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Physical and Theoretical Notions of Home: In the Context of Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

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ToQuyen Thi Doan

Is “home” where your family currently resides or where you were brought up? Is it where you were born or where you have been in the past ten, twenty, or thirty years? This paper will draw upon the complex and contested nature regarding the notion of “home” for Khmer Krom in Soc Trang province and Can Tho city in southern Vietnam. Kampuchea-Krom or Khmer Krom are a group of Khmer people exclusive to Vietnam, the term “Krom” is used to differentiate them from Khmers (Cambodian) in Cambodia. Using literature on home identity across multiple disciples, this paper seeks to make sense of emerging home narratives from this unrecognized indigenous community. This study was carried out using grounded theory, a qualitative research method. The concepts of home presented in this paper are based on interviews with fourteen Khmer Krom participants, women and men whose ages range from 28 to 64, and hold a status of either registered or unregistered Khmer Krom members. This paper will explore how both the concept of “physical home” and “theoretical home” have constructed into the lives of these people, stimulating multiple ideas of “home.” Analysis of interviews have led to the conclusion that “home” can be defined differently at different times, and is influenced by the socio-political environment, as well as livelihood opportunities that are available to the communities. For Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho, the process is not linked to nation or nationality, but it is where one can carry forth dreams, participate in income generating activities, have a sense of community, and the ability to care for family.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my parents, who have crossed borders and oceans in search for a better life for my brothers and me.

To my brothers, John and Joe, for your love and support, cheers to many more centuries of being siblings.

Finally, to Collin, from the first time you gave me flowers in the Peace Corps to the many more flowers throughout this journey; with you by my side, life is in constant bloom.

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Finally, to my participants whose perseverance and positive outlook on life have inspire me to seek joy in all existence **and** *become part of it.*

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Introduction

The hustle and bustle of Can Tho city, famous for its floating markets in the early A.M.s, their illumined night shops, people on motorbikes zigzagging and dodging pedestrians. Colorful Buddhist temples every few miles, people selling delicious snacks and fresh fruits; sliced mangoes, fresh coconuts, and pineapple seasoned with salt and chili peppers could be found on every corner. Walking down the streets, one is greeted by friends or neighbors, people are always outdoor, drinking ice coffee no matter what time of the day, 5am, noon, early evening, and again after dinner. The faces, smells, sights, sounds, and traffic felt so strange and bewildering, yet usual and comforting at the same time. Childhood memories of running in the streets, fingers sticky from eating pineapples come flooding back. At this given moment, although it was my first time in Can Tho, the smell, taste, and sight of this place felt like home.

> "Though we know that place is often about tradition, we often forget that tradition, too, is always being made and remade. Tradition is fluid, it is always being reconstituted. Tradition is about change - change that is not being acknowledged." (Sarup, 1993, p. 97)

The notion of home is not the same in every culture, and even within the same culture, home varies from one individual to the next. As the above quotation from Sarup (1993) suggests, even historical conventions and traditions passed down from one generation to the next have transformed with time. For some communities, “home” is tied to the cultural practices and attachment to ones’ homeland. However, the alteration and fluidity of traditions and cultural practices promote the belief that culture is not tied to a

definite place, nor does it belong to solely one group of people (Massey, 1991). Especially for Khmer Krom, as a marginalize group in Vietnam and not fully accepted in Cambodia, the notion of home has become de-territorialized. The space that they occupied in Vietnam becomes a place through the creation of memories and emotions, leading to the development of "home."

In this paper, I reflect on my participant's narratives, to discuss and link them to existing literatures on home. For many, home is a private museum, a memory that cannot be altered, as if to guard it against the changing environment (See Sarup, 1993). For others, home is continuously changing and mobile, and can exist across several places. In this qualitative study, I aim to address the different layers and nuances of home and the construction process of home through the experiences of Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho. Additionally, I hope to add to the study an understanding of home from a minority group, and encourage conversations around home and homemaking across all platforms.

Motivation for Study

My interest in displacement and home identity stemmed from my own childhood. Shortly after I was born, my parents and I migrated to the United States to escape the squalor of post-war Vietnam in the hopes of securing a better future for me. My childhood "home" was split into two, the first being memories of attending school

in the United States and the second, summer vacations and Tet[1] celebrations in Vietnam. It was in Vietnam, where I got my first kiss, but I crossed into the golden threshold of womanhood in Philadelphia with my first period. As I grew older, it was harder to take leave from school and soon in my teenage years, Vietnam became a summer event. Then in my senior year of high school, while looking for college scholarships, I noticed opportunities were limited due to my lack of U.S. citizenship. As such, I took the naturalization test and turned over my Vietnamese citizenship to become a U.S. citizen. Throughout my childhood, I have always thought of myself as "American," despite English being my second language. It was not until becoming a U.S. citizen that I felt a closer connection and curiosity towards my Vietnamese heritage. In spite of the curiosity, Vietnam was not the center of my focus during my undergraduate studies and when given the opportunity, I traveled elsewhere.

In 2013, representing the United States, I joined the Peace Corps for a twenty-seven-month mission in Armenia. And it was then, I became preoccupied with the ideas of home and displacement, and the narratives of Vietnam as my "home" kept emerging. When confronted with the question, "where is your home?" My response interchanged between the United States and Vietnam. During my search for "self," questions of home lingered. Is home where your family currently resides or where you were brought up? Or is it where you were born, or where you are now? Can the notion of home be defined differently at different times, and if so, what factors influence this concept? To date,

[1] Tet is Vietnam's Lunar New Year.

both of my parents have spent more time in the United States than they had growing up in Vietnam. But to my father, who holds U.S. citizenship, Vietnam is his home and he visits and longs for it every year. Meanwhile, to my mother, who does not hold U.S. citizenship, Philadelphia is her home and she dreads the idea of retiring in Vietnam. In my parents' case, borders are not sufficient to make a "home" and citizenship does not amount to being a native.

My interest with the notion of "home" intensified during my studies at Clark University and with today's growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons. Unlike many that are forcibly displaced, my parents and I are migrants who have crossed the borders in search of a "better life." I am aware that my displacement is unlike theirs, and perhaps my own subjectivity on displacement and home may have been reflected during narratives and interviews with fellow Khmer Krom participants. By no means does this study represent the whole reality for the Khmer Krom population, instead it is an attempt to gain a short window into the notion of "home" for this unrecognized indigenous group in southern Vietnam.

Methodology

The arguments, observations, and discussions in this paper are based on research undertaken during the summer of 2016 to better understand the complex notion of

"home" for Khmer Krom in Soc Trang Province and Can Tho City in southern Vietnam.

Ethical Considerations and IRB

To assure the protection of rights and welfare for participants, this study was reviewed thoroughly and underwent multiple modifications following recommendations by the institutional review board (IRB) at Clark University. Ethical dilemmas are common when working with a vulnerable community such as the Khmer Krom, an unrecognized indigenous group. In the field, I was constantly aware and mindful of my language and how I interacted with participants. The way language is used can include or exclude people, foster a sense of community and allow participants to trust the researcher or promote levels of hierarchy and hostility (See Temple and Moran, 2011). The same word can also mean different things in different cultural contexts, so I was careful to cross-reference with participants to ensure they are correctly presented. Furthermore, to guarantee participants' welfare and to minimalize any potential risk, names or distinguishable description were not recorded. Participant's identity remained hidden through shorthanded codes and notes were recorded in a password-protected laptop.

Change in Research

Initially, the purpose of this study was to examine the meaning of the term "internally displaced persons (IDPs)" for certain minority groups in Can Tho city of

southern Vietnