhom Kem's seated position in front of the Bodhi tree depiction amidst fresh cut flowers, smooth ivory-colored candles, and glitter depictions of deities made him clearly visible to community visitors. The colorful lights draped around the Buddha statue and the glittery fabrics demonstrated the divine.

As the members of the Buddhist council filed into the room, they paid respects to the Triple Gem. Upon entering the room, adherents performed physical displays of devotion. Seated so that one's toes do not face the monk, one t*wainkom* (bows) toward *prepot* Buddha, *pretauh* Dhamma, then *presang* Sangha. Later, on a weekday afternoon, I asked about the three bows. Venerable Sokhom Kem explained:

> If you look closer you will notice people do not pay homage properly because they are unaware of the details involved in the *sampeah* (greeting). Clasping the hands depends on who you are greeting that both your thumbs touch your forehead when you are greeting Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, thumbs touch your nose to greet your parents because they are your breath and life, thumbs touch the mouth to greet your teachers and your hands are at your heart to greet your *mutapeak* your friends and equals.

I noted that in fact, none of the visitor *sampeahs* were at the forehead. One man in his 60s walked in, kneeled *twainkom* then left without speaking to anyone. No one was surprised that the man came in just to pay homage and leave. Everyone I observed followed this

ritual upon entrance into the worship area. It is not just physically bowing paying homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the sangha but it includes another physical ritual.

As the months passed, I got to know the members of the Buddhist council. I later joined the women as they travelled long distances to a Chinese market to purchase spices, ginger root, and tropical fruit such as mango and pineapple in preparation for the Sunday offerings to the monk. In their kitchens, they stored the goods in deep freezers chock full of ground spices tightly sealed into plastic jars with bright red lids. The small Chinese market was located across the way from a Polish market. It had an assortment of glass jars of kimchi, small plastic bottles of San Benedetto brand sparkling water near the cash register, and bottles of the Squid Brand fish sauce from Thailand. As far as I know, the women I went with did not speak any Chinese, but thanked the cashier saying thank you in Mandarin with a smile. It was clear they were frequent customers. I helped cook the food and bought a whole roasted chicken or fruit for the occasions.

The two main groups present at the Buddhist Council meeting were Wat Khmer, the religious arm, and the Cambodian Cultural Association, a cultural component. Organizational practices at the wat are egalitarian to ensure monies are funneled with transparency. The power is shared within the Buddhist council, which is further separated into two wings. On the agenda was a deliberation over how temple donations should be allotted in the upcoming Khmer New Year in April 2020. Simultaneously, the year 2020 was also the 40th anniversary of the arrival of Cambodian refugees in Italy. The discussion revolved around whether funds should go into hiring a live Cambodian rock band for the evening at New Year's. The other discussion was whether the separate entity

the Cambodian Cultural Organization of Italy should be allowed to hold a fundraiser for the Italian Red Cross at the temple. In the temple's founding, men were the public leaders that negotiated with Italian politicians, but behind the scenes, at Buddhist Council meetings, the laity shared the duties.

Each person spoke in turn at the meeting. It began when an Italian-raised Cambodian named Giorgio circulated a clipboard with a sign in sheet. In 2012, Giorgio and his wife, Vanna, a woman from Cambodia, founded the Cambodian Cultural Association of Italy. Giorgio was born in Cambodia but his parents fled to Thailand when he was a toddler. They resettled in Lombardy directly, where Giorgio grew up. Though the Cambodian Cultural Association is housed in the same location as Wat Khmer, Giorgio explained in Italian that his goal in creating the organization was to engage more with mainstream Italian society. Giorgio spoke little Khmer, though he knew some, thus we communicated in Italian.

Giorgio was one of few Italian-raised Cambodians I met at the temple. When he had gone to visit his parents' village in Cambodia, he met Vanna, a woman from Cambodia and they had two children, both of whom were in middle school. On some Saturdays, after everyone left except for the couple and their children, we played English word games while the monk joined us and provided pens and stationery. Vanna clearly related to me that she supported her husband in using temple funds to hire a band. Vanna stood up, hesitated, then said in Khmer that donating funds to the Italian Red Cross would help the temple fulfill social obligations in larger society thereby raising the reputation of Cambodians in the area.

When Cambodians arrived in Italy, they relied on the Italian Red Cross for resettlement. The planning of the 40th year anniversary fundraising event for the Italian Red Cross included giving the donations to the organization that resettled the families forty years prior. On Saturdays, Giorgio would drive to meet with the local Cambodian band about their performance at the event. I sat with Vanna, chatting with the monk at the temple. For Giorgio, raising funds on behalf of Cambodians was important in maintaining the image of a united Cambodian community. For this reason, he added, raising money for the Italian Red Cross is a legitimate use of temple space. In addition, he concluded, hiring a band would garner more funds for this purpose. The Cambodian rock band was comprised of Cambodians who fled to Italy with his family as teenagers, now in their early fifties, and bilingual in both Khmer and Italian. The singer only spoke Khmer as she had migrated as an adult to join family in Italy. Since all the members spoke Khmer and performed songs deemed classics in the Cambodian repertory, they were regarded as a legitimate band to proudly display Khmer culture in the region through a fundraiser for the Italian Red Cross.

For the couple, the fundraiser would provide a sense of shared merit produced and donated to the Italian Red Cross and the larger Catholic majority. However, for older survivors, the temple was regarded as a piece of Cambodia, of their specific struggles and resilience that should be clearly delineated apart from larger society. The increased reliance of the fundraisers in the past decade may be rooted in processes of economic liberalization in the region with the increased need to fund social services, but this need has also become a point of symbolic displays of integration, or ways to perform desires

and imaginings of belonging. The temple has become a source of social capital through its participation. The different interpretations of Buddhism by Giorgio and Vanna and the older members showed the differing feelings and visions for the temple.

Critical Refugee Studies scholar Yến Lê Espiritu (2006) finds that in the US, Vietnamese American refugees were expected to show gratitude despite the US imperialist war in Vietnam. Scholars of Asian American studies have long argued that for Asian bodies, belonging has been conditional, set by notions of white supremacy as to what behaviors or ways of being are acceptable. Historically, in the US, the racialized Asian body oscillated between the Model Minority and Yellow Peril contextualized within broader discourses of Indigenous dispossession and racial capitalism. However, in practice, there is no pendulum that swings, instead racialization is embedded in everyday life, and decisions are often made based on a particular set of circumstances. For Giorgio who was raised in Italy, Buddhism is a framework for Cambodians in the area to construct subjectivities within the local politics of Lombardy. By not raising funds for the Italian Red Cross to show gratitude, Giorgio and Vanna feared that Cambodians would be constructed as ungrateful immigrants. For the older folks, the temple was a space to serve their emotional needs as religious and ethnic minorities, when funding may not grant them equality and belonging.

After a latent silence, Ming, a Cambodian woman in her early 60s, in a meticulous Italian autumn outfit, an elegant yellow knit shirt, pearl necklace, and beige suede jacket, stood up and spoke passionately. She said, “Everyone puts in whatever five euro they may have because we are a Buddhist temple. If they don’t trust us [the

committee], there will be no more donations." She then looked directly at the monk, where he sat quietly in the room where he spends his afternoons on weekdays. In the context of the Buddhist temple, following the funds takes on meanings of making merit. There is a collective devotion to making sure that donations are dispensed to make merit.

For Ming, the temple had already paid their dues locally. In 2015, Cambodians in the area represented culture and religion in the town's Festival of Solidarity event. Wat Khmer Italy was the only ethnic and religious minority organization among the Italian constellation of local nongovernmental organizations participating in the festival to raise funds for local Italian charities. While the Festival was mandated by the Vatican in 2005, it has become localized as a grassroots organization that residents use in order to raise funds for organizations deemed worthy in the context of the retrenchment of the Italian state. As Ming suggested, they needed to raise their own funds as they had already raised funds for local Italian charities.

While in the field in Lombardy, I regularly scrolled the town's social media page for updates on attempted break-ins during the winter and warnings of impending extreme weather. A picture of the mayor congratulating a South Asian woman appeared on my feed. I noted it because it was unusual. The two women were shaking hands and smiling directly at the camera. The caption under the picture revealed that the woman just passed an Italian language exam. The image supported a typology of integration similar to functionalist notions of assimilation and conditional existence that Cambodians navigate as racialized subjects. Giorgio and Vanna made crucial points in advocating for the temple as an opportunity to be active in local politics. I had initially considered

participant observation at the mayoral offices but sensed my presence would be unwanted considering the politics in town.

With the election of the populist mayor in 2018, raising money for the Italian Red Cross could show political involvement. Yet at the same time, as Ming suggested, the temple is first and foremost, a transnational Buddhist temple that buffers against racialization. Despite the good-natured intentions expressed by Giorgio and Vanna, for Ming and her advocates, the temple should not claim visibility within the reality of xenophobic populist politics and COVID-19, in Lombardy. Later, as the temple shut down following the decree for religious spaces due to the pandemic, in that particular moment of anti-Asian violence, the virtual temple was a space for Cambodian refugees to grapple with their experiences as long-term residents that both fulfill the role of the innocuous ideological model minority, but simultaneously embody racialized difference. During the meeting, through discussions surrounding the temple, all parties involved negotiated how to confront these politics of racialized difference in contemporary populist Europe. For survivors, the temple expresses resilience and memory of life in Cambodia, and should be guarded against physically and symbolically, as articulated by Ming.

Transnational Considerations in Temple Deliberations

Despite the significance of local politics in Lombardy for Cambodian survivors, these monetary decisions are inherently transnational over local. [60] Anthropologists have traced transnational monies through the form of remittances, but also through the political implications seen as nation-states implemented legislation that would include rights and

privileges for those in diaspora. Johanna Lessinger (1992) finds that in India, the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) visas grant Indians in diaspora rights and privileges such as tax exemptions that create tensions with the business class in India. Karen Richman (1992) shows how Aristide referred to Haitians in diaspora as the "Bank of the Diaspora" (196). Rosina Wiltshire (1992) finds that Trinidadians in New York City may turn to Baptist churches to contest national identities. Cambodians refugee Buddhists in Italy staunchly refuse the funds.

Though, as factory workers, the community was still in the process of paying off the 200,000 euro, they wanted a temple that reflects their beliefs. The community said they had become closer working together, as people volunteered to mix and lay concrete, painted the outside of the temple, and regularly cleaned the six-bathroom stalls just outside the courtyard. When I returned home, I saw the temple was raising funds to fix a leaky roof in the large hall that had been transformed rather gracefully into a worship area complete with fifty fold-up chairs, a furnace, and paved concrete. They were also raising funds to purchase the grassy area adjacent to the temple and expand it. At the Buddhist council meeting, people stood up, and took turns to speak. Ming wanted to maintain political membership in the transnational Cambodian Buddhist network of temples.

In December 2020, two months after the Buddhist council meeting, Pich, a 53-year-old Cambodian factory worker, later invited me to dinner in her home to meet her daughters both in their mid-20s, Alice and Alessandra. Both daughters were home for Christmas and were excited about meeting an American. The entire dinner was in Italian

to include the Cambodian parents who did not speak English. I was told that Alice and Alessandra spoke English fluently, following two years in England. One was preparing to work in Australia. Pich began to tell me in Khmer about a Thai temple in Rome. The community had worked for years to build a *vihear* or main worship room but they were unable to because of Berlusconi. They recently somehow managed to finally get the permit approved. Pich recounted that the Thai community in Lombardy was all women who were married to Italian men. She said, "Their [the Thai] government helps them pay for temples, financing it all, for example, the *viheah* in the two-million euro range." In contrast, the Cambodian refugees in Italy refused to take money from Cambodian government. One Italian newspaper venue interviewed a Cambodian refugee who stated rather bluntly that it would not be a true temple with funds from the government. The temple actively maintained its space as a transnational space. Similarly, temples in the US refute funds from Cambodia for similar reasons. As political exiles, Cambodians in diaspora have a strong distrust of the Cambodian government (Um 2006:15).

Decisions regarding acceptance of funds are weighed heavily because of their political implications in the ongoing diasporic relationships to Cambodia. In 1993, the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) sponsored the first democratic elections in Cambodia. Foreign aid to Cambodia in the amount of 3 billion dollars poured into the country for infrastructure (US Committee for Refugees 1996: 80). The political party Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif (FUNCIPEC), represented by King Norodom Sihanouk and Prince Ranarridh, won the popular vote that year. Subsequent threats of violence by Hun

Sen, head of the opposition party Cambodia People's Party (CPP) and former Khmer Rouge officer, forced a shared-power decision between FUNCIPEC and CPP in the 1993 elections. Since staging a coup in 1997 in the capital Phnom Penh, the CPP have dominated Cambodian politics. Despite all the criticism, Hun Sen has maintained relative peace in Cambodia following the elections (Osborne 2003). For Cambodians in diaspora, accepting funds for a transnational Buddhist temple was seriously deliberated. As illustrated by Ming as she questioned the use of funds for the Italian Red Cross and a rock band, the Buddhist council made decisions that were implicitly intrastate, negotiating between Italy, Cambodia and across the temples throughout the European Union and the US.

In the US, following the 1997 coup in Cambodia, 400 Cambodian Americans protested in front of Long Beach City Hall, putting pressure on the US government to address the coup as violation of the 1991 Paris Peace Accord which paved the way for the first democratic elections in Cambodia (Bush 1997). Some people in the 1.5 generation who were born in Cambodia but migrated after adolescence to the U.S. went back to Cambodia to try to change the political system (Chey 1997). Cambodians and political analysts alike allege the democratic elections ushered little shift in political power since 1979 (McCargo 2005: 98-106). Until these issues are addressed, taking funds for a Buddhist temple is unconscionable to Cambodians in Italy, if not outright immoral, decidedly outside the bounds of the Buddhist concept of right action, which undergirds these monthly Buddhist council meetings. In Italy, during the icy winters, with time off

from their factory jobs, some travel to Switzerland to continually protest human rights abuses, reinscribing their membership in the larger global Cambodian diasporic network.

Anthropologists have begun to examine cultural and religious conceptions of the body in Cambodian responses to past traumas (cf. Hinton, Um, and Ba 2001). Sotheara Chhim (2013) studies *baksbat* (broken courage), a mode of processing past and current experiences through language and religion. [61] Without these culturally specific studies, models of PTSD render the religious experiences of Cambodian survivors as reactions to trauma without acknowledging that Buddhist practices are also about practices of futurity. In their work on Southeast Asian refugees in the US, Nguyen, Lam, and Ngô (2012) argue that due to the replication of nation-state hierarchies within Asian studies, the efforts of Southeast Asian diasporas have been pathologized, depicting them as victims. Rather than being victims of these histories, these disagreements indicate an ongoing interdependent relation between the monkhood and the laypersons. Cambodians are marginal within the discipline of Southeast Asian American studies itself (Um 2015:17). [62] The economic marginalization of some Cambodians does not necessarily mean that they resist capitalism, but rather that these ongoing struggles take on a variety of responses. While some Cambodian survivors in diaspora still actively engage in transnational politics through public protests for human rights in Cambodia (Wong 2013), the vast majority engage in ensuring monies support merit through donations, attending to the monk, and engaging in council politics. Though survivor guilt may be a factor, engagement in building the temple does not come from a place of pathology. These acts

are guided by a sense of right act, right speech, and the collectivity to make meaning in the impermanence of life.

In the US, Asian American Studies scholar Eric Tang (2015) coined the concept of "refugee temporality." Tang studies the lives of Cambodian refugee women who resettled in the Bronx, New York in the early 1980s. He argues that following the period of the Cambodian genocide, the Thai refugee camps and resettlement in the US created a specific Cambodian American temporality, in which surveillance was a characteristic shared among these periods. In Italy and the US, there is a shared vocabulary of mobility among Cambodian refugees who specify the Thai camps they were placed in prior to resettlement in second asylum countries.

I would spend weekdays at their houses sitting in the living room as people casually reminisced about their transnational friendships that began at Thai refugee camps, which was always referred to by its specific name of the camp *Khaodang* or *My Rout*. They were moved from one camp to another based on what was arbitrarily written and posted the next morning. Most laughed saying they had others read their names for them, not knowing where they would go next. Anthropologists Susan Needham and Karen Quintiliani (2008) found that in the refugee camps, one of the first institutions Cambodian refugees recreated were Buddhist temples. The transnational Buddhist temple network built on these friendships and continues to exist as a sense of refugee temporality for Cambodian survivors. I would add that the cultural meanings behind refugee temporality is significant for understanding how survivors have rebuilt their lives.

Suffering is believed to be an accretion of *kam* or negative karma from past lives. Political scientist and scholar of Cambodian American studies Khatharya Um (2015), conducted research on Cambodians in the US and France. Through the method of interviews, she found that many hold *tvuh bon/tvuh bap*, make merit or make negative karma, as a guiding principle in life. When talking to Cambodian survivors about their pasts, the narratives are circular, characterized by a Buddhist sense of temporality undergirding narrations of historical and karmic self. In the US, Jolie Chea (2009) finds these blocks of time are also called "black shirt time" (22), referencing the black clothing that was mandated in the period of the genocide that is also denoted by the term "*semai a Pot*." *Semai* is from the Pali *samaya*, in its adjective form it means "modern or up-to-date" but its noun form denotes a block of time translated as "time, season, tradition, state, doctrine, phase of the moon". That block of time, that *semai,* was marked by Pol Pot as *semai a Pot*. [63]

Ultimately, decisions around temple funds are otherworldly meditations on this life. A colloquial Buddhist phrase says, "when you die you cannot take any material things with you" as a reminder of the religious questions regarding material wealth. "At the temple, these acts of planning are guided by Buddhist aspirations for a better rebirth. Images of Buddhists in diaspora characterize and romanticize transnational migrants which inherently implies that these subjects consciously resist or even naturally oppose capitalism. Yet, as part of Buddhist practices, the laity regards their dharma with practicality through decisions regarding monies. Following the seminal work by Glick Schiller (1992), scholarship on diasporas began to direct attention toward the roles of

migrants transnationally, particularly in the Americas (i.e. Goldberg 1992; Feldman-Bianco 1992; Wiltshire 1992; Rouse 1993). The flow of monies at the temple are not merely economic but are judiciously calculated to engage in these negotiations of morality in the transnational context. Some of the older committee members saw the band as an unnecessary expense given the already limited budget. Ming reasoned that the Italian Red Cross was already a well-resourced institution that did not need donations.

These negotiations of deep circumspect are historically embedded in Cambodian histories of state-imposed violence and dispossessions. For those from the various regions throughout Cambodia, from French Protectorate status (1863-1953) to the present day, Cambodia has experienced seven different forms of government (UNESCO). The status of Cambodia as a nation has been both debated and enforced through volatile nationalisms; Pol Pot's Democratic Kampuchea period is just one of the extremist political periods Cambodians have endured. Furthermore, Cambodia has long been considered a "sideshow" to the US imperialist wars, the continued silences of the experience (Shawcross 1978).

Cambodian survivors who suffered under the Khmer Rouge only recount selective experiences from this period. In the US, Cambodians eclipse all American culpability and thus do not critique the American government in any form; this is a strategy of survival through acceptance of a new home country (Hein 2010: 57). Feeling disempowered politically in the U.S., many first-generation Cambodian have spent the past 30 years interrogating political figures in Cambodia, forming coalitions to usurp the current military regime by organizing global protests and pressuring Washington D.C. (Um

2006:10). Suffering is at the core of Buddhist doctrine. Yet, nearly an entire generation was exterminated. Through these political and religious acts, survivors who are now in their seventies and eighties prepare themselves for a more auspicious rebirth.

The Sangha (Monkhood) on the Move: Religious Mobilities

As the formal Buddhist council started to wrap up the meeting, Pich suddenly stood up and asked the monk a question directly. “Are you happy here? Will you stay?” I was surprised at the directness of the question. Later, at dinner, Pich revealed to me in her home that the monk seemed unhappy. The monk’s lack of knowledge of Italian was one of many concerns for the Buddhist Council. The incumbent monk at the wat in Italy is not a refugee and speaks no Italian, having arrived in 2018 with limited access to Italian language courses. The monk had attended evening language classes in the nearby town of San Pietro where the Cambodian community lived but stopped after a month. The drives were long, in the fog, with the laity driving him back and forth following their shifts at the factory, so the monk began to decline the rides. She worried about his adjustment to life in Italy without the language skills. The temple’s first monk eventually disrobed and moved to Paris to work in the formal economy, “but he was a social monk, so we were glad to see him find his path.” This caretaking act of standing up and speaking out reaffirmed her authority as a Buddhist mother, which are viewed as affirmations of status in Khmer conceptualizations of gender. Though the practice continues, prior to the civil war, in Cambodia, most Cambodian men joined the monkhood, ordaining even temporarily, in order to make themselves more attractive marriage partners for later in

life, if not for the literacy, then for the wisdom and merit accumulated in the act of ordination.

Initially, I did not understand why she asked a question that seemed unrelated to the discussion that took place regarding temple monies. In the end, the presence of a monk is at the core of the well-being of the temple. The space at Wat Khmer is made with regard to the monk's physical and emotional comforts in the protection of the sangha. Particularly in diaspora, the monk is reliant on the laity for tasks such as procuring visas, or driving him to doctor's appointments. The monk's knowledge of Italian is not imperative for maintaining the integrity of the temple. The monk is attentive to and considerate of the Cambodian community. The monk previously attended the evening Italian language courses but given the difficulty with transportation, he decided to stop as he did not want to disturb the *gniet gnom* (men and women) who work so hard during the week. I noticed an English language book in front of him as well as Pali books in the glass casing against the wall.

The sangha is so intertwined with the laity that concerns over the monk's well being and adjustment to Lombardy are discussed using Italian words. This lack of knowledge of Italian however, further isolates him from the long resettled Cambodian refugee community. For this reason, Pich stood up to ask him directly about his well-being. When she stood up at the meeting, speaking clearly and directly to the monk, she wanted to ensure he was at ease because unlike the majority of the community, the monk is not a refugee and does not speak Italian. The temple is the only Cambodian one in Italy. Its landscape performs lively and transpacific worlds and histories that gave rise to

new forms of Cambodian lifeways in rural Lombardy. One of these modalities of space-making is the implantation of tall willowy lemon grass stalks that sway under the grey Northern skies on the temple grounds.

The monkhood is unquestionably the center of Buddhism for Cambodians in diaspora. For this reason, the predilections and the well-being of the monk are considered with deliberation and care. On the dining square wood table adjacent to a large window, the adherents filled the small bowls with snacks of almonds, walnuts, and individually wrapped chocolates. When I went to the temple on the weekdays, no one was there except for the monk and the groundskeeper. The table was adorned with a tablecloth with white jasmine flowers set on a deep blue. Each Sunday, visitors shared a potluck, blessed by the monk, and depending on the season, consisted of lime green honey dew melon, cooked rice, and fried fish, which was delicious. The view from the window looked out to a bunch of bamboo-like stalk trees swaying in the wind. As it warmed up, the birds were chirping loudly, as if they were gathering at a playground.

In the forest Theravada tradition, gardens are not allowed nor food storage, or cooking for oneself (Chah 2016). Yet, because of the relative isolation of the temple, adherents stored cooked food and herbs stored in a rectangular stand-alone freezer. The monk prefers vegetarian Khmer food, and is especially unaccustomed to Italian food saying he does not like tomato sauce. He cooked his own pre-noon meal in the morning, then ate it alone in the silence of the old villa. At the temple, the kitchen was well-stocked with cases. When I opened the fridge, two cups of yogurt were secured on the door. Someone had covered a bowl of Brussel sprouts and spiced beef. The monk had

expressed that Italian espresso was too strong for him. There were two cases of ready-made, individually packaged Starbucks caramel Frappuccino drinks. A plastic sack of peanuts imported from Egypt, tangerines, persimmons, six plums still wrapped in plastic, and a half dozen pack of liters of water were also there. The monk is mostly vegetarian but ate whatever was offered to him. Next to the bowl of beef and Brussel sprouts were bags of lettuce, slightly shriveled with drops of moisture inside the sealed plastic bags. Despite proscription on food storage, Buddhist practices are malleable in practice with the goal of maintaining the well-being of the sangha monkhood.

When Pich stood up and addressed the monk directly, she used the term *dechkun*, the proper language, making the gesture an acceptable form of caretaking. Religious linguistic register is strictly abided by at Wat Samaki. In Khmer language, lexical terms indicate the status between interlocutors. At temples, linguistic boundaries maintain a distinction between monk and layperson. Right speech encompasses a main tenet of all Buddhist practices. The use of language in relation to the monk denotes unpretentiousness. Gender cannot be assumed as the main linguistic characteristic (Bucholtz 2002). Gender and status differences in colloquial speech are collapsed, further foregrounding the boundary and simultaneous interdependency between monkhood and laity. Language provides hierarchical relations which are practiced as spaces of care and morality. These speech practices guide how to relate to our interlocutor as equals but in the face of the monk, religious speech is also a gentle reminder of our humbleness on this earth within the cycles of rebirth.

On a windy afternoon in December 2019, I arrived to find an empty temple. Everyone had already warned me, "Everything stops until January 7th." In the winter, the monk maintains a network of religious visits to his monk friends across Europe. Prior to his departure, he showed me Flixbus ticket, and explained his travel itinerary. He planned to depart on December 22 for Switzerland and meditate there until December 26. From there, he was to head to a Khmer temple in Germany for 2-3 weeks. He explained that on New Year's Eve, people will meet up and have a BBQ, without temple services or the monk being there. In the process of movement across borders, migrants bring with them their religions, sometimes as an interpretation of the migratory journey.

The direct inquiry about the monk's well-being reflected a deep anxiety about the ambiguity of the monk's religious status in Italy. The temple was able to sponsor a monk from Cambodia following years of paperwork. In the US, Cambodian Americans have easily sponsored Buddhist monks through a 1992 law which incorporated religious sponsorship, thereby facilitating a transnational movement of monks (Marston 2004:195). Cambodian monks in the US are able to travel to Buddhist conferences in Australia and return to Cambodia intermittently. Buddhist studies scholar John Marston finds that Cambodian transnational Buddhist laity take pilgrimages to Sri Lanka. In contrast, in Italy without such legislation, the monk does not participate in these pilgrimages. The monk cannot return to see his mother in Cambodia. Instead, he travels throughout the European Union.

In the US, the process of subjectivization of the Cambodian refugee intersects with capital and the politics of being classified as Asian American. Anthropologist Aihwa

Ong (2003) argues that the Carter administration's 1980 Refugee Act created the conditions of belonging for refugees from Southeast Asia. Yet, obtaining citizenship entails more than a legal framework. In particular, the subsequent Reagan presidential terms slowly diminished funding for refugee resettlement. Ong's ethnography traces the role of the Buddhist temple for Cambodian refugees resettled in Oakland, California. Ong argues that the category of "Asian American" harks back to a narrow view of belonging that dismisses the recent Southeast Asian refugees who were produced through legislation, obliterating experiences of Cambodian Americans. The Buddhist temple in Oakland is a way for participants to counter these forms of invisibility.

In Italy, the political situation differs in that the monk's mobility with the EU highlights the long-standing tension between the regional and national governance. In the landmark case of "Berlusconi vs. the region of Emilia Romagna" Berlusconi sued the region of Emilia Romagna for issuing temporary worker visas to migrants without the consent of the centralized government. The judge ruled in favor of the region of Emilia Romagna and in doing so, overrode national legislation, resulting in potential differential categories of refugees in this reconfiguration of the state. The monk who used to travel to three wat Thais in Verona, Treviso and Roma, has since stopped as the congregation sponsored monks directly from Thailand. He regularly visits two Khmer temples in Switzerland, one in the French speaking part, and the other in the German speaking part. The monk also occasionally travels to Cambodian temples in Germany, and maintains regular meetings using WhatsApp with a temple in Norway. In a sense unrecognized under the Italian politics of citizenship, the monk does not really belong to any one state

as he physically creates these transnational Theravada Buddhist networks through travels in Italy and throughout the European Union.

As Buddhists, the temple falls outside the purview of Catholic forms of governance. Kingfisher and Makovsky (2008) call for the closer examination of the state in configurations of citizenship. The emphasis on Catholicism also calls into question Foucault's pastoralism in eliciting forms of religious confessions for serving the state. Giordano (2008), finds that Italian state laws figure prominently in producing the category of the deserving refugee, perceived to be Catholic. Article 18 of the Italian Immigration Law states that victims of sex trafficking are eligible for residency once they undergo Catholic logics of confession with nuns, in order to become legible by the state. In other words, this legislation authorizes gradations of difference through the "refugee" category that are articulated by the Church and the state in this law. Though the monk's mobility does not shift state configurations of deserving refugees, it is generative to examine the role of religious minorities in shaping these national perceptions of difference. In Italy, the Buddhist monk too is made legible under Catholic discourses. Without legislation specifically for Buddhist monks, his mobility across the European Union is indicative of the role of the Italian state in producing forms of citizenship outside of labor visas. Tracing the monk's physical construction of Buddhist transnational networks starting from Italy and extending throughout the EU exemplifies the complications of conceptualizing a monolithic state. These states must be interpreted through their specific cultural, and in this case, religious frameworks.

The monk's mobility in the winter when the worshippers stay at home to celebrate Christmas could be described as religious since he visits other Buddhist monks in Switzerland and Germany, but it seems to also be to explore Europe. From a small village in Battambang, the monk joined the monkhood as a boy in the postconflict period. Renowned for his ability to read Pali, when Pich, one of the Cambodian refugees in Italy returned to Cambodia to have a house built for her surviving family, she selected this particular monk for his knowledge of the key Buddhist texts and chants. In conjunction with the Buddhist council, an elaborate travel itinerary was created for the monk. It was freezing cold and he wore a winter version of his saffron robes, and with one small sack, traveling light, he got on a Flixbus all the way to Zurich, where someone picked him up in a car. In the winter, with the Flixbus tickets purchased by the congregation, he ventured to visit Cambodian monks in temples in Switzerland and Germany, telling me about the cleanliness and organization of Switzerland rather nonchalantly.

There is a sense of adventure when the monk talked about travelling across Europe. Ruben Andersson (2014) follows the movement of refugees who arrive on the shores of Mediterranean countries. Andersson ethnographically studied men who said they went to Spain sometimes for the adventure. He argues that the common televised images of refugees from Africa along the Spanish coast belie the small numbers of arrivals. According to Andersson, the images are produced by an industry built around surveillance. I do not suggest that these journeys are taken lightly, but these individualized stories build on the concept of rhizomes (Deleuze and Guttari 1987) in delinking the racialized and dehumanizing images of refugees.

Perspicaciously, Malkki (1992) posited that the production of the gendered and racialized images of masses of African refugees derives from a disconnect between people and place in processes of de-territorialization, which, in turn produces a discord of refugee bodies. The monk knows no Italian or English, and travels with a small orange satchel that contains a lunch packed by the groundskeeper, thus the morning meal is a surprise. He recounted opening his bento box to find fermented fish as he was sitting on the Flixbus. "Everyone ran to the back of the bus!" he chuckles. In detailing the journeys, it lends a sense of individuality to being a racialized subject in these spaces, sometimes ignored, and other times regarded as abject.

The World's Beloved Noble Savage: The Buddhist Monk

Getting out into the cold evening air felt good as I cut through the cobblestone piazza on my way to the book meeting. In these processes of racialization in Lombardy, Buddhism is a key mediator of the Asian refugee body in Europe through the idiom of Catholic charity and peace. Interestingly, Barbara said she has been to the temple. Laura, a retired schoolteacher, said that Oriental religions are peaceful. I quite liked Laura with her sassiness and straightforward demeanor. Taking our regular seats she sat to my right, with pink jeans and a blue-green sweater on. Laura's comment points to popular images of Buddhism that circulate. In Italy, the world's center of Catholicism, in order for the temple to be tolerated, the image of the Buddhist monk must remain static to continue a narrative of the universal good and civility of Christianity. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) explains, "The symbolic transformation through which Christendom became the West structures as a set of relations that necessitate both utopia and the

Savage (14)." The physical presence of a monk is clearly the metaphorical heart of the temple. In practice, the political image of the monk in the West as a lone wolf belies the community labor involved in his well-being, particularly for racialized groups such as Cambodians.

The fundraising decisions by the Buddhist Council speak to a core debate about alterity in anthropology. The image of the Cambodian refugee can be placed within the century-old anthropological debate about the study of the "other" as produced by colonial expansion (Trouillot 2003), international development organizations in the 1980s (Malkki 1995; 1992), ethnographic representations in anthropological writings (Clifford 2015; Marcus 2015), and biopiolitical classifications (Mbembe 2003). Cambodian refugees in Lombardy were sponsored to go to Italy by the Red Cross, the Catholic Church, and have resettled as textile workers in the northern part of the country. The chapter of Cambodian refugees in Italy expands upon this genealogy of understanding of how the gendered and classed subaltern bodies are both historically produced and constituted through the temple. Despite forty years and three generations, survivors grapple with classifications that exclude them through funding activities that facilitate Buddhist practices, and a celebration of being Khmer. They do this while maintaining relations with the nation-state of Cambodia through summer visits, Buddhist pilgrimages, and remittances to relatives.

The saffron robes denote 2,000 years of Buddhism in Asia. However, in Europe, as religious minorities, and racialized subjects, the Buddhist Council shares a communal responsibility for the conditions that may expose the monk to forms of violence. Butler

(2004) writes, “Body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well” (26). Through the lens of Butler’s analysis of bodies, that beyond notions of the linguistic, sense of vulnerability of the monk is shared by the community who are responsible for his well-being through proper heating, cooling, food, protection. The standard image of the Buddhist monk is a hermit, engrossed in meditation atop a mountain. Yet, community caretaking of the monk extends beyond this lifetime. The monk is an integral part of the transnational kinship network of Cambodian practitioners in their construction as modern Buddhist and Asian subjects.

On the one hand, the proliferation of popular notions of karma propels it into non-Buddhist audiences which may garner ideological support for the construction of Buddhist temples in non-Buddhist spaces. For example, Zen Buddhism and global humanitarian Buddhist movements have combined principles of conversion and aid as well as Protestant-style individual prayers to the Buddha dot the global landscape. On the other hand, the increase of the presence of snippets of Buddhist concepts circulate, as earlier scholars of globalization have theorized (Kearney 1995; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1997), may decontextualize and de-historicize these snippets. As a consequence, due to the globalized hegemonic discourses on Buddhism, contemporary problems with Buddhism may go largely unacknowledged, or characterized as exceptions. As such, the ramifications of these global discourses on Buddhism, coupled with global Islamophobia, range from omitting the challenges to the ordainment of nuns within Buddhism to

skirting the issue of mass killings of the ethnic Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Without doubt, it is hopelessly impracticable to thoroughly apprehend the vast variations in Buddhist practices, but in this context of globalized discourses on Buddhism, a history of particular Buddhist political contexts exigently demands attention in discussions of Buddhist place-making. In summary, it is commensurately significant to outline a history of the Khmer wat in order to anchor it in-place in Italy, while simultaneously in virtual and transnational spaces.

One example of a monk as a Noble Savage is the Dalai Lama. Surely, the Dalai Lama would laugh at the Noble Savage image and easily shrug it off. His lightheartedness is clearly contagious, but discourses of Orientalism also obscure his life struggles against the Chinese state, in political exile in India since he was 15, and the continued occupation of Tibet by China (Dalai Lama 2018). On the other hand, in the 1960s, politicized Orientalist images of monks as dangerous Asian bodies are produced through images of self-immolation during the Vietnam War, countered by the Venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh (1992; 2017). Consequently, these images in the context of neo-Fascist rhetoric, economic liberalization, and populism, associate the temple with exoticism and danger.

The image of the monk obscures these internal political processes of the Buddhist Council, but also the colonial struggles in Asia (cf. Gajaweera 2016). At Wat Khmer Italy, everyone actively has an interest in making Buddhism viable in diaspora. The images of peaceful Buddhists, though seemingly innocuous, and Asia produces ideas that obscure the military violence on peoples in Asia, as well as continuing legacies of

European colonialism and US imperialism. In Asia, Buddhism for many has been central to countering processes of dispossession and displacement. The 2,500 year significance of Buddhism continues because it is modern and adaptable.

The Four Noble Truths unite all the strands of Buddhism, yet each of these iterations of practice have accommodated local beliefs. In China, Korea, and Vietnam, the advent of Buddhism incorporated Confucius ideas. In Japan, the practices of Zen emerged as intertwined with local Shinto beliefs. At Wat Khmer Italy, the monk is undoubtedly the most significant figure at the temple. The temple offerings and deliberations ensure that monk lies the heart of a community that supports him, even when the sangha themselves are vulnerable in post-pandemic era and increasingly populist regional politics. The practices at the temple will continue to accommodate these changes while upholding core Buddhist concepts of merit and karma, *tvuh bon/tvuh bhap*, in Khmer.

Recently, the Buddhist multispecies emphasis on sentient beings has gained global traction and continues to grow. To cease deforestation, Thai forest monks work with local villagers and NGOs to emphasize the multispecies significance of trees. In representations of Buddhism in the West, individual monks are celebrated, often upheld as the promoters of universal ethics. This can particularly be exemplified by the Dalai Lama's message of "secular ethics" (Dalai Lama 2020). He references Greta Thunberg to focus on climate change. Environmental Studies scholar Jade Sasser (2018) demonstrates how the discourses of the climate change movement blame women of color in the Global South for fertility rates. Sasser argues that capitalism drives climate change. Buddhist

ethics brings together these pressing multispecies discussions on climate change, gendered and racial justice through the emphasis on sentient beings.

The Buddhist Council adjourned the meeting, then each person swept the temple grounds, cleaned nick knacks in the garage and pruned the surrounding apricot trees, placing the twigs into large plastic garbage bags. They had voted to use temple funds to hire the band during Khmer New Year in April 2020. The band is made up of Cambodians who arrived recently to join relatives, as well as long-time residents of Italy. The issue of the 40th year fundraiser for the Red Cross was sidestepped by hosting the event at an Italian venue so that local Italians would be more inclined to participate. The council reconciled to hold the event in April 2020, so that Cambodians coming from different parts of Italy could attend both events and engage in local and transnational forms of community belonging.

Conclusions

Following the meeting, I took leave early but did not stay for the evening since Giorgio and his wife offered to give me a ride home. In the car, they expressed disappointment about the decision. They accompanied me to my apartment, asking to see the accommodations. The one-bedroom apartment is fitted with shabby brown wooden cabinets throughout, in a light caramel colored brown. In the living/dining room, I took out three small spoons from the drawers, pulling two brass knobs that stick out like a pair of yellow owl eyes in the night. I had only met Giorgio and Vanna once prior to the Buddhist council meeting. I spoke Italian with Giorgio and Khmer with Vanna. They asked about the contents of the four rectangular drawers at the bottom. I told them it was

filled with a dozen wooden spoons. We laughed. They stirred and waited for the sugar to dissolve in the cups of organic Earl Grey tea, which I had brought with me from the US. After a moment of silence, a deflated Giorgio began to describe future plans for the Cambodian Cultural Association. As an Italian-Cambodian organization, the Italian Red Cross fundraiser was a chance to proudly parade the contributions of Cambodian refugees. Giorgio wants to be recognized as a religious minority within the modern Italian state. The older folks however, with their histories of state sanctioned violence, as well as labor practices in Italy, want to remain solidly independent of Italy and Cambodia, to the extent to which this is possible.

In contrast to Alice, Alessandra and other Italian-born Cambodians, Giorgio is an outlier and the only young Italian raised Cambodian I saw at the temple throughout my fieldwork. Following the Buddhist Council meeting, Giorgio recounted his plans to create a pop-up Khmer culture booth to be presented along with second generations of Senegalese-Italians and Filipino Italians at an immigrant festival in Rome, scheduled in 2020. This event would mark solidarities to recognize the desire to belong by long-resettled Italian-born immigrants.

At the dinner at Pich's house, her daughter told me they had self-converted to Catholicism in elementary school, and only go to the temple on Khmer New Year. Nearly all of those raised in Italy were actively Catholic, even more so than their peers, sometimes going on religious trips. Pich had prepared all the food in the outside kitchen because "Khmer food smells," she revealed. As we ate, we watched the kitchen television which featured the news about Prince Harry, Meghan Markel, and the tension with Queen

Victoria. Alice and Alessandra smiled, speaking rapid Italian with a Mantovano inflection about their staunch support for Meghan. Both had Italian boyfriends, and for all purposes, considered themselves Italian. For Giorgio, though outwardly secular in his goals, the organization is explicitly linked with the temple, promoting a sense of Buddhism into mainstream Italian politics, or manifestations of ethnic solidarities.

Giorgio's stance on the amplifying the temple space into secular Italian matters speaks to the changing meanings of the space with the younger Cambodians who seek multiethnic solidarities and political recognition in Italy, beyond the Buddhist modes of belonging of his parents. In the US, similar conversations are taking place among Buddhists. In 2013, I attended a Khmer New Year celebration at Wat Willow, a majestic temple in Long Beach, California. After I helped my mother wash dishes, as we looked for my father, who was socializing with the monks. Someone asked us how we were getting home, and my mom made it clear that her husband was driving. One of the worst insults hurled at someone in Khmer is *oht pouch* meaning without offspring or roots. My parents began to accompany me on my research trips in Long Beach. That day, I saw posters advertising summer meditation courses for free at the temple for teenagers. I wondered how many actually attended these courses. Before we left, I watched a child in pigtails pin a few one-dollar bills on the money tree in the main worship area. For me as well, the Khmer Buddhist temple is about family, community, and would not feel Buddhist to me without these familiar cultural connections (see Conclusion).

Endnotes

[56] I was thinking of Bourdieu ([1977]1991a) here because the logic of practices of Cambodian Buddhists in Lombardy are also informed by legislation in Italy regarding labor, refugees, and Catholic discourses. I decided to use the quote by Stuart Hall (1983) because he contextualized the use of the concept of practices specifically within moments of historical ruptures. For this reason, I use his quote to begin the chapter. The Buddhist temple is a space of rupture and simultaneity that continues to mediate the experiences of Cambodian diasporas. This chapter argues that to fully understand the Cambodian Buddhist temple as a modern project, it is necessary to examine the practices that take place at various levels. These practices of what Nina Glick-Schiller calls "lived simultaneity" involve various deliberations. Following the work of practice theorists who reconceptualize power as not merely categorized within "resistance" or "agency." The term "resistance" conjures classic authors of the question of agency. Anthony Giddens (1984) envisions a structuration theory of "rules" and "resources." Sherry Ortner (2006) uses a "serious games perspective" in which agency is constructed as part of a collective. Here I use the concept of lived simultaneity as active practices with the chapter detailing the deliberations that revolve around the caretaking of the monk, but also how monies are spent in ways that allow the expenditures to be framed withing concepts of Buddhist merit and right action.

[57] A *Los Angeles Times* article ran a 2019 article on monks who slept on the sidewalks in California after being evicted by the council. Tensions are common throughout the US, in Oakland, Lowell, Massachusetts. This is not limited to Cambodian temples but also occurs at other Asian diasporic temples. In my ethnographic fieldwork in Long Beach, California, monies for a rock band are universally agreed upon, as an effective means to draw more people to the largest Cambodian temple in the city. Given the numerous temples in Southern California, those who disagree likely fund and frequent other temples. In addition, my sense is that in diasporic temples the Vinaya or codes of conduct for Buddhist monks are always in question with questions such as whether a monk may drive or use a cell phone, putting him in a position between purity and danger to use the work of Mary Douglas ([1966] 2002).

[58] See Salguero (2019) for Buddhist healing rituals in Philadelphia

[59] The heating and the cooling creates an acute awareness of the body. The lengths the congregation goes to keeping the material environment comfortable for the monk points to a larger network of care. Here I am influenced by the work of Catherine Fennell (2015) where through the perception of heat, Fennell examines race, public/private partnerships and urban space in Chicago.

[60] The region of Lombardy figures significantly into the history of the Red Cross. In 1859, the Swiss Henry Durant came up with the idea for the organization when he

witnessed the aftermath of 40,000 deaths in the town of Solferino in Lombardy (Mize 2018:11). During my field work, my Italian neighbors spoke about the organization with pride. It is likely that Giorgio knew the significance of raising funds for the organization because of this history, but could not articulate it in Khmer. That said, even if the older Cambodians knew of this particular history, my sense is for them, the temple is more of a transpacific connection.

[61] The Venerable Kong Chhean, a renowned Buddhist monk and survivor of the Cambodian genocide also received a PhD in psychology and began to incorporate models of trauma and Buddhism at Wat Willow in Long Beach, California. He was since passed but when he was alive, my father was good friends with him, and we would visit him at the temple. He has two academic publications (Chhean 2003;2007). For other examples of Cambodian models of healing through Buddhism, see Chea (2003), Lok Tha (1993), Hinton, Um, and Ba (2011), and Nou (2010).

[62] Khatharya Um (2015) argues, "With neither the numerical strength of Vietnamese Americans nor the political cachet of Hmong Americans, Cambodians are peripheral despite the not insignificant size of the community. While Cambodian American educational data and mental health statistics are often used to highlight achievement gaps and disparities and argue for resources to assist refugees, very few programs are for or run by Cambodian Americans. In academe and related enterprises, Southeast Asian American studies is often made synonymous with Vietnamese American studies" (17). In my experience in speaking with scholars of Asian American studies, they tend to echo Um's claims as well.

[63] Khmer is a hierarchical language with gendered prefixes to denote hierarchy. The 'a' in front of 'a Pot' is significant. The 'a' can mean an intimate relationship but in general it references a person lower in hierarchy, sometimes an animal. Though it mirrors in sound and function with the personal a used in Spanish to denote a human being, since Khmer is also hierarchical there is expressed emotion against the person with the use of 'a.' The 'a' in front of a person's name may be casual. In the case of Pol Pot it is denigrating because as a high-ranking politician the word *lok* should precede his full name. Instead the word 'a' precedes only his surname. Cambodians speak about their histories as coded in the block of time called *semai a Pot* creating this noun phrase to name history and label the approximately four years they spent under the Pol Pot regime. The 'a' denotes intense disgust and anger at the referent, but as a syllabic diminutive, there is also a sense of the cyclical temporality of death, rebirth, and an aspiration to end this cycle through right thought and right speech.

Chapter 3: Haunted Performances of Diasporic Khmerness

Placemaking is a primary realm of considerable anthropological debate extending from soundscapes, to political access to resources such as water, housing, and transportation (cf. Bourdieu [1971] 2003; Larkin 2008; Fennell 2015) to the increased incorporation of material using an archeological lens to analyze the meaning of place (cf. DeMarrais, Castillo, and Earle 1996). Scholars have defined place as a process of meaning-making embedded through the practices of the body through engagement with the landscape (cf. De Certeau 1984; Ness 2016). Though Bruno Latour's (1993) focus is science, his argument extends to my project. Buddhist placemaking at the temple in Lombardy is culturally mediated together between the nonhuman and the human: "Everything happens in the middle, everything passes between the two, everything happens by way of mediation, translation and networks" (37). This chapter examines how objects and spirits engage in placemaking during two festivals at the temple. It asks: What does it mean to have objects and spirits be so crucial in the coproduction of Buddhism and Khmerness? [64]

I envision Khmerness as an object, following the work of art historian of Southeast Asia, Boreth Ly. In *Traces of Trauma*: *Cambodian Visual Culture and National Identity in the Aftermath of Genocide* (2019), Ly focuses each chapter on a material object that creates a sense of Khmerness. For example, Ly describes the Phnom Penh-based art performance *Full Circle*. In this performance, Cambodian American artist

Lee Sanford (an adoptee born Ly Sundari), breaks and pieces together chards of clay from the Cambodian town of *Kampong Chnang* (literally Town of Pots in Khmer language, famous for artistic cookery) as a metaphor for piecing together life in the aftermath of war and genocide. [65] In another chapter, Ly traces the *kramaa* (checkered scarf associated with farmers), an object that was appropriated by the Khmer Rouge for its symbol of the everyday use amid the backdrop of sugar palm trees that feature so prominently in pop karaoke videos that make postwar reconstructions of rural landscapes in Cambodia. [66] Ly argues that these objects are central to the deployment and reconstruction of symbols of national identity. In the book, Ly presents the work of Khmer artists from in Cambodia, the film of Rithy Panh in France, as well as artists from the US. In a sense, Ly reformulates national identity to include the transnational, renegotiating notions of authenticity.

This chapter builds on the work of Ly, by proposing that the Buddhist temple is a key site for the production of Khmerness, and that these are legitimate transnational spaces in their own right. In France, though there are Cambodian temples that focus on inwardness, for the most part, there is a repertory of Buddhist practices in the production of Khmerness (Kalab 1994). I use the term Khmerness to denote a Buddhist aspiration for ethical selfhood in the face of deep loss. [67] Cambodian diasporic temples have branched out like the Bodhi tree itself, a representation of Buddhism, as the place where Siddharta Gotama achieved nirvana. Like the roots of the Bodhi tree, these temples extend historical networks that branch from northern India, through the rest of Asia, and across the Pacific. Contemporary Cambodian Buddhist temples specifically connect and

maintain friendships formed during the Thai refugee camps (see Chapter Two), but they are also key sites of the negotiation of Khmerness. During the festivals, the communal interactions between the worshippers and the spirits regenerates Buddhist beliefs through merit making rituals. As suggested by Latour, the material objects are essential to this process of meaning making within Cambodian Buddhism.

I witnessed two ceremonies at the temple that center on the spirits, one in 2019 and another in 2020. This chapter uses participant observation from the two events to examine the ritual transfer of merit ceremony that took place on both occasions. The annual material feeding of the ghost spirits symbolically produces the notion of Khmerness. Herein lies the production of the link between Khmerness and Buddhism. At Pchum Ben (annual communal meal for the spirits), the overall goal is the construction of a unified diaspora. Similarly, at the funeral, the ritual transfer of merit also relies crucially on the performance of spirits and things to produce diaspora and Buddhist space. Yet at this event, the concept of Khmerness was more explicitly contested. The chapter ethnographically details the role of objects, food, and clothing during Pchum Bun and the funeral to show how they perform in tandem to produce a sense of Khmerness.

***Pchum Ben*: A Feast for the Spirits**

The sky turned pale blue with a hint of pink as the sun lent an orange brilliance to the temple. The space was alive and on full display in celebration of the Cambodian diaspora in Italy. There were upwards of two hundred people. On that October morning, the temple welcomed visitors from as far away as Tuscany and Rome to partook in the ritual of the transfer of merit to the spirits through material offerings of food and money.

The temple's incumbent monk, Venerable Sokhom Hem, led the morning chant. Despite the crowds, the monk's voice floated through the large room with double doors on each side. The congregation chanted along in Pali after the first few lines. The air was imbued with sentiment to the brim with the names of one's *ji dohn ji tha* (ancestors) written on envelopes by the monk. When the chanting ended, people walked in pairs chatting outside into the courtyard. The seriousness of the indoor ritual of transmitting merit to the spirits completely dissipated outside.

In the courtyard, I watched four men assemble tables with matching blue tablecloths, dotted with yellow lemons in pairs, two green leaves and two white jasmine flowers. The border of this blue tablecloth is sealed with larger imprints of these lemon formations. Earlier that morning, they had erected two large white canopies above to shade the tables. An older man dusted the chairs and said to me, "It doesn't matter if people show up or not, we still celebrate." These were everyday worshippers who are not officially heads of Theravada Buddhist temples and did not receive explicit praise for attendance. The collaborative work of arranging the objects was perfunctory and produced a sense of community. Men hammered old pieces of wood and arranged the canopy. This labor to assemble the furniture to prepare for the festivities showed the merit involved in making temple space. The work was matter of fact and done with steadfast concentration with intermittent laughter.

In Asia, the ritual transfer of merit to deceased loved ones is common across Buddhist congregations. The ceremonies feed ghosts who return and garner material gifts such as food and money. For many Buddhists, this is a chance to celebrate their ancestors

through merit making. Community members collectively pay homage to the dead who return to feast. The public efforts of the Buddhists transform the temple into a visible vehicle for the sanction and maintenance of culture through religion, merit, and mutual support. In diaspora, they create a sense of place through careful ornamentation, food, and following the Buddhist calendar. The space is produced through linguistic, embodied gestures, as well as specific room arrangements.

In the US, according to Ethnic Studies scholar Khatraya Um (2012), for Cambodian Americans, merit making gives the believer a sense of contribution and agency while relieving feelings of survivor guilt; they are alive yet help loved ones through merit. For many Cambodian Americans, these forms of Buddhist practices are about remembering the past, which, in the context of the US, is a political act (839). [68]Arguably, as religious and civic actors at the temple in this politically conservative region of Italy, participants personally and communally remember family members while interweaving their religious histories into this landscape.

Anthropologist Carol Mortland (1994) finds ethnographically that merit-making can be done on behalf of dead loved-ones in diaspora (79). In Lombardy, at Pchum Ben, next to a potted rose plant was a large glass full of unlit incense. On the edge of the tent were approximately fifteen pizza-slice sized Buddhist flags hanging and blowing in the wind. The display was both visually and aurally serene and beautiful with everything laid out symmetrically and incense constantly lit throughout the space to call the spirits, feed them, and engage with them. The participants publicly enacted diasporic aspirations of unity through religion. That day, the Pchum Ben event was clearly deeply emotional.

Adherents paid respects to, and actively engaged with, ancestral spirits through communal food offerings.

In the courtyard, the prepared foods engaged in place making in Lombardy as a continuation of transpacific Southeast Asian religious and culinary practices brought over by Cambodian refugees to Italy. The main Pchum Ben fare is normally *nohm asam*, a sticky rice, mung bean and pork, wrapped in banana leaves and steamed. But there was an assortment of food. With care, the women in the large kitchen at the temple diligently cut coconut sweets into bite-size squares and arranged them on a white plastic plate. In small white bowls, they used chopsticks to neatly mound vermicelli noodles stir fried with slices of pork and julienned green onions that add peppery flavors of spring. On the side was a small, deep round bowl of freshly picked small, spicy chili peppers but only one daring person, a grandmother wearing glasses with cropped short hair intermittently nibbled at one slowly with bites of food. I ate a delicious *porro* (leek in Italian) steamed on top of fish, some bamboo with shrimp afloat atop the steaming soup. I ladled a bitter gourd stuffed with noodles and ground pork into my bowl. Worshippers made merit as they neatly offered dishes of lemon grass sauce made from their gardens as dipping sauces to be paired with sautéed pork chunks and round lime-green colored eggplant, and freshly fried whole fish, crispy, golden and brown. They scooped jasmine rice from four large family-sized rice cookers.

During that autumn Pchum Ben festival, worshippers made merit for the spirits, objects in the courtyard performed alongside the worshippers and the foods. The main courtyard table had a triangular tent that underneath it housed a long table with a beige

thick tablecloth with white somewhat squiggly designs. Entering the outdoor temple area, the table was positioned lengthwise. On the right there were four sets laid out that included a glass or porcelain bowl, two bottled waters and a can of sweet green gourd drink from Malaysia set out for the monks. These drinks were stacked by the caseload in the kitchen. I recognized the brands as the exact same drinks later offered to me at the temple one Friday. The Chinese characters for the drink read winter melon tea. Grass Drink, sweetened Soy Milk and drinks of this sort were associated with celebrations I attended in the US. Someone had donated a large case of the sweet gourd drink distributed throughout the temple. At the end of the table was a large statue of Buddha seated cross legged. On the left of the table were gold-colored holders wrapped with yellow plastic tied decoratively at the top. Hung above the Buddha statue was a gold-colored fabric with the texture of silk with beads sewn onto its edges. To the left of the Buddha statue was an assortment of potted flowers, one that included what looked like an entire rose plant that was about 1.5 feet tall in a white ceramic pot. These goods traveled from Asia, across the Pacific, to Europe.

Together, the worshippers embellished the temple to enhance the divine realms. They wrapped extra blinking Christmas lights on the Buddha statue. In the courtyard, they hung more Buddhist flags with white, orange, and blue strips that flap in the wind, strung just above the outdoor canopy. Inside the large worship hall where one wears shoes, luxurious orange and yellow drapery made walls. They placed elaborate silver color foot holders, candles, and freshly cut flowers. In the courtyard, a donation bowl had elaborate etchings in silver metallic, polished and shining. Inside, a wedding cake-like

rounded figure with nine levels towers represented the levels toward enlightenment. These objects created a sense of Buddhist religious space and Khmerness.

The burning incense and Pali chants created an atmosphere of reverence, but the foods added a sense of joy and community building. Pchum Ben is a celebration of Buddhist livelihoods. With the spirits honored through their favorite foods, relatives made merit. On large rectangular tables clad with English-style country tablecloths, the members had placed an array of circular, white bowls, each with Styrofoam on top. Adherents attended to the visiting ghosts by scooping mounds of white rice in some of the bowls. Other bowls had an assortment of cooked Asian style dishes: green bean and beef stir fried with gravy; dessert of orange slices arranged next to a bowl of ripe papaya cut in diagonal chunks; sliced roasted pork with translucent vermicelli noodles layered in a mountain; pork-stuffed bitter gourd melon soup; red curry with potatoes, carrots, and beef; edible violet-colored flowers, freshly arranged with salad greens; slices of pound cake smeared with thick layers of butter. These elements of cuisine were sustenance to the spirits, and deliberately placed to highlight the occasion as the life of the Cambodian community. The chit chat and laughter at the gathering with old friends catching up lent itself a sense of joy, a celebration of life, the heart of Cambodian Buddhists in diaspora.

Clothing is a celebration of Khmer identity, a sense of self production of which has historically involved silk. Outside in the courtyard, the colors of the silk were significant for the organization of time, for notions of morality and being Khmer aesthetically, all of which is acutely marked during community gatherings at the temple. In writing community histories of Cambodian diasporas in the US, some have claimed

that a distinct color corresponds with each day of the week, as well as a specific angel, a gemstone, a flower, an animal protector and weapon. In Italy too, the women's choices in colors for their silk skirts and tops were varied, as they wove their own identities into the Italian landscape at the temple. The clothing mediated gendered and political representations of being Buddhist in Italy, as cultural bearers within the local diaspora, organized by the presence of a monk, the accompanying spirits that needed to be put at ease, and a celebration of diasporic communities.

Historically, in elite circles, the silk was tied and twisted to be worn in a pants-like style called sampot *chong k'ben*, a style which has its origins in India, and was represented in Angkor bas-reliefs. Silk textiles in temple fashion are cross-cultural, gendered and a celebration of aspirations of Buddhist harmony, particularly through the bodies of women who don brightly colored silks of various tones and indentations. In 1296 AD, Chinese envoy Cho Ta-Kuan chronicled his travels to Cambodia, noting the significance of silk production for trade between Siam and the Khmer empire: "The Siamese use silk to weave the dark damask-like textiles with which they clothe themselves. The Siamese women can sew and mend, and when the fabrics worn by the Cambodians become torn, Siamese are called in to repair the damage." Ta-Kuan notes how silk became important modes of communication and trade between Siam and Khmer. Other scholars noted that trade with China involved the export of raw goods such as feathers and tusks from elephants. Silk fabric in this period, the import of silk from China was the second largest, following precious metals of gold.

Silk was a contested object that mediated Khmerness in the French colonial period (1863-1953). During the French colonial period, the pants-like style of silks was deemed un-Khmer as the French colonial construction of Cambodia envisioned the *sampot samloy* (long skirt) (Edwards 2007:246). Tracing the history of silk, the fashion which was tied and worn on the bodies of both men and women, continues to mediate notions of Khmerness in diaspora. While silks tied in *chong k'ben* style are normalized at weddings for its connections to royalty and on special occasions, this style is absent at temples. However, on both occasions, silks continue to take center stage as symbols of Khmerness in diaspora. The colorful silks worn at Pchum Ben are significant producers of Khmerness and the celebration of a Cambodian Buddhist community in Italy. At Pchum Ben, the silks countered traces of histories of resistance to French notions of Khmerness as a disappearing group in decline.

Following the afternoon sermon, a man dressed in an emerald-green silk shirt stood at the front of the hall with a microphone in hand making announcements about the monies collected in the donation box that day. A woman and man made the rounds with donation baskets as they meandered through the aisles. People in the rows of chairs excitedly waved ten and twenty euro notes. Suddenly, a woman in the audience seated at the edge of the middle row, asked the man in the silk shirt to speak Italian. She later explained that though she is Khmer, there were many Thai women in attendance from other parts of Lombardy. Participants are multiple generations of Cambodian refugees from all over Italy. The ritual of offering cooked food to the monk in on the rectangular tables makes merit, adheres to the Theravada Buddhist calendar. Historically, in

Cambodia, some venerated statues that were connected to the monarchy making the religious political connection explicit on these days (Chan 2004). In the Italian context where Sunday is the rest day, the meanings of Pchum Ben do not have this sense of royal significance related to Cambodia specifically. Rather it is understood that the event must be aligned with the workdays and time off on Sundays of the practitioners. The atmosphere was joyous as people traveled from other parts of Italy to enjoy time with their friends.

The monk retired to his quarters and the scene continued to be lively with conversation. A woman with her hair back tied neatly in a loose ponytail revealed to me that she was from Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. I listened to the conversations and did not speak much since I did not know anyone. People came and went to clean up plastic forks, spoons, and plates for others at the conjoined tables. They cleared left over bowls of food on the tables. I helped pick up plastic water bottles to put in large, clear trash bags, which people took out back to be recycled. Toward the end, those who could, stacked the heavy chairs, picking up used napkins on the concrete flooring along the way. There were final sweeps of the worship hall with T-shaped brooms. On that afternoon, the community presented themselves as united. A Cambodian woman told me in Italian, *siamo pochi ma uniti* (we are few but united), referring to the small numbers of Cambodians in the region as a strength, an identity as a small diaspora, which points to the amount of work necessary to present a united monolithic front within the realities of diverse experiences among the Cambodians in the region. This façade of unity of course

must be produced through Buddhist rituals. The caretaking practices are ritualized through the food, and it is emotional with care.

The *Neak Taa* and *Teovada*: Doctrinally Invisible, but Central to Practice

A few days later, on a quiet Wednesday afternoon, I arrived at the temple with the courtyard bare of its triangular blue, white, and orange Buddhist flags that had lined it during the Pchum Ben festival. Seth, the *chieng* (groundskeeper) protects the monk's time and serves as a watchman for the temple. The groundskeeper told me his dedication to Buddhism to a "lifetime with no salary." Historically in Cambodia, monastic labor consisted of slavery (Harris 2005:71). In the case of Seth, there is no slavery, but rather, his labor is making merit. Seth has the face of a dried fig, with a cigarette hanging out of the side of his pursed mouth. Whenever I arrived from the shortcut through the grassy fields, walking along the muddied path adjacent to a concrete aqueduct, and passed the two hovering electricity towers, I normally encountered him outside in the courtyard smoking, under a white pole. On Pchum Ben, he had worn his usual blue polo shirt and brown pajama pants and walked into the courtyard with little fanfare. Having no other employment options or housing, Seth said he resided at the temple to make up for his *kam* (bad karma) accumulated from past lives.

That afternoon, I asked Venerable Sokhom Hem about the about the annual feeding of the spirits. They were clearly the center of the Pchum Ben event, yet they are invisible under authoritative forms of Buddhism. The monk had aided in the success of the merit transfer, but this ritual is not normally recognized in authoritative Buddhist circles. [69] The monk replied with a lesson on compassion for oneself. He said, "No one

can save you except yourself. If you eat, you get full, not the person sitting next to you." The monk drew on a doctrine Theravada Buddhism that focuses on the individual. For example, in Mahayana Buddhism, Guanyin is a *boddhisava* someone who forgoes nirvana to help someone else in a gesture of compassion (Palmer, Tse, and Cowell 2019). In contrast, in Theravada Buddhist practices, the *boddhisava* concept is not central. One cannot transfer enlightenment to someone else. Rather it is more conceptualized as an individual journey, seeing enlightenment as a lone venture across lifetimes. In replying, Venerable Sokhom Hem did not specifically mention any supernatural entities, which are not recognized within authoritative doctrines of Theravada Buddhism, but instead pointed to diverse doctrines of Buddhism. Thus, he shifted the conversation to allow for teachings about diverse forms of Buddhism.

In responding with "if you eat, you get full, not the person sitting next to you," Venerable Sokhom Hem's answer reaffirmed that though he is solidly an authoritative religious figure in his stance on the individual doctrine within Theravada Buddhism, the reply did not foreclose the existence of spirits in the context of the discussion. The season of Pchum Ben centers on the significance of food for the spirits, material offerings of food and money to beloved relatives. Yet his role is to serve the congregation who asked that a monk be present for the event. What the Venerable Sokhom Hem seemed to suggest was that the ghosts feed themselves, and he was not a part of their sustenance. At Pchum Ben, the temple made the space their own through community ritual feedings of the ghosts. In notions of Buddhist temporality, the ghosts conflated the past and the present occupying shared spaces.

The monk's reply also indicated that in practice, across Southeast Asia, most of the time, there is no strict distinction between sacred and the secular. In the Isan region of Thailand, Mary Beth Mills (1995) finds that widow ghosts sit on men in forms of adult crib death. In that period, men had their fingernails painted to trick the widow ghosts and avoid suffocation. These spirits have mediums that negotiate these states of being. In Myanmar, Tamara Ho (2009) finds that globalized discourses have made the practices of the *nat kadaw* as male bodied 'gay' figures despite the long-standing role of women in these spirit positions. This also in particular goes with the history of military coup in 1962 in which reform notions of Buddhism in which images of monks were sacralized, made marginal these gendered practices of spirit houses. In Thailand, Michael Herzfeld (2016) finds that within the economic neoliberal configurations in Bangkok, the spirit houses surrounding the temples, are deemed feminine spheres, as marginal to the centralized economic and political discourses surrounding Buddhism, polity, and neoliberal configurations of temple space. In pre-colonial Indonesia, the *waria* was historically seen as a source of power, as many forms of gender ambiguity. Historically, ghosts have mediated and continue to ally anxieties throughout Southeast Asia. The lack of recognition of spirits in authoritative Buddhism is common throughout Southeast Asia.

Venerable Sokhom Kem then contextualized the teaching to the term *rodeav* (season) of Pchum Ben, which had begun on September 26th. [70] In colloquial Khmer, the period of celebration is called *rodeav*. The *rodeav* of Pchum Ben is the most important religious celebration of the Buddhist calendar, and most certainly the most significant during the autumn. *Rodeav* could mean a shift in temperature, but in this case, it marked a

community recognized entrance of spirits in postindustrial Lombardy. The communal meeting place of the temple, framed by Buddhist events, gave the space a sense of the cyclical nature of impermanence. The *rodeav* denotes a block of time when supplicating hungry sprits are attended to specifically.

Theravada Buddhist calendars vary, but on all of them, the season of Ben Katun follows the season of Pchum Ben to honor the hungry ancestors. This sequence of events brought crowds to the temple, and they made offerings of food and donations, creating a sense of Buddhist time in the middle of rural Lombardy. Pchum Ben celebrated the spirits with an annual communal meal in honor of them through collective practices of merit making. For Cambodian diasporas, the autumn event is considered the most important religious event in the yearly calendar. Through the planning, the seemingly mundane practicalities of moving tables and affixing Buddhist flags to canopies, on another level, performed a negotiation of what it means to be Cambodian and Buddhist. The definitions are fluid, remade and made, and contested.

For me, in the context of the impending cold of Northern Italy in October, the use of the term *rodeav* marked the change in temperature. Yet, for the refugees who had lived in Lombardy for four decades, that Sunday, they performed their livelihoods as textile workers, through ritual offerings of material objects such as money, food, Buddhist and Italian flags side by side. A sense of impermanence underlies material objects, as a common phrase in Khmer is “you cannot take any of this stuff with you when you go.” They made food offerings so that the hungry ghosts can feed themselves. In 2019, the Cambodian congregation gathered for Pchum Ben, or the Souls Day on a Sunday. The

season of Pchum Ben is produced by events that follow the Buddhist calendar. Families traveled long distances to perform a ritual of impermanence in community.

As I sat at the temple kitchen table jotting notes the went into the main worship area to bring give me a calendar. “Ben Katun is from October 30th to November 28th. This is important for culture,” the monk said as I wrote down the dates. In Cambodia, the almsgiving for the monk follows Pchum Ben. Bun Katun is a festival after the rainy season when laity bring gifts such as towels, robes and soap to the monks for the work the monks perform on the laity throughout the year (Seager 1999:144). The season of Ben Katun normally spans 24-25 days and in 2019, it began on Sunday, November 4th, according the calendar at the temple. Thought the Buddhist calendar fixes the period of celebration, all the major events actually took place on a Sunday during my fieldwork. In Italy, there was no Ben Katun since many had already arrived from as far away as Rome, a five-hour drive away, could only attend Pchum Ben.

In diasporic communities, the dates of events are malleable to accommodate the worshippers. For example, in Lombardy, Pchum Bun took place on a Sunday. During my fieldwork, I noticed that Buddhist festivals were held on Sundays instead of according strictly to the lunar-solar Buddhist calendar out of the exigency as textile workers with Sundays off. Additionally, in Italy, there is also a sense of Sunday as family day, giving rise to a Buddhist version of the Sunday lunch, with its Pali chants, the monk eating before noon, as ways to delineate this Sunday practice as specifically both Cambodian and Buddhist.

This practice of the malleability of the Buddhist calendar is common in diaspora. Allison J. Truitt (2021) calls this a form of stacking (113). In Truitt's ethnography on Vietnamese American Buddhists in the US Gulf South, she attended Van Lu festivals at four different temples and encountered the same people who also attended these multiple festivals. Temples coordinate to maximize attendance. In Southern California, where there are clusters of temples, the calendars are coordinated to maximize the numbers of visitors. Cambodian American computer programmer Phylypo Tum gathered Buddhist calendars throughout Cambodian temples in Southern California and found shared blocks of time but differences in dates of the Pchum Ben. Temples collectively maintain Buddhist time through coordination of Pchum Ben to create a sense of place.[71] As religious minorities, the events are moments to raise funds, build community, and construct notions of Khmerness.

Unless one goes to the temple daily, rather than the Buddhist monk, it is the spirits that are involved in daily life. In Cambodia, in the intimate spaces of the home, anthropologist Carol Kidron (2018) finds that many engage daily with deceased relatives at home, cooking favorite foods of deceased so that they can have a seat at the table. Kidron writes, "The dead are far more co-present in the daily lives of Khmer Buddhist households…the obligation is not perceived as a burden but rather as a moral normative mode of familial being" (153). In her comparative study, for Jewish descendants of Holocaust survivors, the connections are made through namesakes, and relating to pictures. For Cambodians whose relatives perished, there was interaction through objects, not pictures, but through the foods offered that were favorites of the deceased, and that

their spirit shares at dinner. Kidron calls this a "badge of honor" to be able to commemorate and remember in these intimate spaces of the home. Kidron argues that with an emphasis on talk therapy, the studies pathologize silence. [72] Yet, as Kidron argues, in both Jewish and Buddhist cases the daily acts are embodied, often without words but through objects such as foods and pictures. Kidron argues that frameworks such as intergenerational trauma does little to understand the caretaking practices that produce Buddhist lifeways through material objects.

Though monks may be present, it is the spirits that are the focus at rituals of transition. At birth into the human realm, one is accompanied by a spirit called a *kruu* as a guide. At weddings, one's parents are formally acknowledged as near divine in the presence of supernatural entities called *teovada* whose presence symbolically elevate parents. Anthropologist Kathy M. McKinley (1999) ethnographically detailed Cambodian weddings in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Ontario, Canada. Live music is considered the most proper even despite the accepted use of recorded music for weddings. McKinley argues the bride and groom bow three times toward the parents in addition to the monks. These *teovada* spirits are not necessarily identified with a set gender, though they are recognized as being either male or female. In Khmer, objects such as musical instruments are gendered and played and offered as a part of the wedding ceremony. In the *ayai* singing at weddings for example, families hire a professional man and woman duo to sing and banter for entertainment, as offerings to the couple's ancestors. The spirits are elaborately entertained in this reformulation of filial piety that the *teovada* officiate.

In Buddhism, rebirth occurs over several lifetimes. According to Elena Lesley (2020), in times of deep suffering, Buddhists magnify the efficaciousness of supernatural entities who can exert influence over one lifetime. In other words, Buddhists create an alternate sense of temporality through the spirits. In Lesley's comparative study in Cambodia, of Cham Muslims and Khmer Buddhists, she found they constructed different notions of justice based on time. She followed participants as they attended the *Transcultural Pscyhosocial Organization*, an NGO in that urges survivors to publicly present testimonials. In Cambodia, practices of Islam have moved closer to universalized forms, with a sense of selfhood related to the sole figure of Allah. In Buddhist concepts of time, the main operating principal is *karma*, which requires lifetimes. For this reason. Lesley argues that the role of the *teovada*, the *neak ta*, are increased because they can be efficacious within this lifetime. At the Pchum Ben festival in Lombardy, the spirits were welcomed through material caretaking of food and money in envelopes.

Venerable Sokhom Hem's reply on the spirits must be contextualized within the recent history of Cambodian Buddhism. In the days following the Pchum Ben event, the monk's reply excluded the explicit acknowledgement of the spirits, though he did not deny their existence. According to Matthew O'Lemmon, this absence of spirits in authoritative forms of Buddhism indicates their increased role in postconflict Cambodia. O'Lemmon argues that given the specific recent history of Cambodia, the spirits such as the *neak taa* have increased. In O'Lemmon's ethnographic research in Kep province, Cambodia, he argues that following the Democratic Kampuchea regime, military violence, the death of the number of monks, that the lack of Buddhist infrastructure, has

increased the role of the *neak taa* spirits. To be sure, though considered central to Buddhism, the monks, and the ritual specialists are of still significant, but physical landscapes is seen to be amenable to *neak taa* who live in places considered uninhabitable.

In contrast to the perfection of the Buddha, a historical figure, the *neak taa* are capricious and unpredictable. When I asked people about the *neak taa*, the question elicited smiles of affection. The *neak taa* take on various physical forms. They may be revered ancestors, sacred mountain spaces, or domesticated buffalo. They may reside on land and are communes with hierarchies. Head community protectors take on forms such as white elephants and relate to plants and stones (Thierry 1997:108). These *neak taa* communities are an integral sense of the Khmer Buddhist sense of protection. They occupy geographical spaces that serve as a metaphor of power as interdependent on the landscape, such as rice paddies and trees. The *neak taa* also take on male and female forms and a medium make call on the *neak taa* for protection (Harris 2005:52-59). Though there were no depictions at Wat Khmer Italy, on the walls of Cambodian temples, painted *teovada* deities adorn the walls. They represent the myriad of beliefs within the Cambodian Buddhist tradition. At Pchum Ben, when I asked what these deities were, I was told these were like angels, without a gender, but rather communities of protectors.

The *neak taa* also allow practical engagement with the Middle Way. According to anthropologist May Mayko Ebihara ([1968] 2018), in Theravada Buddhism, the astringent practices of the monk with meditation, with one meal a day, and begging for

food, allows laypeople to maintain the Middle Way in their own lives while still being ethical Buddhists. In other words, through intermittent ritual offerings at the temple, lay Buddhists can be imperfect and still moral. She found that people are not expected to attend temple services daily when of marriageable age. For example, because young people are not under injunctions against killing animals some teens during that period prepared the meat for their families. Ebihara conducted fieldwork in Cambodia in the 1950s, yet anthropologists have followed up and found these practices persist within new models of rural-urban hierarchies (Ledgerwood 2012). In Lombardy, practices shifted to accommodate the *neak taa* who are imperfect, yet superhuman, arguably a mirror of the worshippers themselves. Victor Turner's ([1964] 2009) betwixt and between state, in this case the spirit is in this state, needs to be mediated and transformed through Buddhist ritual. The *neak taa* can be benevolent but also mischievous in a constant state of liminality, but this seems to be where they harness their power. For Cambodian refugees themselves who may long for Cambodia, but cannot return permanently, there may be an increased identification with the *neak taa* as mirrors of their own existence.

From the outside, it seems like Theravada Buddhists are relaxed about Buddhist doctrine, but this is not necessarily the case. Julia Cassaniti (2006) examines binary discourses between rationalist Buddhism, and folk does exist in the village in Northeastern Thailand where Cassanti did fieldwork, she finds that while authoritative discourses on Buddhist *annica* (impermanence) are important, that people describe the term based on their lived experiences, and lives, work and not necessarily through esoteric Buddhist terms. Cassaniti found that among farmers in Northeastern Thailand,

they tended to discuss the *annica* with explanatory models from their daily lives, such as the unpredictability of rice crops yields. There is a perception that the farmers do not understand Buddhism because they do not talk about suffering, impermanence and inwardness.

Similarly, for Cambodian Buddhists, the principle of merit making is at the core of Buddhist practices. Like the Theravada Buddhists in Northeastern Thailand that Cassaniti studied, they operate on the principle of making merit and making ritual offerings. In other words, they access the Buddhist landscape through notions of temporality and samsara rebirth through supernatural entities such as the *teovada* and *neak taa*. In Lombardy, the Venerable Sokhom Hem utilized esoteric terms by providing Buddhist calendars as an explanatory model to describe the *rodeav* of Pchum Ben. For Cambodian textile workers in Lombardy, though the Pchum Ben festival did not fall on a Sunday officially, it was planned on that day to make sure they had the opportunity to make merit for future lives for themselves and the spirits present that day.

In Cambodian Buddhism, the monk is clearly the central figure in doctrine and practice at the temple. Yet, there are many figures aside from the Buddha that are significant for Buddhist communities. In Cambodia, Buddhist sects are diverse, but this does not supplant the significance of Theravada Buddhism. Throughout Cambodian forests, just outside the *p^{h}uum* or villages, the colonies of *neak taa* spirits protect and menace those who transgress boundaries. In Cambodia, the supernatural entities called the *neak taa* are said to live in the forests, in areas of the highlands considered uninhabitable by lowland, rice farming groups.

Of course, Buddhism is par excellence centered on death. Buddhist Studies scholar Erik Davis (2015) argues that in contemporary Phnom Penh, the history of highland and lowland distinction in Southeast Asia is a point of differentiation that is negotiated through spirits that reside in rocks and trees. Spirits transmigrate across dangerous boundaries such as wild and tame. Buddhism is a central organizing principle within boundaries and transgression of morality. Davis argues that the monk's presence and rituals make this dangerous transitory state more auspicious. As the Venerable Sokhom suggested to me that day when I asked about the spirits, though he may not believe in the *neak taa* because it is outside modern iterations of Buddhist doctrine, he was present because it involved the community. The next section examines a lunch at the temple, seven days after the death of an elderly Cambodian man from Trentino, a neighboring area of Italy. It argues that while Pchum Ben was in part a celebration of Khmerness through clothing, food, and collective engagement with spirits, in contrast, the funeral emphasizes a more malleable sense of Khmerness because it centers on only one spirit (that of the deceased man).

The Funeral: a Particular Display of Khmerness in Italy

I began and closed the circle of fieldwork in Lombardy with the spirits. I attended a memorial for a man who had passed seven days prior. It was my last visit to the temple, since days later, I unexpectedly had to evacuate as the region became the global epicenter of the pandemic, but I did not know this at the time. Like every Sunday when I went to the temple for the ritual offering of food to Venerable Sokhom Kem, I left my house in the morning, and walked to the town center near a large Catholic church. As I normally

did, I left an hour early to sit outside on a bench cushioned among a cluster of rose bushes and watch people congregate outside a Catholic church while waiting for one of the Cambodian women to give me a ride to the temple. That Sunday was special since the temple was to host a funeral event.

Like Pchum Ben, the event commenced with a morning sermon and chants in the same large hall that had hosted the annual feast the spirits event. In contrast to Pchum Ben, the rows of chairs laid out were sparse, leaving half of the hall empty. When I entered, one of the deceased man's sons was collecting money. He asked me my name and wrote it in Khmer script on the clipboard with "20" to indicate the twenty euro I handed to him as I made my way into the hall. Unlike my initial arrival at Pchum Ben, I knew several of the older women already seated in the hall toward the back rows. I asked Chandra if twenty euro was enough, and she agreed that since I did not know the family, that amount was considered appropriate.

We watched the scene in front of us. At the front, there was a raised platform where the monk sat facing the audience. To the left of the central table of the Buddha statue housed the large portrait of the bust and face of the deceased in a suit and dark red tie. The frame looked to be a foot in length and a foot in width. The picture depicted him in his aging years with white hair and a solemn expression. On the top of the frame were three small black bows two inches in diameter placed on the left corner, the middle and the right corner. At the community ritual called the Seven Days to commemorate the passing of the older man, the decorations delineated a Buddhist community space, but personalized, unlike the Pchum Ben event.

Chandra began to whisper information about the family members to me. Six of deceased man's seven children, fifteen of grandchildren, and his widow occupied the two front rows, right in front of the portrait. The family was clearly bereaved and their placement in front of the audience seemed to heighten the effect. Janina Fenigsen and James Wilce (1994) find that in Finland, transnational performances of faith during the funeral are not merely replicas of a tradition. Similarly, though the Pali chants follow a repertory, they are not merely replicas of a perceived authentic Buddhism.

Anthropologist Webb Keane (1997) finds in Indonesia, the enactment of rituals, particularly in the presence of ancestors, generates high levels of risk. The standard is an ancestral perfection that cannot be replicated. Using Keane's notion of risk, the context of honoring the deceased man generated a sense of heightened sense of communality. The family shouldered the responsibility of organizing an event that connected the past and present in ways the man would deem worthy. I watched the family hold hands while Venerable Sokhom Hem chanted. We collectively created a soundscape of Pali chants that animated the Buddhist collective in making Khmerness in the presence of the man. I never met the man but soon learned about his predilections through the lunch and objects selected to adorn the event.

Various objects performed during the funeral, though much less elaborately than at Pchum Ben as they seemed to be guided by an aspiration for perfection in honoring the man. The objects narrated the portrait of the deceased man as central to the day's events. Like the yellow orange silk like fabric with beaded edges that hung over the Buddha statue during Pchum Ben, this same fabric hung over the man's portrait. There were five

white candles placed in front of this pictures as well as potted yellow flowers. There were two main candles on each side in front of the portrait the left one lit and the right one looked like it had gone out in the wind. In front of the five candles stood what looked like a large cake holder filled with sand and converted into a place where incense sticks were placed to pay homage. On both sides of the incense holder stood two open packs of incense. To the left of the incense holder filled with sand stood a thin glass vase full of about six cut white lilies and four roses indicated that an adherent had maybe brought the flowers since they were not potted. These elaborate decorations made the funeral visually distinct from the everyday rhythms of the temple.

Unlike the clothing worn during Pchum Ben, there were no silks at the funeral. Run-of-the-mill khakis with tucked-in shirts with many sporting sunglasses were the mainstay for the men. This community occasion displayed individuality, where each person wanted to be seen in their best, yet Sunday semiformal attire. The clothing resembled those worn by the churchgoers I saw earlier outside of the Catholic church. Following the morning sermon and chants, I waited in the courtyard. I watched an elderly man perhaps in his seventies walk across the courtyard. There were no triangular Buddhist flags. The man was wearing very casual clothing almost pajamas, thin pants with a short-sleeved buttoned shirt. A man in his twenties dressed in jeans and a white T-shirt. He had longish hair, glasses and somewhat heavy set, with tattoos across his forearms. The one in long jean pants had a camera in hand which probably belonged was a distant relative.

I had seen him taking pictures during the chants. I lost count, but at 9:30 am there were twelve elderly women and at 10:00 am there were seventeen elderly women and fifteen men. People filed in and out. One woman looked like she stopped by on her way to work caring for an elderly Italian woman, which meant she worked on Sundays. Another man in his sixties dressed in what looked like dark Adidas pants and a red cotton shirt extremely casual. He also wore what looked like home sandals. Aside from the elderly men who help clean, everyone was dressed neatly, their clothing performing a sense of Khmerness that was decidedly also embedded in Italian norms of Sunday best rather than silks.

Everyone stood in the courtyard chatting for about twenty minutes, then the adult children of the deceased set up tables toward the rear of the temple. The entire event that day felt Italian to me, including the two Italian baristas who made espressos in front of the entrance to the worship hall. At that point, the monk had eaten and retired to his quarters. The tables were set up toward the back of the temple outside the purview of the monk's windows on the second floor. The younger folks related to the deceased or friends of his grandchildren cleared the kitchen tables to make room for a catered communal lunch. Everyone was in a good mood and it was clear many old friends were catching up. The typical Khmer dishes were served Italian-style in courses. The meal began with typical Khmer dishes such as red curry, and tempura fried pieces of pork, served separately in order, rather than all at once as is the norm in Cambodian meals. The Khmer meal seemed out of place at the event as everything else had a sense of Italianess to it. I was told that these foods were favorites of the man. As the fried meat was brought

out, one of the man's sons, walked around filling glasses with red wine, which in Italy, is normally paired with the rather heavy fried meat. Unsure if I would violate any of the rules, I looked around and saw most of the young people also had a glass of wine with the meal. Since the wine was a specialty of Trentino, I decided to have a glass since I had not been to that region.

Though each family pays voluntary monthly dues of fifty euro to the temple, the benefits of hosting the lunch at the temple cannot be distilled down to money. Everyone was there to witness the aspirations for an auspicious rebirth. Though the ritual of sending off the dead makes unity, it we examine it closer, the whole day's events were simultaneously about making difference. The family was clearly wealthy. As the postprandial afternoon sermon from the monk came to a close, everyone began to file out. A woman with thick cat-eyed tortoise shell glasses told me take plenty of food home. She said, "The young need blessed food for their children and grandchildren." I packed and lugged a cardboard box filled with a bag of Sicilian red oranges, squared baked sweets dusted with powdered sugar, mounds of focaccia, pizza with olives on top. The roomful of uneaten food at the temple made me sad, a reminder of the impermanence of life. There was so much food leftover and the family of the deceased had worked hard to commemorate him. They selected his favorite grappa from Trentino, and other Italian staples. While the ritual merit transfer during Pchum Ben featured absolutely no alcohol, the funeral event was specific to the family of the deceased. The lunch was Khmer and catered to reflect the man's predilections during life. In his passing, they wanted to send him off with these material goods.

On the way home, a sense of contention emerged surrounding the presence of red wine at the table. Makara and her husband Kosal, a couple from Battambang, Cambodia, who were in their sixties nearing retirement, drove me back home. It was unusually silent in the car. During Sunday ritual food offerings at the temple, normally, Makara who is diabetic, liked to chat about her medications, dietary restrictions, and her exercise routine. Every moment is an opportunity for exercise, she would say. At the temple on Sundays, I regularly watched her gather stray branches to stuff in large plastic bags and pick herbs that grew wildly in the back of the temple. In the car ride after the funeral, her husband Kosal hesitated, then he blurted, "Khmer only go during large events and should go every week because it is not just about religion but community." Kosal's comment is likely a negotiation of ethnicity through Buddhism. [73] For Makara and Kosal, Khmerness is a contested site of identity formation, with religion as negotiating modes of belonging and exclusion. Between two states, Cambodia and Italy, the discussion over the glasses of red wine with the meal, poured by one of the sons of the deceased, regarded deeper questions about Buddhist practices, but also the continual making of Khmerness in diaspora.

Makara told me that the family of the deceased were wealthy and Sino-Khmer. [74]Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2010) studied a group of upper-class transnational entrepreneurs who fled Cambodia and opened donut shops in California. Ong specifically refers to the subjects of her study as Sino-Khmer, rather than Cambodian, to indicate their ethnicities both as Khmer and Chinese. At the funeral in Lombardy, one of the granddaughters in her late twenties told me she had studied in Tokyo, Japan for a semester. Her father had funded her education and study abroad. The man who passed

away lived in Trentino and his family wanted to represent their region and celebrate their material wealth as refugees following forty years of residence in the mountainous and picturesque Italian region bordering Austria. The family hail from Trentino, not Lombardy. They are Sino-Khmer. For the family, *grappa trentina* and red wine are typical Italian foodstuffs that accompany a meal on a Sunday lunch. At the funeral, they claim the space to negotiate Khmerness through Italian material objects such as *grappa trentina*. They displayed their wealth through the overabundance of food at the ceremony following seven days since his journey into Buddhist rebirth. In Cambodia, these spirits also exist by ethnicity such as the *neak taa chen* (Chinese *neak taa*), which form hierarchies and communities for Sino Khmer in Cambodia.

Notably, discussions of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia also point to the ethnic diversity within Southeast Asia which encompass zones such as the Zomia (James 2009). It is no wonder that scholars of Southeast Asia have begun to utilize area studies in order to theorize across the social sciences. Scholars (cf. Schwenkel 2014; Ho 2017) have argued for the decentralization of the West in scholarship by paying attention to the diversity of Southeast Asian migrations beyond images of the refugee, and further argue that in doing so, scholars may theorize migration outside of nation-states. From the formation of Singapore to the massacres in Indonesia, the history of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia arouses notable curiosity, and histories of tragedy. [75]

Only Makara and Kosal evoked Chinese ethnicity in relation to the wine, and they were indeed the outliers. In Cambodia, since the period of Angkor, Chinese have married Khmer women integrating into dominant society (Oveson and Trankell 2004:256).

Khmer women chose Sino-Cambodian over French men for marriage in the 1950s (Schliesinger 2011:201). In the Khmer case, Chinese were relatively well-incorporated, and were considered desirable marriage partners during decolonization. In the 1990s, Chinese Cambodians were nearly indistinguishable because of intermarriage (Ku 1995:16). Most Chinese intermarried with Khmer making these categorizations difficult. In some villages mixed marriages between Vietnamese, Khmer, Cham and Chinese were common (Scupin 1995:313). The Khmer Rouge executed their favored rural Base People toward the end (Heder, 2002:180). The Khmer Rouge were Maoists who treated the ethnic Chinese better but at the same time they targeted urban New People many of whom were Chinese (Chandler 1991:285).

I propose that the wine invoked a status of performing a sense of integration Italian integration that Makara and Kosal were uncomfortable with. As factory workers in Lombardy, and not a wealthy family from Trentino, they evoked ethnicity as a code for not Buddhist or Khmer. No one else seemed to take issue with the wine. That day at the funeral lunch, the monk had retired to his quarters and could not see the setup of the tables. The consensus seemed to be that the family had successfully organized an elaborate event to make merit for the deceased man. Simultaneously, they made merit for themselves and their children. The foods were charitably distributed and shared in the merit making event. Kosal and Makara evoked Chinese ethnicity in their negotiation of Khmerness through what they deemed to be proper forms of Buddhist practices. Likely though, with the impending COVID-19 in Lombardy, Kosal and Makara were likely

speaking to long standing Sinophobia in Southeast Asia, despite its muted iteration in Cambodia historically. [76]

Haunted Spaces and Reconciliation

> There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits once can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in—and this inverts the schema of the Panopticon. Michel De Certeau (1984:108).

De Certeau's clarion call for cultural readings of power structures such as the Panopticon is significant to ongoing discussions of anthropology in Southeast Asia (cf. Steedly 1999). [77] In Cambodia, during the Democratic Kampuchea regime, the term, *ʔaŋ kaa pnɛɛk mnoah* (the organization has eyes all around like those of a pineapple) was the Panopticon's slogan. In Khmer, the word *mnoah* (pineapple) is said to come from Cham language. Taking a fruit that has several regional varieties, with its brown and yellow outer hard shell, one needs to shave the top layer, then make diagonal incisions to remove the eyes of the fruit, rendering it refreshing in the tropic heat. Without removing the shell, the pineapple's protruding eyes make it a cultural object for the metaphor of the Panopticon during the 1975-1979 period. As de Certeau might say, for Cambodians, the haunting by spirits during Pchum Ben constitute necessary practices of Buddhist placemaking. The silence of the spirits is formidable. Yet, at the temple in diaspora, Pchum Ben presents a space of collective and Buddhist counter to the silences of national commemoration.

Embodied placemaking practices are central to countering state-sanctioned forms of violence. These processes of haunting crucially involved objects through Latour's conceptual framework of networks: Buddhist place-making is materially, culturally and

socially embedded within a specific context in which meanings are continually negotiated. The narratives surrounding Cambodian refugee has tended to focus on Buddhism as a response to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Undoubtedly, these religious rituals are modes of processing suffering. Yet, this framework alone of pathology inadvertently produces a subjectivity that mirrors the economic hierarchy of nation-states. Without ethnographic details of the cultural meaning-making, there is little agency given to survivors as they defined by a narrative of economic determinism. [78]

In religious terms, this translates into Cambodians being constructed as imperfect Buddhists, since practices arising from East Asian countries such as Zen Buddhism, are viewed as the orthodox versions, with Theravada practices viewed as secondary. The perceived invisibility of the spirits under state-sanctioned narratives allows them to waft into their way into the everyday lives of survivors through "mediation, translation and networks," to use Latour's words. The two diasporic ceremonies described in this chapter constitute ongoing conversations about postwar reconciliation in Cambodia through Buddhist mediations of matter and spirit.

Anthropologists have examined the meanings of materiality and the remnants of bones (cf. Krmpotich, Fontein, and Harries 2010). In her ethnographic study of the genocide of Mayans in Guatemala, Diane Nelson (2015) narrates the testimony of bones. She writes, "Already disembodied and disaggregated into bones, numbers, and DNA, they will reembody, it is hoped, in a courtroom" (85). The bones lay testimony to the violence inflicted by Rios Mont political regime. In Theravada Buddhism, the relation between the soul and the physical body is connected in unity. This is especially evident in

the treatment of the head which holds the essence of each individual and following the physical death the soul divorces itself from the body to a higher form (Ong 1995). Lindsay French who worked with amputees in refugee camps notes bad karma manifests itself in the cutting off a limb, showing that the person lost status and does not have a good future (French in Ong 1995). In talking about bones, for Cambodian Buddhists, this discussion necessitates Buddhist rituals of cremation.

In 1994, King Norodom Sihanouk proposed to fund the cremation of the skulls at Tuol Sleng and Choeng Ek to honor the dead through Buddhist ritual cremation. This request was denied by the Cambodian Peoples' Party (CPP) (Ledgerwood 1997: 94) Commemoration sites that provide solace for Cambodian survivors need to involve religion. Choeung Ek is a stupa made of human skulls. In Cambodia, tourism is not just about money, it is integral to discussions of national reconciliation (cf. Hughes 2008). Choeung Ek "Killing Fields" museum and Tuol Sleng execution center museum open up significant international dialogue through tourism.

Far from being removed from the local Buddhist population, the bones on display at the Tuol Sleng museum and Choeng Ek elicit mixed emotions. For many Cambodians, the centers serve as political sites that reaffirm the existence to the current regime (Um 2012: 837). In Cambodia, Theravada Buddhism has played multiple roles in the modern era. In her research at Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, Sina Emde (2013) argued that spiritual engagement in commemoration at Choeung Ek is significant but the narrative of collective suffering against a handful of cadres at the top hinder national reconciliation between everyday perpetrators and victims who live among each other (22). There is no

coherence on what to do with these bones. Judy Ledgerwood (1997) finds that locals do not necessarily take issue with the museums. In fact, many relate to the narrative produced. The issue at hand is the bones.

In the Cambodian context, as in most of Southeast Asia, there is no separation between the material and the spirit following death. Jean Langford (2009) argues that this is an ontological question and the spirit and the material cannot be disconnected. [79] Langford writes:

> The radical separation of matter and spirit found necessary by Aquinas, and all but ineluctable by Agamben, is problematized if not absent within stories of dead who return as lizards to watch over their grandsons, or dead who are in need of clothes and cookware. In the world imagined by those stories, desecration of the dead cannot be simply understood as the treatment of the dead as debased matter devoid of spirit. The stories gesture to a simultaneously corporeal and spectral power of the dead (704).

In Langford's ethnographic work in the US, she finds the institutionalized version of this separation at hospitals and mortuaries serve as reminders of the structural violence in the lives of Southeast Asian Americans. In Cambodia, landscapes bustle with spirits. The role of Buddhist rituals of cremation in discussions of national reconciliation cannot be understated. At Pchum Ben in Lombardy, Cambodians engaged with deceased relatives that are forgotten in the national narratives of reconciliation. Without Buddhist rituals of cremation, these lives can never be put to rest, and remain roaming in Cambodia and in diaspora. Buddhist rituals attend to the transitory states of death and rebirth. In both cases, for Cambodian diasporas, this chapter examined how objects and spirits regenerate Buddhist lifeways during community festivals at the temple.

Though clearly religious, Pchum Ben at Wat Khmer is also about celebrating community in diaspora, through displays of silk, and the making of food for deceased loved ones who wander lost in Lombardy. Through the incense, the writing of names of loved ones, in this context of northern rural Italian landscape, survivors transform this country estate home, utilized the multiple rooms and create a site of commemoration and cultural renewal at intersecting locations—Italy and Cambodia—that situate Buddhists in Italy as merit makers for their perished loved ones, part of the 1.7 million that died in the genocide, but simultaneously, for taking the karmic consequences and using the concrete, the earth, the painting of the buildings, the community space to transform these events into practices of resilience.

In diaspora, as the funeral demonstrated, these celebrations are also markers of shifting identities. In the process they produce notions of Khmerness, the family of the deceased man situated themselves as meritorious Buddhists with their particular Italian regional tastes poised for more fortunate subsequent lives. The temple is protected physically through the cameras, the back entrance, but also through the groundskeeper who resides at the temple. The house adjacent to the temple is owned by a family of Polish descent. During the weekdays, I witnessed the groundskeeper helping the family by opening the gates for the utility company since they were at work during the day. He kept their packages for them and helped secure their home. In other words, these neighborly relations embed the temple into this Catholic space. As Asian bodies in Italy, the making of Buddhism and Khmerness through food, clothing, and ritual is significant in subverting the Panopticon of being racial and religious minorities.

As I was about to leave the funeral, a Cambodian woman in her late fifties with blondish dyed hair in a bun, wearing a white lace ran out and called out to me. She wore a small gold ring, silver bangles on one wrist and a gold bracelet with little dangling hearts on the other wrist. She said, “I saved some extra focaccia for you.” There was a lot of food leftover. It seemed the family of the deceased might have been expecting more people, but due to rumors about an unknown virus in Lombardy, fewer showed up than expected. The funeral took place just a few days before an official decree declared Lombardy a red zone, and the temple shut down.

I exited the car and refused offers of help Kosal and Makara to carry the box of food up to my second-floor apartment. I waited until they drove away to visit my neighbors, Mauro and Lucia, who were cleaning out their garage when I got home. Mauro commented on the newness of Makara and Kosal’s car, surprised they could afford an electric car on a factory worker’s salary. I shared the baked sweets and some focaccia with them as we chatted about our Sundays. They asked me if Italians had made the food and I confirmed that an Italian *pasticceria* was hired for the baked goods and the main courses were cooked by a Khmer woman who caters specifically for Buddhist events. Mauro and Lucia told me they were now afraid of Chinese food. Recent televised interviews with politicians abounded about approach of the coronavirus in Northern Italy. As a decree designated Lombardy a red zone, it became clear that negotiations of Khmerness were less significant given the processes the racialization during the pandemic, which I turn to in the next chapter, using Bakhtin’s heteroglossia as forms of

distributed agency, in a discussion of Khmer-Italian codeswitches, language, and race with a group of Cambodian Buddhist women who gather daily to socialize over cards.

Endnotes

[64] Severin Fowles (2016) argues that the ontological shift to focus on the object detracts from human struggles. I think his argument is valid, but it must be contextualized rather than generalized. The shift to materiality does not necessarily fill the void of a sustained postcolonial critique but could also be used in conjunction. For example, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2015) depiction of Khmer mushroom foragers in Oregon with only traces of their refugee status mentioned in the book left something to be desired for me, as it seemed to detract from their experiences. Tsing describes the Khmer in relation to her fieldwork in Indonesia collapsing the pre-Vietnam war era with the ruins of capitalism, without a focus on the ruins of war, through the bodies of Southeast Asian refugees present in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, I think that Tsing--as a specialist in Southeast Asia, and considering the literature on Cambodian Americans depicted primarily as victims of war, capitalism, neglect in the literature--made a clever and appropriate choice to represent the Khmer as foragers that are part of the global chain that supplied matsutake mushrooms to the Japanese market. In this representation, Tsing allows Khmer to be producers, part of the capitalist ruin, not merely inert, which is significant as her work becomes an archeology of knowledge of the literature on Cambodian Americans. In this case, the ontological shift worked in tandem with the postcolonial, particularly when considering that the ethnographer mediates the text, and thus their reflexivity must be considered, in addition to the topic represented.

[65] *Chnang* means 'cooking pot' in Khmer and *kampong*, borrowed from the Indonesian *kampung* for village. Kampong Chang is the Village Cooking Pots.

[66] To the *kramaa*, the earthen clay pots, and the sugar palm trees, I add the *trakuən* (water spinach), water convolvulus. In 2012, I volunteered at an elementary school on the periphery of the splendid Angkor Wat temples. As part of a collective lunch program to provide meals for all the children during the day, the teachers asked the kids to plant the *trakuən* around the school buildings, to add to the daily meals with rice. The NGO provided meat that were cut into small pieces that would accompany the soups and lightly stir-fried meals that went the *trakuən*. Ceremonies throughout Monsoon Asia are said to be rooted in animist beliefs. Cambodian survivors have touted them as life-sustaining when starving. In 2013, when I interviewed, videorecorded and documented the survivor stories of Cambodian seniors in Long Beach, California, many spoke of the *trakuən*. Abundant throughout Southeast Asia, the wilted green at the top like stalks of bright green wheat, its abundance, and short life cycle make the *trakuən* easy to grow, harvest and consume. It lends a sense of Buddhist impermanence to its existence. In the heavy rains in Southeast Asia, the *trakuən* grows along riverbanks without the need for planting, an image for the role of Buddhism in notions of Khmerness, an existence that is so integral that is rarely regarded as a religion. It is like the *trakuən*, and the air, land and water that give rise to the plant. The *trakuən* is eaten by everyone, easily grown along riverbanks, and is considered a symbol of Cambodian resilience.

[67] I am specifically defining Khmerness as Buddhist in this essay based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Lombardy, Italy, where Catholicism is significant for the second generation through self-conversion. In the US, the role of Protestant groups in the resettlement process of Cambodian Americans is a factor in the production of Khmerness in the US. In her essay on Cambodian American Christians, Nancy Smith-Hefner (2010) writes the following about Cambodian American Christians: "They are Khmer, and certainly think of themselves as such, but the way in which they conceptualize "Khmerness" is quite different from that of their Buddhist brethren" (440).

[68] See also Kwan (2020) for Cambodian American commemoration and trauma

[69] Though normally frowned upon in rationalist strands of Cambodian Buddhism, if asked, monks will tie strings around wrist "to take away the bad karma from previous lives," as I was told in 2013, at Wat Phnom in Pomona, California. On a blazing sunny Monday morning, typical of Southern California weather, I entered to temple to inquire about Khmer language lessons. In contrast to the stark white outside, the room where the monk sat seemed dim. The room smelled of freshly lit incense. A woman with long hair and looked to be in her early 30s was seated on the floor with her legs in a position where her toes were pointing toward the door the toes facing away from the monk the proper way to sit. She was thin and wore a skirt and had a terry cloth towel over her legs. The monk suggested she use betel nut leaf and she answered with *kanaa* the religious laity word for "yes." I didn't ask, but she seemed to be suffering from emotional or physical problems. She sat with a bag of rice grain covered in a white cloth.

[70] The spirits allow practitioners to reformulate temporality. Stuart Hall writes, "how people whose day was structured by diurnal rhythms, by physical and geographical things, by the temple of the seasons, et cetera, ahd to learn new practices of timekeeping" (42).

[71] http://www.cam-cc.org/calendar/Utility/khmer-monthly-calendar.php

[72] See also Kidron (2009; 2012) for more on genocide and silence. See also Lorde (1977) and Basso (1970).

[73] Kosal's comment, "Khmer only go during large events and should go every week because it is not just about religion but community" is likely a negotiation of ethnicity through Buddhism. In a survey of Sino-Khmer in the US, Nancy Smith-Hefner (2010) writes, "One young Sino-Khmer male explained the religious participation of Sino-Khmer in the following terms: Real Cambodians probably go to the temple more often than Chinese because the Chinese work too hard. "But I give food for temple celebrations if they come to my place and ask. I do that for the good feeling and because it is my tradition too…because I am Cambodian. As for beliefs like destiny, reincarnation, well, most Cambodians believe in that; Chinese, maybe only percent believe and the rest

believe in hard work. I don't believe that if you go to the temple you will have a long life or better life. I go because it's part of my tradition" (275).

[74] Chinese Cambodians mainly speak Hakka, Hokkien, Hainanese, Teochiu and Cantonese with Teochiu Chinese making up 70% of Chinese-Cambodians (Schliesinger 2011:111). When I was in Phnom Penh, I noticed the term "Ei" which is Chinese for aunt is used to speak with all women business owners in Phnom Penh markets. In my view, this gendered linguistic fusion reflects the fact that women in Cambodia work in markets and involve themselves in commerce and use these terms as part of establishing a sense of relations with customers. It somehow occurred to me too that the numbers 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 and 90 in Khmer language correlated with numbers 2-9 in Cantonese.

[75] See for example, in Wardaya's *Truth Will Out*, an ethnic Chinese Indonesian man and survivor said, "But being in politics has its consequences, namely the '3B's – Buron, Buang, Bunuh- hunt down, banish, kill. That is why one should study history wisely" (124). Of the nine testimonials from witnesses and survivors in Wardaya's *Truth Will Out*, the paramilitary troops wrongly arrested fourteen-year-old Mujilah who spent 11 years in prison her entire youth (129).

[76] Though this chapter only discusses Sino Khmer, significantly, Khmerness has also been historically produced in relation to Islam. Because I did not work with or meet any Cambodian Muslims in Italy, I footnote my thoughts here on the significance of Islam in Cambodia in the production of Khmerness. Cham Muslims in Cambodia constitute a significant minority at 700,000 in a country of 15,000,000 (Ramsay 2006:31). Though the historical record shows that there was a Cambodian Muslim king named Reameathipadei I that reigned from 1642-1658 (Kersten 2006), I argue that through discourses of Buddhism and state-making in decolonization period, that Cambodian Muslims were incorporated through the concept of Khmerness, as noted through the term Khmer Islam. Thus, this construction is relatively recent. Similar to processes of racialization of Khmer, the French showed concerned for Cham but often represented Cham as an unchanging ancient group (Scupin 1995:305). Though quite different cases, postcolonial Malaysia recognized the colonial legacy of structured and racialized inequality for Malays through the New Economic Policy (Shamsul 1997:209). In the case of *Cambodge*, during the French colonial period, Cham Muslims and Khmer were racialized similarly (Edwards 1997:22). I would expand on the work of Edwards and add that in part, religion played a role in racialization as it was in part a buffer, amplifying the significance of these religious practices. Cham did not initially send children to French schools to preserve religious identity (Eng 2013:123; Perez Pereiro 2012: 40; DeFeo 2007:9). Similarly Khmer Buddhists did the same initially as well. Generally, Cambodians consider Cham, Cham Imam Sann and Chvea culturally similar to the dominant Khmer group. The three groups are collectively called Cambodian Muslims or Khmer Islam. Cham became incorporated into the nation state under the political label Khmer Islam (Oveson and Trankell 2004:245). In Khmer language, Cham means Muslim conflating religion and ethnicity. However, in reality each of the three groups are distinct with differing histories

which influence their political activities and identities: the Cham migrated in 1471 following the collapse of the Champa Empire, the Cham Imam Sann migrated in 1692 and the Chvea whose willing movements happened prior to the Cham and Cham Imam Sann, are not ethnic Cham and maintain links to Muslims in Pattani (Stoddard 2008:239). Similar to the situation of Buddhist infrastructure during the Democratic Kampuchea regime, 70% of Cambodia's Muslims perished (Taouti 1982:194). At the social level, relations among Cham and Khmer remain arguably harmonious following the genocide (Taouti 1982:197). The Khmer Rouge separated all families including Cham Muslims to hinder rebellion (Kiernan 2013:324). Cambodians refer to Cham Cambodians as *bong poun Cham* (our Muslim brothers and sisters) (Eng 2013:128). However, the Champa discourse socially excludes Cham as refugees despite centuries in Cambodia (Hamid and Effendy 2006:252). Royalty has also been a figure in the making of Khmerness in relation to Islam (Trankell and Oveson 2004: 23). In 1997, King Norodom Sihanouk conferred upon the Cham San Imam village chief the influential title of Oknya which politicizes the head as part of royalty and the state (De Feo 2005:2). Furthermore, classified as un-Khmer, Cham are vulnerable to abuses (Ehrentraut 2013:114). In Cambodia, media may point to extremism (Mydans 2002). However, the reality is the vast majority of Cham are moderate Cambodian Muslims (Carmichael and Nara 2001:4). Social and political links that have historically existed between Buddhists and Muslims in Cambodia, and the collaborations at all levels of society (Zain bin Musa 2001:3). In the US, Cham are normally undercounted because demographics are acknowledged through nation-states (Hosan 2014). Anida Ali, a Cambodian American Cham performance artist demonstrates the feelings of being a religious and ethnic minority in a Buddhist country through her performance of "Buddhist Bug."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fgaydWp0kA

[77] I think Steedly's discussion of anthropology in Southeast Asia is also significant to Ortner's (1984; 2016) discussions of the discipline following the 1960s and her use of the term "dark anthropology."

[78] I am aware that the term agency is problematic. I use it here specifically in regard to the work of Alfred Gell. During the communal Pchum Ben ceremony and funeral, the sense of making merit for the spirits and their relatives engages notions of karma, what Alfred Gell might describe as a sense of shared agency. Gell (1998) writes, "Pol Pot's soldiers possessed (like all of us) what I shall later discuss as 'distributed personhood'. As agents, they were not just where their bodies were, but in many different places (and times) simultaneously. Those minds were components of their identities as human persons, just as much as their fingerprints or the litanies of hate and fear which inspired their actions" (21). Scholars have extensively examined the distributed personhood of the Khmer Rouge, in terms of what is left behind, such as the landmines, the marks of the era (cf. Hinton 1996; 2002). This form of agency that Gell describes makes room for the spirits. For Cambodian Buddhists, the distributed agency is carried through the traces of what remains of the loved ones who perished without being ritually cremated.

[79] In Jean Lanford's ethnographic study in the US with refugees from Laos and Cambodia, she argues that the institutionalization of Christianity, this version that separates the spirits from matter at hospitals and mortuaries is a continued reminder of the structural violence in the lives of Khmer, Khumuu, Lao and Hmong in the US. Langford emphasizes that this ontology is present across ethnicities and religions for the Southeast Asians she worked with; many of the Hmong in her work were Christian.

Chapter 4: Gender, Codeswitching, and Race

> Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1988:102).

Being Buddhist is fluid, as is being a Cambodian woman. Chandra, the 64-year-old grandmother (see Chapter One) invited me to a daily informal gathering playing cards. The women congregated daily during their lunch breaks. I did not see them at the weekly Sunday ritual offerings for the monk. They attended the main temple events such as Pchum Ben and the funeral (see Chapter Three), but the everyday congregation over a few hands of cards met their needs for Buddhist practices, for sociality, and for reflection on the making of the Buddhist concept of *veasna*, which has the connotation of "fate" but not quite, as this concept is more negotiable. In contrast, karma is non-negotiable. One can keep making good karma but cannot change past deeds of bad karma.

Gender complementarity has been a model for Theravada Buddhism since its inception in mainland Southeast Asia. According to historian Barbara Watson Andaya (2002) the uptake of Theravada Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia was facilitated by the participation of women articulated through their status as mothers. Andaya explains, "While any donation of the Sangha was a demonstration of religious piety, the benefits of dana were incremental, for the constant giving of even humble gifts meant an accumulation of merit that could eventually lead to enlightenment (nibbana)" (10). In Khmer concepts of nibbana, the mother's love is a metonym of the compassion shown through Buddhism. However, the contemporary scholarly focus on Buddhism and male

political figures obscures the contributions of Buddhist women in the making of communities. [80]

Anthropologist Judy Ledgerwood (1996) demonstrates that the concept of merit provides ways to negotiate inequality in terms of karma and dharma (14). Merit gains significance with age as one approaches death and rebirth. A Cambodian woman at the temple jokingly chided, "You don't have to cook or wash dishes at the temple. I'm the old lady here!" when I asked a grey-haired visitor if I could help with anything. Despite the emphasis on women in Theravada making, I saw both men and women wiping down kitchen appliances, rolling up calendars and posters, and tidying up the kitchen. Women who no longer live the life of family and children may reside at a temple in Cambodia (Harris 2005:74) in Khmer Buddhist conceptions, these injustices translate into Buddhist notions of dharma and merit (Ledgerwood 1996:14). Gender provides space to produce an everyday sense of religious self through merit making.

The term *veasna* means 'our fate' which in the context of Khmer Buddhist practices could also be interpreted as 'our karma.' Furthermore, it is almost exclusively uttered by women, suggesting an emerging sense of gendered collective karma. I explore here is how within the gendered spaces of their work in the textile factories, and their card playing circles, the sense or practices of gendered collective karma are ways to practice Buddhism conjoining their past and present. It transforms these sufferings as part of the everyday, the traces of bad karma of past lives, into the good, and the collective.

The group of women invited me to learn *scala*, a game similar to bridge, according to a quick Google search. There is a rotation of houses as they take turns

hosting the daily event, but it was primarily held at the home of Maria. Around the table sat everyday Buddhist women listening to Cambodian rock from the 1960s while playing an Italian card game. One does not have to leave the space to find a historical model, specifically the singer Roserei Sothea's sings about karmic law and labor. Songs from the 1960s are programmed on the TV suspended at the corner of the dining room. The lyrics show how front and center, first and foremost, Buddhism is a lived practice, in the living rooms of the women who gather to play.

This chapter shows how Asian women who are Buddhist and have survived decades of war reconcile the karmic law as doctrine with the Four Noble Truths. The lyrics show how front and center, first and foremost, Buddhism is a lived practice. There is a rotation of houses as they take turns hosting the daily event, but it was primarily held at the home of Maria. Anthropologist Tanya Marie Luhrhmann (2012) worked with Christian evangelicals in the American South. She finds that instead of assuming they are religious ideologically, they know that faith needs to be practiced daily through prayer. Using Bateson's theory on frameworks of play, Luhrmann argues that the practitioners incorporate belief and play in the making of their Christianity. In the case of Cambodian women Buddhists in Italy, on a daily basis, this making of karma as a belief happens in these spaces of socialization which are spatially gendered, a norm in Italian leisure spaces such as coffee shops. For Cambodian women engaging in these Italian rhythms of socialization, they remake karma collectively as racialized and gendered subjects in Italy. Using Luhrmann's argument, *veasna yung*, or the making of Cambodian women's collective karma, happens daily through frameworks that allow the women to make

Buddhist forms of faith daily, in which a Cambodian Buddhist subjectivity emerges as significant for the women whether they go to the temple regularly or not.

Crucially, the worshippers produce Buddhist space through the deployment of linguistic and embodied performances in public. Language ideologies are vehicles of power (Woodward and Schieffelin 1994). As such, monks and lay people perform both linguistic and bodily rituals, such as chants in Pali, that mark for gender and status, thereby creating a Buddhist sense of place that mediates their belonging as they renegotiate categories of "refugee," and "migrant" in the framework of religious merit accumulation for their potential following lives. In this process, they also delineate the "sima," or protective space a form of Buddhist protection particularly salient in the Khmer transnational context (Kent 2007).

The language and physical patterns typical of worshippers at the temple are without gendered markers, making the focus of the get together a sense of Buddhist community. Linguistic anthropologist Alessandro Duranti (1997) finds that the production of transnational spaces must account for the body's positioning. When the Samoan phrase "sit down!" is uttered in a suburb of Los Angeles, it is done so to point to unruly children in the presence of visitors. Alternatively, the mothers recall cherished familial ties in Western Samoa, with the use of the term. Similarly, at the temple, the use of temple speech, along with intentional bowing and uttering chants in Pali, produce a transnational sense of Buddhist space in Italy.

Thus, rather than employing at a functionalist analysis that would say that interactions with Italians is limited to work vocabulary. [81] This chapter shows how in the

homes and living spaces that perform a sense of italianità while also celebrating modernity and Khmerness through the Cambodian music. As they play cards, they sing along to, but also, from the discussion of karma without invoking it directly. From seeing the homes and ways of being as Italian, the strict adherence to the *bella figura*, these Italian words also point to an aspiration, and the desires of a modern Cambodian women in Italy. My work examines how Buddhism is woven into everyday practices of life.

The round table where the women play cards was outfitted with a furry blanket with a picture of an orange cat. Maria, a Cambodian lady who owns the house near the bank and whom they call the chubby one, hosted the card games I attended. A younger woman around my age named Vee, who seemed to be good friends with Maria, also regularly attended. There was an older woman from another nearby town who cannot drive, so she arrived with Vee. After about 15 minutes, another woman arrived whose speech was peppered with Italian. She began to talk about eating *integrale* (whole wheat pasta and carbohydrates).

The daily card sessions are a strategy for being Cambodian, a mother, and Buddhist without having to enter the formal worship at the temple. On one occasion, Jolie, a Cambodian woman, told me that her 32-year-old daughter, told me her daughter had converted to Catholicism, and prohibited her mother from going to the temple. I saw Jolie on the day of the funeral waiting for her daughter to pick her up in the grassy area that was used as a parking lot. Many of the younger people had converted to Catholicism. Perhaps most importantly, some of the women revealed to me they do not trust a temple that houses someone like Seth, the groundskeeper, who Chandra alluded to with the

Italian word *chiuso* or closed off. I later learned from the women that he had been fired from his factory job because of alcoholism.

Everyday life is replete with such Italian words for the women in the card circle. Many of the younger people had converted to Catholicism. The families I had met kept Italian homes. As textile workers in Lombardy, the women peppered their speech with Italian words related to their work. *Cuccipunti* is a type of stitching done on women's stockings and *completo* means complete but in the factory (this means that the box has been filled full of merchandise). As *operaio* or factory workers, they have Sundays off, and the weekly morning ritual offerings to the monk at the temple, are ways to forge identities as Italian *operaio*, and Buddhists. In the intimate spaces of the home, I was intrigued with how everyone wore shoes in the house. I was also regularly reminded not to take off my shoes in the houses I visited.

When the children and grandchildren would intermittently come in, the women spoke to them in Italian. They explicitly chided practices such as co-sleeping, a common feature of Khmer rearing of children. They told me that they ate *puntini* pasta with tetra-boxed broth instead of making homemade broth, insisting that children have their own Kinder food or chocolate for breakfast, and a special type of milk for children with a long shelf life. I was also regularly reminded not to take off my shoes in the houses I visited. In the everyday life of being Italian, these were seamlessly melded with modes of being for Cambodians and Buddhist. The temple significantly serves as a space to render difference through Buddhism and constructing Khmerness.

The women gave each other looks as I mentioned Seth the groundskeeper at the temple, but they also gave each other looks when talking about Montha and her ex-husband. Montha said jokingly, “Like husband and wife, we would chat in the evenings and he would mention other women he was attracted to, and I would casually say, ‘Why not then go out with these women and see how it goes?” Things were even worse when they lived in another city. “He definitely was not joking,” she assured us. I liked how Montha contextualized and textured her story. The women were judging her because of her husband, but in explaining the relationship between the two, Montha made it about gender. She wore a large, heavy gold necklace almost like a yellow shining baby snake, a red sweater that showed her cleavage, and her outgoing nature.

Though they are racialized subjects, the women playing cards construct their own identities beyond Italian words that denote their daily labor. This chapter examines how Cambodians in Italy construct counter-narratives in everyday speech through the use of Khmer-Italian codeswitches. I ask: through everyday codeswitches how can multiple views on racialization be expressed within these codeswitches. Here, codeswitching is defined as the ability to capitalize on multiple meanings through the construction of various voices. Bakhtin (1981) explains:

> All transcription systems—including the speaking voice in a living utterance—are inadequate to the multiplicity of the meanings they seek to convey. My voice gives the illusion of unity to what I say; I am, in fact, constantly expressing a plenitude of meanings, some intended, others of which I am unaware (xx).

Codeswitching is a form of heteroglossia in that it conveys various meanings that need to be analyzed according to the specific context in which the codeswitch occurs. Thus,

according to this definition, the unintended meanings behind the use of Italian codeswitches may create added possibilities for the speaker. Chandra then uses Italian wordsthat may speak Italian fluently through dress and race; she takes these, and through a process of heteroglossia, uses the terms to create her sense of what it means to be a Buddhist in Italy. The heteroglossic terms reveal how Chandra interprets the meanings behind the language. She does so in her own terms. The codeswitches tell a story, form a narrative, tell ways of moving through Italy, of daily life.

Looking at language this way specifically attends to the workings of power through the framework of "pedagogical discourse" (16) put forth by Charles Briggs (1984), who argues that the cultural framework between the ethnographer and interlocutor produces power dynamics that need to be examined at the micro-linguistic level. This chapter employs this empirical approach to the construction of discourse by drawing on three speech events [82] that took place during the card session about the following topics: 1) work in Italy, 2) Montha and her husband, and 3) the temple groundskeeper.

Following the work of several anthropologists (e.g., Hill 1986; Keane 1999), this chapter draws on the concept of heteroglossia as put forth by Mikhail Bakhtin to elaborate on the Khmer and Italian codeswitching practices. In the first event, Chandra's narration of life in Italy defies state-bound models of assimilation. In the second event, as Chandra discusses Montha's successful performance of the *bella figura*, an Italian moral category, she narrates continued livelihood under emergent forms of racialization in the context of the pandemic which makes the platforms of social media even more significant

form of place-making. In the third event, through descriptions of the temple groundskeeper as *chiuso* (closed-off), the women project possibilities for the transnational temple and aspirations for Buddhist selfhoods. I argue that in all three cases, the women use Khmer-Italian codeswitches in order to capitalize on the multiple meanings conveyed in both languages, as expressed through the concept of heteroglossia which captures the expression of multiple voices within one person. [83]

Language Ideologies and Racialization

> *Penso che la Cina abbia pagato un grande conto in questa epidemia perché li abbiamo visti tutti mangiare i topi vivi o cose del genere.*
>
> I think China has really paid for it, in this pandemic, because we've seen them eating live rats and things like that (Luca Zaia, Governor of the Veneto Region of Italy).

The women gathered to play cards with Italian news on in the background. On February 28, 2020, in an interview on a local Venetian channel, Luca Zaia, the governor of the region Veneto, declared that he had seen Chinese eating rats. Zaia, the governor of the Veneto region conversationally said on a local TV program, "I think China has really paid for it, in this pandemic, because we've seen them eating live rats and things like that." Zaia is a member of the nationalist populist Northern League. The resurgence of the Yellow Peril has spread along with the global COVID-19 pandemic. Constructing Asian bodies as abject through consumption of perceived exotic foods is not new, nor exclusive to Italy as recent articles in the popular media have shown. However, the pandemic in the political context of neo-fascist interactions in Northern Italy, has emboldened those such as Zaia to naturalize his public claim that Chinese are eating rats.

Zaia's televised use of the object pronoun *li* with the noun *i topi vivi* or "live rats" enlivens the image of rats, but also lends a casual tone to the statement, as if it were something uttered every day, not by a bureaucrat, but a friend. The coda of the sentence *cose del genere* or "things like that" softens the rat images, making it palatable for the populist politics of local TV. Increasingly, small regional networks in Italy are key sites that produce populist politics that manage the precariousness of the working classes through music and dialect that audiences participate in (Giusto 2020:98). The casual language used by Zaia temporally centers the image of the rat into the immediate present, giving a sense of urgency to the impending Yellow Peril menace COVID-19 of Asian bodies. [84]

Racializing discourses in mainstream media, such as those by Zaia, have been studied extensively (cf. Hill 1998; Santa Ana 1999; Bucholtz 2001; Alim and Smitherman 2012). Though these studies are important, it must be noted that analyses of newspaper articles and televised comments by political pundits, similar to methodologies that are not rooted in participant-observation, largely ignores the question of agency in responding to these discourses in everyday life. In a global rise of "nationalist populism", Gusterson (2017:212) calls for the study of these processes locally as sentiments of disdain. The multifaceted workings of power need to be methodologically addressed (Herzfeld 2015:23). Micro-linguistic analyses of everyday speech demonstrates how racializing discourses continue rather unabatedly due to their prevalence in face-to-face quotidian interactions. As Pagliai (2011) argues in her ethnographic study in a small Tuscan town, introducing racist comments is akin to talking about the weather, and the

listener becomes complicit through Goffman's concept of saving face. Pagliai demonstrates how these discourses are constructed and negotiated at these micro-levels leaving explicitly anti-racist Italians with feelings of guilt for their silence.

In 2012, a law passed that required successful completion of an Italian language exam in order to renew immigration documents (Love 2015). While discussions on national languages in Europe have centered on standardized state-languages as related to national identity (Gal 2004), what remains to be studied are how the refugees themselves respond to these monoglossic policies in their daily lives. However, studies on learners of Italian language tend to focus on the structural elements of speech such as Spanish-inflected Italian speech by Peruvian immigrants or Igbo-English influences on Nigerian Italian language learners (Goglia 2009). These studies are shaped by monoglossic ideologies of assimilation into nation-state, implying that immigrants and others seek to attain an imagined perfect Italian fluency. These conceptions that bind official language and state are undergirded by Saussurean structuralist *langue/parole* that privileges an innate sense of language in the mind. However, as several scholars have argued, grammatical constructions cannot be merely categorized as in the mind but rather, the category itself performs and creates possibilities for the speakers themselves.

Though studies on racialized speech of Asian Americans are useful as a starting point, the literature on the race and language in the U.S. cannot directly serve as a framework for Cambodian refugees in Italy. In the U.S., language socialization of Asian Americans is directly in relation to a black/white dichotomy. Studies on Asian Americans (cf. Bucholtz 2004; Reyes 2007; Shankar 2008) show that in the socialization of race and

speech, they perform out of this racial black and white binary. Similarly, studies on Latinos show that youth, for example, perform outside the black and white binary through performances of speech and dress. Rosa (2016) further argues that outside of the black/white binary, Latinos are rendered "languageless," that is, perceived to be incapable of speaking English or Spanish. Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners in speech and deemed to have accented English.

However, though the black and white binary has been deployed globally, as anthropologists have argued, these images are mediated locally. Herzfeld (2007) argues that the working-class context of Rome, a US moral logic of not being racist serves as a veneer for Italians to reformulate deprecating remarks about the living conditions of incoming Eastern Europeans, often articulated as advocating for immigrant rights.

Italy provides a striking example of local linguistic and geographical variation as a result of its history of fascism and contemporary populist nationalist movements. However, studies on dialects in Italy in relation to the Italian-state, are framed within North and South geographies. The figure in Lombardy is viewed as a racist, male, farmer in the national imagination (Cavanaugh 2005). Arguably, Cambodian refugees are rendered languageless, to use Rosa's concept, within the North and South binary. In other words, the concept of languageless also forecloses any acknowledgement of heteroglossia or the production of multiple meanings. This chapter fills the gap in the literature on the performances against racializing discourses in Italy. It also advances the central argument of my dissertation, in that it centers on how Cambodian refugees, through the temple, make livelihoods in the face of precarity and populist politics. A closer look at how

Italian and Cambodian code switches are used by Cambodian refugee women in Italy may show how they may experience life in Lombardy. To address how Cambodian refugees create counter narratives to racializing discourses, this chapter analyzes two specific speech events of everyday Italian codeswitches by Chandra while we were conversing in Khmer with her group of friends over hands of cards.

Speech Event One: Semi-Structured Interview

I walked to the temple daily to speak with the monk and attended larger community events on the weekends. I also participated in the town's evening book club, and met Italian mothers who invited me to dinners, and shared their views on how Catholicism shapes an uneasy tolerance for Cambodian refugees' use of religion in community events. With the assistance of Cambodian refugees, I also became acquainted with agricultural workers from Bangladesh who socialized daily with Cambodians at Café Sport, a Chinese-run coffee shop. Men played cards and shared information about organizations such as shelter and employment training daily. These observations helped me better understand interreligious solidarities and their limitations. However, did not get the opportunity to conduct formal interviews with the men. Whereas commercial coffeehouses in the US may sell middle-class experiences, those in Italy tend to cater to the local neighborhood (Gaudio 2003). Given the circumstances, I was still able to conduct 7 interviews that each lasted from 1-2 hours, audio-recorded and compiled oral life histories.

I interviewed Chandra twice through two semi-structured ethnographic interviews about her life in Cambodia, during encampment as a refugee in Thailand, and her

resettlement in Italy. In this chapter, I choose to focus on Chandra's participation during the card games. Her everyday speech revealed different information than the interviews. Both interviews lasted an hour each with a digital audio recorder. However, as anthropologists have argued, the presence of these technologies may evoke fears of surveillance. When I transcribed portions of Chandra's interviews, I noticed that she seemed comfortable but spoke in a formal manner. This is a common feature in Cambodian films, but even Cambodian music employs formal registers of language due to the language ideologies surrounding the use of Cambodian language when recorded through social media. In this case however, the recorded interviews somewhat unsettled the status differences between Chandra and myself. Within notions of Cambodian culture, because she is much older, asking personal questions is considered somewhat abnormal.

Viewed as a formalized speech event, audio recorded interviews yielded a different picture of Chandra's daily life in Italy as analyzed through the language she used. In two semi-structured audio recorded interviews with Chandra, she used Italian for words such as *multa* (fine to be paid), *pronto soccorso* (emergency room), *cuccipunti* (type of stitching for winter stockings done during factory work), *completo* (complete, but used to talk about stockings already stitched and ready to pack into cardboard boxes) *maschera* (face mask, used to talk about making masks for Italian government during COVID-19), *marmo* (marble, used to describe the labor the Cambodian men performed as miners in Tuscany) *cento dodici* (112, similar to 911 in the US), *carabinieri* (military

police), *privato* (private medical doctor), *questura* (immigration office), *croce rossa* (Red Cross), and *patente* (driver's license), when otherwise speaking in Khmer.

The Italian switches were mostly nouns related to Italian bureaucratic processes and labor. However, in everyday speech the use of Italian was more varied beyond functional reasons, but rather in what Ochs and Capps (1996) call an unfolding sense of self-narration. These categories could be specified as either labor-related or those connected to interactions with various forms of Italian bureaucracies such as the immigration office, the military police or the emergency room. The interview itself poses a dilemma in that it implies a western centered approach to talk with the goal of eliciting the inner sentiments, making public personal thoughts (Briggs 2007). In the following section, I expand on the work of Briggs and also Ochs and Modan who analyze the discourses that are produced between the ethnographer and interlocutor. I analyze two speech events that I would describe as pedagogical and took place in the kitchen, an intimate space of Chandra's home.

I sensed that the everyday speech during the card games that was produced as she chatted without the digital audio recorder reflected more of Chandra's thoughts on making a livelihood in Italy. I attend to these significant cultural expectations between ethnographer and interlocutor. As a 19-year-old Anglo field worker with Spanish speakers in New Mexico, Charles Briggs (1984:24) emphasizes the cultural frameworks in which interviews take place. The interlocutor, Mr. Trujillo, was fifty years Briggs' senior (18). The fact of my being much younger than the senior women, there was a sense that I should know that my asking them personal questions contradicts the norms of

"pedagogical discourse" and could be perceived as potentially rude. The interview as a genre culturally may be considered formal. Whereas Briggs was clearly delineated as an Anglo and male researcher, my position among Cambodians in Italy was more ambiguous.

In using Italian in the everyday with her friends, Chandra capitalizes on heteroglossia, used in this chapter to denote the possibilities that even the speaker may not be aware of. The use of Italian is on the one hand pedagogical within the immediate context establishing status within the framework of Cambodian cultural norms, but significantly, within state monoglossic policies that enforce Italian-only policies for immigration paper renewals, Chandra's use of Italian also means a commentary on being a Cambodian Buddhist refugee woman in Italy. Chandra narrates this sense of self through two figures who are important in her life, her best friend Montha and the groundskeeper at the temple.

As a Cambodian American, the everyday speech without the digital recorder was more culturally acceptable as Chandra taught me about Italy from her experiences. Using Briggs' idea of "learning to ask" in which he, the following two speech events will focus on speech produced without the presence of the audio recorder. These two instances are drawn from my field notes. Both speech events took place in the living room of Maria during the card session. Chandra defended her friend, Montha, another Cambodian refugee and noted member of the community. Chandra's commentary about Montha's Italian language fluency is not merely about speech, but rather, a comment on Montha's

ability to successfully perform the concept of the *bella figura* as a racialized body within connotations of civility that underlie this key Italian concept.

Speech Event Two: Fluency and Gender Performance

When Chandra retorted with, "Montha speaks Italian well. Everyone knows her," she was also commenting on the ideologies surrounding Italian language. Chandra too, speaks Italian well, yet followed by the sentence "everyone knows her," for Chandra, Italian fluency means the successful performance of the concept of the *bella figura*. In fact, when I went to the Chinese-run bar, Montha would socialize with the Italian retired men playing cards, the Bangladeshis, the wife of the Chinese bartender, making people laugh. When Chandra responded with a comment about Montha's fluency, she praised her for being successful at performing Italian in the everyday, a note on the Cambodian community in Italy.

Watching the fire at Maria's home, the first floor of it was cold, as everyone in the card group waited for the wood to catch fire. Maria started with the smaller twigs and build up to the bigger ones. The smoke would then waft up to the top of the house, to the second floor where the bedrooms were. In fact, the first floor was the playroom. In this house, Maria's in-laws live in the adjacent house, owned by her. She said that they are on good terms. In the summers, the downside is there are bugs, flies, and mosquitoes, but she says she never feels lonely surrounded by friends and family. I could see why she liked to host the daily card gatherings. Like the other homes I visited, hers was very Italian. On the phone, she spoke Italian to her two adult daughters who have moved out of the home. Maria advised me on how to be Italian, pointing to items such as the

recycling calendar. In ways, the Italian state produces effects of identification of Southeast Asian women, through the calendar, consumption of Italian home items, as markers of civility through self-management.

While Montha fully incorporates techniques of self-management, as I got to know her, I realized that speaking Italian well, beyond any state methods of management, rather Montha was able to successfully balance the racialized aesthetic of the *bella figura* and also walk the line of morality in the Cambodian term, *mien mohk, mien mout*. In her ability to balance both forms of belonging, she defied any functionalist state-bound notion of citizenship.

When Chandra made the comment about Montha's laudable fluency, Chandra invokes not only her best friend Montha, but also the forty years in Italy, and the historic moment of populism, of being a refugee woman in this context, whose presence is confined to the economically shaped ones by state policies on the elderly, the good immigrant woman worker. In speaking Italian well, Montha, who knows everyone, manages to not just fulfill this identity, but goes beyond it, owning her own home and car, raising three daughters, while working as a live-in caretaker for the elderly. Montha takes pride in her diplomas of Italian language learning, indicative of the formal schooling she did not get a chance to receive in Cambodia, as she was living and working in a home taking care of two children when she herself was just seven and orphaned.

The connotation of civility associated with the term *bella figura* cannot be overstated with its various meanings of propriety (Guida 2020). Guida argues that in the high-profile trial of Amanda Knox, Italian media outlets created multifaceted portrayals

of Knox. I surmise too, at least from my days spent in quarantine in an Airbnb near Piazza Navona in Rome, watching Italian-dubbed movies on the Paramount network, a channel dedicated to Hollywood movies produced by the Paramount, that Knox may have been judged by movies such as *Single White Female* with its messages of homophobic fears and stigma on mental illness. I watched *V for Vendetta*, *Mystic Pizza, Mona Lisa Smile,* which portrayed different images of white American womanhood. On the one hand, Knox clearly did not fit these images. But as Guida argues, Knox consistently failed to understand local expectations of *bella figura*, in Perugia, and relegated to the category "ugly American" (Guida 2020:154).

In an ethnographic study in Reggio Calabria, a region in the south of Italy, Pipyrou (2014) found that with the economic crisis, many secretly shop at second-hand markets in order to maintain the *bella figura*, with name brand clothing as markers of civility. Revealing that the clothes were purchased at second-hand markets would symbolically bring the *reggini* (from Reggio Calabria) Southern Italian closer to *africani* (Africans) (538). Pipyrou argues these ironic remarks reference the colonization of the South by the North. However, Pipyrou does not address the performance of the *bella figura* by immigrant women, who experience being visible and thus acutely racialized. My analysis of Montha's Italian fluency and her ability to create a *bella figura* adds to this literature. If we understood the perspectives of immigrant women in Italy, we could understand how they form strategies within the realities of Italian North and South divides, and localisms through the various dialects. In a sense, as a long-settled group in Italy, recipients of aid via the Italian Red Cross and the Catholic Church, Cambodian

refugee women in Italy are uniquely positioned for us to examine how they internalize notions of civility through state programs as well as how they perform outside of these categories by drawing on both Italian and Cambodian cultural norms.

My own understanding of the concept of *bella figura* entailed these relationships of care by my elderly Italian neighbors. Throughout my six-month field work in Italy, my closet began to fill with second-hand leather boots, jackets, wool sweaters, glitter scarves, purses, and jewelry gifted by neighbors. I had moved into the one-bedroom apartment, fully furnished, with pastel yellow walls, porcelain plates, and images of the Madonna hanging on the bedroom walls. When I left my house in the mornings, I watched white-bellied birds fly around while fat orange and black cats lounged outside on the tiny pebbles that dotted the front yard. Retirees primarily occupied these homes, with embodied rhythms of the town, and the close-knit relationships. As the only non-Italian and one of the youngest in this cluster of homes, uniformly designed with sienna-colored roofs whose tiles fill with frost-like little pockets, I did not have any expectations of being accepted. Yet, I was particularly close to my neighbors, Mauro and Lucia, a married couple who had retired as a farmer and *badante* (caretaker for the elderly, usually in-home), respectively, who I believe organized the neighborhood grandmothers to give me clothing for my work as a researcher and student. I think the clothes provided a means for my neighbors to socially locate me through socialization into the moral geography of the term *bella figura*.

I found the clothes and accessories quite tacky but wore them anyway. When the Cambodians commented on my clothing as very stylish or *saat*, which pretty in Khmer

but with a connotation of cleanliness, I revealed they were hand-me-downs from my neighbors. Everyone then advised me to keep it a secret, referring to the stigma of second-hand clothing, and perhaps, the racializing sense as a recipient of charity. Nonetheless, I experienced these gifts as acts of kindness because the clothes were paired with careful advice on how to assemble outfits for certain seasons and occasions. When I told my neighbors I was preparing for a Fulbright-sponsored meeting at a well-known journalism school in Rome, they quickly brought more clothing for the event telling me about the difference in weather in Rome. When I wore the clothing to Milan to catch the train to conduct interviews, immigrants waiting at train stations asked me about train schedules. Perhaps with the clothing, I was perceived as being a long-time resident of Italy, in part, I suggest, due to the significance of the *bella figura* in Italian culture.

Here, I do not suggest a reading of the *bella figura* as an expression of Western liberation. The dichotomy of Western feminist liberation narratives versus Third World women's rights has been debunked by several feminist scholars, particularly as colonial and imperialist for setting up white, European womanhood as the universal standard. In fact, what I argue is that Montha lives under two forms of patriarchy, both the Italian one and the Cambodian one. The *bella figura* is not a liberatory performance. Additionally, historically, throughout Southeast Asia, when colonial administrators arrived they were astounded to see that contrary to Christian moral expectations of inheritance and labor, that women in Southeast Asia were relatively free in terms of business affairs. Of course, I do not suggest that the economic marketplace is indicative of more rights for women,

rather, that gender must be theorized from specific sites rather than a paradigm of white womanhood as the ideal.

When talking about Montha, other Cambodian women would say, "*key you bedey*" or "they took her husband." The women were referring to her husband who had gone to Cambodia and had an affair. Montha preempted the gossip about her by telling me first as we drove to her house. In the case of the US, some Cambodian men returned to Cambodia to remarry because they find Cambodian American women too strong after living in the U.S. for so long (Um 2012). Nonetheless, the Cambodian concepts of gender and Buddhism merge as co-constituting one prestige system (Ledgerwood 1996). That is, in the construction of "they took her husband," there is no agent. In fact, Montha seems to be blamed for her husband going back to Cambodia. It turned out that he had an affair with Montha's cousin, then had a child and all live near Montha. She emphasizes, "in a rented house."

Montha worked in a factory prior to changing jobs to work as a full-time, live-in caretaker. She owns her five-bedroom villa and also cleans cow stalls for extra money. She spends her Sundays with Italians at a dance club. Because she does not fit the norms, she is on the margins of the Cambodian community in Italy, but she says she has had a life of being different. Orphaned at age seven, she went to live with a family to work as a fulltime babysitter for a three-year old and a four-year old. Montha can understand the Teochew dialect of Chinese because she worked in a Chinese-owned business in Cambodia. In the evenings she attends Italian language classes in order to earn her middle school diploma. She is learning English so that she can travel around the world

since no one speaks Italian when travelling. While Montha spoke very little of her life prior to Italy, I imagine for her that she has overcome a lot.

When I returned to the U.S. I noticed a Facebook request from Montha, and initially I did not recognize her. In Italy, she normally sported Italian styles of faux fur with glittery hats. In the Facebook profile picture, there was a woman in a long sleeved dark green jacket, very somber looking. Within the transnational field of Facebook, Montha maintains the Cambodian concept of *mien mouk, mien mout* literally, "have face, have mouth" presentation of the self, highly gendered in terms of the *chbap srey*, but this goes strongly with age. The older the woman, the less the gendered rules apply. In fact, for a man who is younger than one's father, it would be addressed as *pou* for younger uncle. For a woman who is younger than one's mother, address as *ming* for aunt. However, for someone who is older than one's parents irrespective of gender, they are addressed as *ohm* older aunt or uncle. Montha performs their sense of italianità or Khmer italianità through modes of speaking such as what is perceived as directness in Cambodian ideals of feminine behavior known as the *chbap* codes, explored extensively by anthropologist Judy Ledgerwood in her works on Cambodian Buddhist codes of conduct.

Speech Act #3: *Chiuso* Closed-Off

While no one speaks standard Italian and everyone has an accent, in the promotion of monolingualism. The repertories of all the Cambodian I spoke to includes forms of Italian competence to varying degrees, with praise given to those who had studied Italian formally due to their migration into Italy at an earlier age, and thus formal

schooling. Usually the person is praised for being outspoken, standing up for themselves when necessary. Thus, being fluent in Italian and also utilizing it directly, is described as being a competent Cambodian person in Italy.

In Maria's living room during the card games, while physically in Lombardy, the Cambodian community there also lives in the borderlands. Through the audio videos of Sinn Sisamouth and J-Chan songs posted on Facebook, these sounds and images function like texts, similar to the study of IM and FB in intertextuality. For those who are not fully literate in Cambodian or Italian, this format allows communication through emoticons. I was showing Chandra how to post pictures on Facebook through her phone. Chandra cannot read Khmer and has minimal reading of Italian. I told her not to worry about pushing anything because normally if there is a mistake, the left arrow means to go back and the right arrow means to go forward. Chandra often had Venerable San's sermons playing on her phone. Famous in Cambodia, Venerable San is known for provoking deep forms of thought through analogies and Jataka stories, of the Buddha's past lives.

Animals, significance of the animal in Cambodian folklore, some say as a form of French colonialism that saw Cambodian culture in decline, back to folk tales (Yamada 2009). This could be, as in stories of the rabbit as a hero, much beloved for his ability to outwit through words. But also, they date back, to the Buddhist Jataka stories, popular throughout the Theravada Buddhist world, but also, in popular culture, I bring this up because this is how, when working and getting to know Cambodian refugees, how in life do not speak about their past, and if so, do so with humor, even on the darkest moments. This chapter contributes the body of literature that examines the cultural practices used

by Cambodians in the diaspora to reflect on, and build their social worlds following the 1975-1979 Cambodian Rouge genocide. The social worlds are constructed beyond the recent history, however, and through Buddhist modes of history. The construction of the Buddhist *sima* is a significant form of protection for Cambodians, materialized through temple construction. Throughout the diaspora, worshippers embed the *sima* into the local context. In this chapter, I contribute to this sima as interpreted by Cambodian women in Italy. Through the specific case of Chandra and her use of *chiuso,* which means "closed" in Italian.

As we listened to Venerable San Sochea, Chandra said in Khmer that the groundskeeper is *chiuso*, closed off, using that Italian word in the phrase. "The groundskeeper here in Italy, as Italians would say is *chiuso*. I argue that Chandra decided to use the Italian word *chiuso* for several reasons. Rather than a mere function, I argue that inserting the Italian word *chiuso* while speaking Khmer in the conversation communicates something about Chandra's knowledge of Italian language, but also of Khmer and Italian cultural expectations and boundaries. The code switches normally happen with one or two words while we speak entirely in Cambodian. Although gendered complementarity is debated in the anthropological literature on Southeast Asian studies, nevertheless, the image still remains enshrined in the image of Buddhist temples. Though there are proscriptions on women ordaining as monks in Theravada Buddhist traditions, the concept of gender complementarity narrates this tradition as harmonious. While I do not suggest that Chandra outright challenge the gender hegemony of Theravada Buddhism, as doing so would render one falls outside of the parameters of being a moral

Khmer subjectivities, through the use of *chiuso* she nonetheless manages to foreground the transnational context, that is, the specific location of Italy.

The linguistic ideologies of Cambodian are very much related to notions of gender complementarity. In the case of urban Bangkok, Megan Sinnott (2004) finds that although the female-to-female same sex couple pairing of *toms* and *dees* are changing, nonetheless, the persistence of the masculine/feminine pairing dominates, in large part due to Theravada Buddhist ideologies of gender complementarity. In the context of Cambodian Buddhism, this principle of gendered complementarity is practiced through speech. In speaking Khmer, the use of lexical items already suggests a certain voice. For example, polite forms of the affirmative are gendered with cha for women and baht for men. However, within the context of the temple, the affirmative is collapsed to one form, *kaana* for both men and women, when speaking directly to the monk. This unmarking of gender through language while speaking to the monk, may delineate the lay/monk differences, making evident the power of the monk. At the same time, there is a sense that a monk is symbolically ambiguous in gender, and this liminality adds to his sense of power.

Considering Chandra's role at the temple as an older woman, she uses *chiuso* or Italian to reaffirm Cambodian gendered and moral expectations, as an older woman, she does not criticize the groundskeeper, but rather offers a framework for how she thinks he should behave in a transnational context, how he must in some ways attend to the Italianized population of Cambodians. While the face to temple is male, older women tend to be the gatekeepers of the temple. In using *chiuso*, Chandra challenges the image

of Buddhist complementarity is regularly challenged in the transitional context, as evidenced through the use of Italian, in this case, in using the Italian word, *chiuso,* Chandra is able to attend to the notions of complementarity through asserting her status as an older woman and fluency in Italian to make a stance regarding the groundskeeper, and potential morality of the temple.

Even the expectations of the community of the groundskeeper, is that he is not *chiuso* using the Italian word while speaking in Khmer to me, to explain his shyness. In Italian, being *chiuso* has negative implications as hiding something, or not performing their part in the socialization in a sense. In Khmer, there really is not an equivalent, as a being quiet would be normal, as long as he kept his other precepts. Though, there is a sense that a groundskeeper should be able to speak more to the community, as the roles shift according to the community. In this case, Chandra went at great lengths to tell me about the temple as an upstanding place of worship despite the *chiuso* behavior of the groundskeeper.

Chandra said that they had expectations for the groundskeeper, that he meet expectations of sociality across many linguistic communities within the northern Italian region. Chandra attributed the personality of the groundskeeper to being *chiuso*, the Italian phrase allowing the comment to be negative, but in a way that would not overstep the boundaries of her dharma and respect toward the temple, by using a Cambodian word, such as *ein* or *khmah* which has positive connotations, but not just that, could be seen as infantilizing as it normally describes young children and their proper moral upbringing,

similar to terms like *malu* in Malay and found through various Southeast Asian cultures that place a seemingly reserved demeanor.

The use of Italian also sidesteps the meanings of the religious speech at the temple, which produces a space in which the monk and layperson divide is officiated through differential access to knowledge of the Pali chants. This in turn, creates religious space via reproduction of language community via religious register. For Chandra, using Italian shifts the temple to a transnational one without violating the space, but rather proposing a vision of it.

In using *chiuso*, Chandra is showing or asking the groundskeeper to co-perform the temple with her, in his role as a transnational layperson living on temple grounds, as an older woman, she is allowed to tell him how to perform this role, which she describes with hedging using the word *chiuso*. Considering her long-time residence in Italy, her comment is indeed appropriate, as she does it for the betterment of the Cambodian community in Italy. However, in doing so, she does not go over the gendered complementarity that organizes aspects of temple labor, with women helping the monk, cooking for him, and negotiating morality, she in some ways reinforces the binary through the use of Italian. *Chiuso* performs an important function in that it brings notions of Buddhist complementarity directly into the Italian context, opening up a space for discussion of what she deems is necessary for a transnational temple and groundskeeper, in this case, *chiuso*, while okay in Cambodia, is not the ideal aesthetic in Italy.

As I noted, the Cambodian diaspora in northern Italy, speak Italian in a political context where their fluency is necessary for reaffirmation of an Italian state. All the

refugees I met spoke Italian and the second generation spoke little or no Cambodian. In this context, Chandra's use of Italian in the privacy of the cardplaying area demonstrates that she does not necessarily oppose the Italian-only legislation, but rather, as a long-time resident of Italy, utilizes the ideologies surrounding the dominant language, to creatively amplify notions of transnational Cambodian Buddhism.

The majority of Cambodians practice Theravada Buddhism, the older branch called the Tradition of the Elders engrained with set gendered roles. Buddhism generally supports the status quo which affects women more severely than men. Cambodian women survivors may categorize trauma as karmic destiny from past lives. Alternatively, men may join transnational or other Cambodian political movements which allow them to feel disillusioned with and separate themselves from repressive aspects of religious institutions.

Barred from mainstream secular politics, older Cambodian women's conceptions of gender strictly latch onto religious concepts of merit (Ledgerwood 1996). For example, when Montha told me about her husband leaving her to marry a younger woman in Cambodia told me, *srey yung chang veasna* which translates as, "We women lose out to karmic destiny." Generally unable to speak about rape to anyone, survivors keep these memories to themselves. I suggest that Chandra addresses the silence of split memory by reclaiming a gendered history of Buddhism. As it stands, Buddhism remains a culturally viable institution of processing the trauma. Cambodian grandmothers are viewed as past the sense of worldly desires and accorded status which they enact at the temple (Ebihara 1959). Ebihara's study took place in a village prior to the genocide in the 1960s. I add to

the literature on women and Buddhism through looking at the changes in diaspora. As an older Cambodian woman, Chandra performs dharma, cares for the temple by suggesting how the groundskeeper can serve the Italianized Cambodian refugee population. In doing so, in telling me about the monk being *chiuso*, Chandra interweaves her story as a Buddhist into the larger accepted memory of Buddhism being central to the atrocities.

The use of *chiuso* attends to the specific Italian context, but also makes room for a larger transnational temple space. Through her use of *chiuso*, Chandra comments on the monk, and constructs a gendered subjectivity that is considered moral by Cambodian cultural norms. However, I sensed her use of *chiuso* also pushes these norms. For example, in Niko Besnier (2002) study of Tongan diaspora, he centers on the annual transgender Miss Galaxy pageant, Tongans construct the use of English as feminine, in constructions of Tonganess as masculine. The monk's ambiguity is on the one hand, a source of his power, but on the other hand, a space of marginalization within global discourses on Asian religions. The literature on spirit mediums in Southeast Asia show how globalization discourses of Asian religions render these bodies as sites of spectacular exotification.

I do not suggest that Chandra exotifies the groundskeeper at the temple, but rather as an older woman, Chandra's use of *chiuso* carries a voicing of these globalizing discourses that challenge the temple's historical construction as bound to the state and organized religion. In using *chiuso* she notes the ambiguity, and Chandra chips away at this image. Though her comment somewhat challenges his power, I do not suggest that she goes above the binary. Cambodian patriarchal concepts of gender and Buddhism as

prestige systems merge (Ledgerwood 1996). However, she utilizes the binary to address split memories through temple space. In an audio-recorded interview about Buddhism she reveals:

> On Saturday and Sunday, I go to the temple. My parents too, who are dead, went to the temple [in Cambodia]. I go to the temple because I sympathize with the monk, who is alone without his parents, family, brothers and sisters, I cannot leave the monk alone like that.

Chandra does not use *chiuso*, and instead mentions her daily visits to the temple, then refers to her deceased parents. Cambodian women perform creatively using gendered forms of language to mediate the structures around them, in this case Italian public policies on language. Specifically, in the case of Montha, she draws on her personal friendships to perform the *bella figura*. Chandra maintains the significance of Buddhism through her weekly food offerings and care taking at the temple. In the process, in speaking about Buddhism, she processes split memory, drawing on the past in talking about her parents and relating her current engagement in the temple. In her use of *chiuso*, she links the processes of the ongoing construction of the transnational temple with her narrative of selfhood.

Gender is marked in Khmer language repertory as well as age. The responses or acknowledgement as a listener is gendered in polite speech with *bat* for men and *cha* for women. The knowledge and use of these registers are implemented both lexically and through forms of dress in performances of gender. Being able to use these terms in what is considered appropriate contexts and being able to then switch to the genderless or not marked form of *kanna* in speaking directly to the monk, also shows competence as well

as participation in the religious ritual, or enactment of the *sima* or sacred space, they enact the boundaries through the speech participation and performance. Moreover, the use of Pali, with the monk and accompanying *achaa*, a ritual layman specialist, on special days, but especially the monk, are ways to then to acknowledge and produce a shift in time.

The monk must have food offered before noon, thus people who will offer the food must arrive at the temple in the morning; the Pali codes then are ways through participation in the chant, these are acts that then make the religious world, create and enact distinct identities in this space. Though these two instances of Chandra's performances of Italian voices during the card games may not change the larger structures, Chandra's use of forms of speech creates potential spaces of counter-discourses for women to perform alternative visions of marginalization. This is particularly significant in an increasingly xenophobic political climate in northern Italy that silences voices like hers and economic marginalization that renders immigrant women disposable. Chandra's framing of Italian and Khmer languages is significant to creating Cambodian refugee subjectivities in contemporary Italy.

Conclusion [85]

While Southeast Asian bodies do not constitute the latest focus of national newspapers as images of immigrants on the shores of Italy, nonetheless, they are racialized through Orientalist media representations. With this in mind, Montha's performance of "Italian fluency" warrants a closer analysis, whose body, within popular discourses of Asian women, constitutes a genealogy of Orientalist discourses in Italy. In

an analysis of Giacomo Puccini's "Madame Butterfly," Kondo (1990) contends that the figure of the geisha draws on essentialist ideas of the Oriental, as well as the theatrical figure of the dying woman to produce the "Oriental" womanhood" (18). Scholars of Southeast Asian performance such as Burns have also argued that bodies of Southeast Asian women perform within these narratives through productions of Miss Saigon. I also factor in the economic realities of Montha's job as a *badante*, or caretaker for the elderly. Southeast Asian women's bodies may be read as nonnative in part due to their marginalized labor as foreign caretakers in Italy (Meyer 2015). For these reasons, I situate Chandra's commentary about Montha's "Italian fluency" within larger discourses of Chandra using Montha in order to form counternarratives to Orientalism. As linguistic anthropologists argue, language ideologies are vehicles of power. Chandra's commentary about Italian language fluency references more than speech, but rather Montha's ability to perform against both Italian and Cambodian patriarchal norms through dress, demeanor, and speech, summed up in Chandra's comment, "Montha speaks fluent Italian. Everyone knows her."

Within the context of the pandemic, the Cambodian diaspora in Italy may face many challenges. The images of Oriental womanhood as localized through Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*, are embedded in larger global neoliberal notions of the Asia Pacific which erases Asian histories of colonialism (Wilson, 2002:565). Moreover, the rise of China also points to anxieties surrounding Asian bodies in Europe. While women such as Montha work as a caretaker for an elderly Italian woman, may be viewed as useful to local Italians, as they, within the context of COVID-19, her somewhat coveted image as

close to the Italian nation through her embodied domesticity as a live-in worker, could easily shift to being an abject Other.

In the US, the paradox of the model minority status is that it renders Asian bodies politically invisible when their experiences could be useful for larger social movements (Park 2008:143). For example, in the U.S., as a result of the model minority myth, few know about the plight of single Cambodian American mothers in navigating the welfare system (Quintiliani 2009). I would argue that in Italy, even less is known about the Cambodian genocide and its impact on women, thus the temple may become even more significant, as a space to address and transform split memory, as well as structural forces such racism.

I asked Chandra how her sons got the jobs that seemed quite lucrative and she said *ksae*, the Khmer word for string (see Chapter One). She then explained, "in Italy, the families have *ksae*" referencing the need for connections, but also revealing her knowledge of Italian culture and society as she has experienced it. But also, *ksae*, in the Khmer language used in this way, refers to the patron-client relations that are significant to getting jobs, and being trusted. By acknowledging its existence and pointing it out to me, Chandra proudly lets me know that is cognizant of Italian cultural norms, and in addition, has the status of her sons who are integrated enough, hard-working and trusted to gain employment as plumbers in Venice, but as a mother who raised these three.

I also think that *ksae* is also a way that Chandra referenced the Italian family-based companies in the north that Yanagisako discusses in her book on kinship. In this sense, the use of the Cambodian word *ksae*, is a way to bring out this idea of family, that

is her thre children, that are a part of a significant institution to Italian society and historically as well. In a sense, Chandra embeds her family and herself into the *ksae* of Italian.

Due to the pandemic, the factories closed and I was unable to conduct participant observation in the textile industries. However, drawing from the fieldwork at the temple and in the homes of Chandra and her friends, as well as with Italians at the book club, these ideologies on Italian language reflect larger anxieties about a changing demographic. As a result of the shift to the bodies of immigrants as the new outsiders, the use of the northern dialects have become claims of regional authenticity. The 2010 laws enacted by the Northern League required immigrants to pass an Italian language exam in order to renew residency permits, making the act of speaking Italian symbolically significant for minoritized bodies. They then became both different from both the national and regional claims. Yet, despite this literature on Italian language ideologies, few studies address how immigrants process these proscriptions in language. In this chapter, I ethnographically detailed the practices of Montha's *bella figura*, in the context of Lombardy. I then followed up with an analysis of Montha's performance against Cambodian cultural norms. Finally, I addressed how Chandra counters these discourses through her relation to Buddhism, by making a sense of belonging within the temple.

Montha does not speak with a Northern Italian inflection, but rather, she speaks with traces of Cambodian. In the European Union, national languages are significant to the speaker identity (Gal 2004). In the specific context of Lombardy, the site of my

research, speaking with a Lombardy inflection conveys the image of the dialect speaker is male, uneducated and racist (Cavanaugh 2005) (See Chapter One).

In recent years, as the Northern League and the Five Star Movement have dropped the rhetoric of Northern succession from the South of Italy, the focus has shifted to immigrants, particularly from Africa, often underpinned by nostalgia for greatness of Mussolini (Celiksu 2015). For example, the use of the term *nigeriana* or Nigerian woman colloquially may mean prostitute from Africa (Asale 2005:5). This is a violent and gendered iconization of a forgotten colonial past on bodies of Black women in Italy. As feminist scholars have noted, by virtue of their physicality and materiality of their bodies, sexual minorities are more vulnerable to different forms of violence. Other terms that produce racial meaning are those such as *vu compra* (do you want to buy) which is used to describe the men, often from Nigeria or Senegal who sell hand bags on the street (Carter 1997). The term is a triple marker of difference as it is from a Southern dialect, and thus considered non-standard Italian, which further becomes a racialized icon of on the bodies of migrant men perceived to be from Africa. Yet since I only worked with Cambodians, Bangladeshis and Italians, I limit my analysis to the scope of my experiences in the field. Theorizing beyond runs the risk of reproducing forms of the Savage slot, as defined by Michel Trouillot (2003):

> The wholesale praise of Otherness pushes us to accept the sociohistorical equivalence of all manifestations of alterity and therefore the political equivalence of all forms of discrimination and redress. It reproduces a main feature of the Savage slot, the erasure of the Other's historical specificity (72).

Nonetheless, I would argue that with race as an intersecting category with gender, that methods in linguistic anthropology and feminist historicities may help trace the interplays of power in the everyday speech events, yet there needs to be on-the-ground methods that specify and historicize the experiences of different groups. Several scholars (cf. Modan 2008; Melamed 2014) have argued for the need to delink terms such as "diversity" from its superficial and commercial definitions.

This proves crucial for differentiating the lives of Cambodians in Italy from those in the U.S. As I have argued in this chapter, it is important to understand the specific conditions for the formation of the Cambodian diaspora in Italy. While the large regulatory agencies of human rights that produced the refugee in the camps, all of whom went through processes of becoming refugees in UN governed Thai camps, in part that is an emergent theme in the narratives of Cambodian refugees. However, in particular, it is important to note that in Italy, Cambodians become immigrants in Italy, that is, in part, laborers on the periphery, initially on plantations in the south of Italy, picking oranges and milking cows seven days a week. When one of my interviewees told me she was chastised for not knowing Italian well enough by a worker in Rome, she retorted "I only have cows to talk to seven days a week. How can I learn?" For Chandra and Montha, through networks in the Northern industries of Lombardy, that were looking for the particularly women workers of Asian descent, their experiences show how the merging of global capitalist discourses about Southeast Asian women workers with expectations for Italy as a producer of global fashion tastes, created this community in Lombardy, both religiously and racially marked.

To further avoid typologies, I also differentiated between generations within Cambodian diaspora in the Italian context. It is important to know the details of these experiences, as they may unearth the forms of symbolic violence put forth upon highly visible immigrants in Italy. In doing so, we question the role of the unmarked racial discourses, or rather, this idea of italianità, as a category of exclusion, marked by blood, and race, is unpacked and reframed. This archeology of knowledge historicizes these Italian state discourses that promote the North and South divide as the only mode of belonging. Thus, Cambodian refugees such as Chandra deploy forms of linguistic symbolic capital through Italian and Cambodian codeswitches that may not necessarily change the conditions for the formation of the Cambodian diaspora in Italy, but at least ways to negotiate their own belonging in spaces that symbolically exclude them.

The presence of Cambodians in Italy, is undeniably related to the US war in Southeast Asia, the US dominance in terms of concentrated capital, but also in how, Italy, though considered a periphery to Europe, in many ways lays claim to its purchase on the global sphere through its symbolic leader in fashion and goods, consumed and produced throughout the world. These entail collaborations with Chinese merchants (Rofel and Yanagisako 2019), as well as Cambodian and immigrant laborers. The US nonetheless is still related to this community in Italy, through friendships in the Thai refugee camps that have been sustained throughout the forty-year period, through visits back and forth to the US, to Italy and Cambodia. Thus, Chandra knows Italy and tells me the local knowledge, in relation to her own imaginings of the US. The diaspora in Italy is a nexus of many encounters that cannot rest on one physical place but is connected and produced through

imperialist histories and global capital. The Theravada Buddhist temple, in this context, is a physical manifestation of these desires, such as Chandra's desire for gendered status within the temple and community recognition for forty years of labor within the populist Italian landscape of Lombardy.

The marginalization of Cambodian refugees such as Chandra and Montha, who are limited labor in caretaking or in textile factories continue to sustain the northern industries. Racism must then remain invisible and unmarked in order to not attend to the economic liberalization that has been occurring in Italy since the 1970s. In this chapter, I suggested that for these racializing discourses to become marked, there would need to be large scale discussions of Italy as a nation state. However, in the context of populism, media outlets produce images of the individual, projections through neoliberal logics, that individualize these processes, through channels such as the American Paramount network, that reproduce desires of lifestyles and sense of individualism accorded to the United States. Thus, for Italians, racism exists in the US whereas in Italy, it is the North/South divide that matters. The North and South divide anchors Gramscian images of an industrial capitalist Italy that no long exists (see Chapter One). These luxurious televised images are further reminders of Italy as a peripheral state to Europe, made even more visible by high rates of unemployment. The image of the *badante*, the woman who takes care of the elderly in Italy, the embodied refugee women like Montha and Chandra, are constant reminders of these multiple failures, who thus need to be marginalized and made invisible through legislation. Nonetheless they persist daily through modalities of performances that encompass their distinct religious and linguistic communities.

Endnotes

[80] Nancy Tanner (1974) argued that matrifocality undergirds gender formations in Indonesia. Shelley Errington (1990) revisited the earlier anthropological description of gender complementarity as centered on money, arguing that Westerners see high status because women deal with the money and control family finances, thus there were misreadings of symbols, as many saw the fact that men and women wore sarongs, and then concluded that a "paucity of symbolic expressions of gender differences" (4). I revisit these claims of gender complementarity in Southeast Asia through the study of the Buddhist concept of *veasna.* In Khmer this means something like fate, but I have only heard women use it as *veasna yung*, our fate. In part, this may be based on notions of gender complementarity in the region. Charles Keyes (1984) argues that karma as doctrine is not questioned. I expand on this argument. Cambodian women skirt the issue by using the term *veasna yung*, our fate. See also Brickell 2011. Through the daily practices of playing cards in these gendered spaces of leisure, they play out and negotiate notions of collective, and gendered fates, or perhaps even emerging notions of gendered karma in diaspora. Andrew Walker (1999) traces the mobilities of Lao women who trade long-distance, the notion of the village Buddhist temple that ideally anchors them close to the home, making long-distance trading a potential violation of these spatial configurations. Yet, he argues that their identities as caretakers and mothers allow them to circumvent and even extend this Buddhist space to include long-distance trade. Annuska Derks (2002) finds that in Cambodia, women who move from rural areas of the country into Phnom Penh to work in factories, take on the notion of "entering the shade," a ritual in which women are secluded during their first menses. The factory work mimics the shading that keeps the women out of the sun, and they return to their villages for visits ritually transformed. See also Aihwa Ong (1998) for capitalism, gender and spirits in Malaysia and Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) for gender, spirits and capitalism in South Africa.

[81] The Italian words used by the Cambodian women, beyond lexemes that involve labor, are also words that point to interactions with the Italian state. I do not envision the state as monolithic, but rather a myriad of daily interactions, as argued by Gupta (2012).

[82] I use the term event here as inspired by the work of José E. Limón (1989) who ethnographically details the masculine language of Mexican men in Texas through the carne asada event. Similarly, I am influenced by the cardplaying as an event that produces gendered Cambodian subjectivities. Though I focus on Khmer-Italian codeswitches to further explore Keane's (1999) concept of voice through seeing these events as performances (cf. Hall 1999).

[83] For language and agency see Ahearn (2001) and Bestier (2009).

[84] Anita Mannur (2005), writes, "Asian Americans have been inextricably linked with their foodways in popular discourse—literary, cultural, and political. Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Koreans are routinely depicted as indiscriminate consumers of disease-ridden animals, offal, and other unmentionables" (95). See also Manalansan (2013).

[85] Through gender, Cambodian Buddhism in the postcolonial period could be further historicized beyond configurations of power that focus on ordination of nuns, though that is important. Women comprise 65% of Cambodian genocide survivors (Wagner and Dubasky 2002:10). Approximately 80%-95% of Cambodian women survivors were either raped or witnessed violence against women during the Khmer Rouge regime (Chan 2004:235). Toward the end of the regime, soldiers targeted ethnic and religious minority Cham Muslim girls and women (So 2010). The organization forced couples to marry as they regime viewed women as important for reproduction (Mam 2006:138). Carol Mortland (2002) finds that community frowns upon women for revealing these experiences (155). In the acclaimed documentary film *New Year Baby*, a Cambodian American from Texas, Socheata Poeuv goes to Cambodia to uncover the story of gender during regime and forced marriages. In her study on women survivors of the Holocaust, Joan Ringelheim (1997) argues that the experiences of women and sexual violence are marginalized because the narratives do not fit into the framework of Anne Frank. Ringelheim calls this "split memory" a process in which women experience a split memory in which their personal experiences do not correlate with dominant male narratives of persecution under genocidal regimes (20). As part of Ringelheim's methodology, she specifically addressed gendered violence in research design. In Khmer, when I heard *srey yung chang veasna* which translates as, "We women lose out to karmic destiny," my question is whether *veasna* or destiny is a way to make sense of the militarization through a form of gendered karma that is particular to the experiences of Cambodian women who survived, or a way of processing split memory.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This dissertation has detailed the Buddhist practices of a Cambodian community in Italy. Within the context of local and transnational politics, they frame their sense of emplacement through a Buddhist sense of being. The study showed that for Cambodian refugees, Buddhist practices are modern and malleable. The dissertation analyzed how a religious tradition that has a 2,000 year history in Asia persists in diaspora. In the local politics of contemporary Italy, Cambodian refugees deploy their specific histories that shape their regional presence as a tolerable other. The physicality of the temple itself serves as an everyday impetus for both Cambodians and Italians to engage in Italian politics of difference, war memories, and religious modes of belonging. As political exiles, Cambodian refugees express desires to simultaneously belong and maintain difference through the Buddhist temple. Their Italian-born children however, view the temple as an opportunity to engage in multiethnic forms of national belonging beyond the localized politics.

Chapter One traced the formation of the Cambodian Buddhist community in Lombardy, Italy. I found that local Italian perceptions of the temple are framed through Catholic discourses. Through the presence of the temple, Cambodians and Italians negotiate difference daily beyond the national categories of difference of a North and South framework. Chapter Two detailed the various perspectives at a Buddhist Council

meeting. Cambodian Buddhists work within their constraints and opportunities to protect the monk's wellbeing. I also traced the mobilities of Venerable Sokhom Hem, the monk at the temple as he traveled across Europe to other temples. Chapter Three explored Bruno Latour and Michel De Certeau's work on haunted spaces. Drawing on the work of Boreth Ly, I described the temple as a communal space for the everyday lived experiences with spirits and the production of Khmerness. The chapter argued that commemoration must include Buddhist rituals. In Chapter Four, I found that through daily socialization over playing cards, Cambodian women mediate Buddhist ideals collectively. Through these processes of codeswitching between Khmer and Italian, they counter forms of racialization they may face in daily life.

Future Research Trajectories

I watched a beautiful bird perched atop the roof, with its white belly and wings, black head, and bright orange beak, chucking at something brown and wiggly. When it flew away, the white tips of the wings looked like they were cat whiskers, a fluttering moment right outside the dining room window at the temple. The sun shined directly through the window onto my face, which felt divine. Before I left to cross the fields home, I asked the monk what differentiated Christianity from Buddhism. He said, "In Buddhism, you cannot wash away bad karma like in Christianity." His interpretation of baptism framed it as a process of washing away karma with the image of water as cleaning and essential to life. The use of the image of water is on the one hand

universalizing with its life-giving properties, but also indicative of the fact that Buddhist practices, like water, will shift within the context of Catholicism in Italy.

Cultural immersion is the bread and butter of fieldwork, but I was only in Italy for six months because of a mandated repatriation to the US in March 2020 due to the pandemic. My research visa under the Fulbright had initially been from September 2019-October 2020. Additionally, I had planned to extend for three months until December 2020. Giorgio and Vanna had asked me to attend a national multicultural event in Rome in June 2020. If I were to return for follow-up fieldwork, I would want to better understand how the temple engages in building institutional links between the Cambodian Cultural association and interethnic coalitions such as Senegalese-Italians, and Filipino-Italians through national events, such as the one I was invited to attend with Giorgio and Vanna in Rome in June 2020. In order words, I would like to understand how the Italianized Cambodians such as Giorgio engage in forms of reciprocity that differ from their parents. Buddhism is clearly central in the lives of the first-generation refugees such as Chandra, Pich, and Ming. Cambodian diasporic religious institutions were created by the now aging Cambodian refugee population, but as this community has shifted, the Buddhist practices too, may take on different meanings. My hunch is that the Theravada doctrines figure significantly into what Cambodian Buddhism may look like.

Individualism as a doctrine in Theravada Buddhism has implications for continuity in diaspora. Unlike Mahayana Buddhism, in the Theravada strand, the concept of the *boddhisava* is not central, as one reaches enlightenment for oneself. The emphasis on individual responsibility in Theravada Buddhism for Cambodians is central. For this

reason, at least for now, I do not see Cambodian Buddhists anywhere in the world joining universal and global Buddhist movements, at least not for the purposes of latching onto larger movements to continue Cambodian diasporic Buddhist practices across generations. However, this may change with Asian American pan-ethnic Buddhist movements (Han 2021), particularly as Southeast Asian Americans are negotiating political movements through literature and the arts in the wake of Atlanta in the context of global anti-Asian violence with the pandemic (cf. Sok 2021; Phounsiri 2021). As Chapter Three demonstrated, Cambodian Buddhist practices are also about producing and celebrating Khmerness, or the making of Khmerness, particularly celebrated at community events, specific to the history of Cambodian Buddhism, as well as, a sense of futurity that emerges from decades of struggles.

Arguably, for Cambodian diasporas, the doctrinal focus on individuality in Theravada Buddhism precludes any larger Buddhist ecumenical movements. The Theravada focus on individual responsibility frames much of the understanding of Buddhism values to those born and raised in Italy. Buddhist values are expressed differently for younger generation. For those like Giorgio, they seek forms of engagement and recognition through ethnic solidarities withing larger society.

In the US, Buddhism pervades Khmer child rearing practices. Anthropologist Susan Hefner-Smith (1999) conducted research on the Cambodian community in Boston, Massachusetts in the 1990s. She argues that the focus on the sense of individualism is tied to notions of karma. Parents watch the individual child closely in an attempt to better

interpret the past lives of the child (64). This translates into the idea that the Khmer parent will not force the child into any specific academic field as already within Theravada Buddhism the belief is that the child already has certain aptitudes present from previous lives. These aptitudes may not necessarily be academic and Khmer parents are more likely to support the child in their specific destiny whether academic or otherwise. Hefner further argues that for this reason Khmer parents are less likely to mold the child early on in development. Smith-Hefner explains, "Widespread belief that a child's future fundamentally depends on the child's predetermined nature. The resonance of these ideas with Khmer Buddhist conceptions of personhood and achievement is striking" (146). In Italy, Pich, Chandra, and others had no qualms about their children converting to Catholicism.

My plan was to begin to conduct research in the sock factories where the Cambodians worked in April 2020 while attending large community festivals at the temple such as Khmer New Year. Chandra had also planned to take me to Tuscany to meet other Cambodians. She and her husband had initially resettled in Tuscany and lived there for nearly twenty years before making the secondary migration to Lombardy. When I first arrived for language classes in Sienna, Tuscany, I had fallen in love with the region, and was looking forward to a return to the area. I also wanted to follow up with more research on the marble industries in the areas, particularly for the Cambodians who remained in Tuscany, rather than making the secondary migration to Lombardy.

I was also planning to head to Naples and the South of Italy to meet dispersed Italian-born Cambodians raised in the North, who had married Italians from the South.

My sense is that the North and South national discourses do figure into the lives of Cambodians born in Italy. Unlike their parents, Italianized Cambodians may relate to the historic struggles that their peers and coworkers from the South have faced. My research has demonstrated that, in acknowledging the presence and contributions of Southeast Asian Buddhists, it allows for a national narrative to emerge that more closely resembles the ongoing notions of selfhood as interdependent in Lombardy, a region that has long been a destination for labor migration. These stories of Cambodians have the potential for revisiting the work of Antonio Gramsci through a critical race (cf. Hall 1986).

When I returned to the US, I received a social media friend request from Venerable Sokhom Hem. He had begun to showcase the temple through his own page. I sensed he also wanted to be known transnationally given he is limited in his mobility. The page amplified his presence. He featured different Buddhist teachings daily that ascribed to the modernist Theravada strand. Prior to the pandemic, I had planned to take the Flixbus to Switzerland and Germany to meet the other monks and visit temples during August, when the temple closes to align with Cambodian families spending the month at the beach, like most Europeans.

Yet, perhaps because of the pandemic, the concept of home has become increasingly important for me, particularly after nearly two decades of long-term work and life on differing continents. The more I go elsewhere, the more I appreciate the diversity of California, where I grew up. For this reason, my next immediate phase of research will be in the US. Most likely, the next iteration of ethnographic research will be

in large part US-based, but with a continued larger trajectory being a Global Asias approach.

I would like to better understand the role of global Theravada Buddhist practices, such as Pali-based chants, and healing rituals, in shaping social and religious perceptions transnational belonging for Cambodians. Methodologically, this would mean a closer focus on rituals mediated by the monk in Pali. For this, I may need language training in Pali and Sanskrit. I will likely return to field work at temples in the US, where my previous research centered on Cambodian temples housed in makeshift suburban tract homes typical of Southern California stucco houses.

Through Buddhist merit making, Cambodian diasporas have assigned meanings to their environs whether rural or urban, through merit actions such as cooking, pruning trees on the temple grounds, thereby continually incorporating their historical, cultural and spiritual identities into the landscape in a process that continually creates a sense of home. These meals for were for the monk, offered weekly with delicacies that deigned the table each *pranzo di domenica* Sunday lunch (if that could be used to discuss what happens on Sunday mornings at the temple). The monk ate before noon and had his meal first, then everyone else had lunch around the same table as the monk. I close with four lines from my fieldnotes:

> Stalks of lemongrass neatly line up in the large grassy field
> Bright green as they reach toward the blue skies
> Sustenance for tamarind sour soups
> Memories of Cambodia

In Lombardy, the roof on the angled area where large communal events were held, began to leak droplets of rainwater which propelled fundraising efforts. The rainwater leaked through the holes in terracotta reddish roofs and the tiles were then mended by the monies accumulated through online merit fundraising events. These monies contribute to the morality and order as represented by a perfectly protected roof. The temple was also starting to raise funds to expand through the purchase of the adjacent empty fields. The offerings will be repaid in subsequent lives. These practices are ways to account for negative karma accumulated from past lives, to continue to make future merit. Instead of the names of donors featured on the walls of the temple on plaques, the names were shared by the temple on social media.

Though Cambodian Buddhists in Italy are invisible in national discussions on migration, making known their experiences is important for moving the conversations around migration beyond the nationalist rhetoric that legitimizes difference through the North and South lens. Beyond tolerance, Cambodian refugee Buddhist practices also merit more attention in the pressing debates on migration throughout the European Union, beyond the Islamophobia which renders these mobilities as an ahistorical crisis.

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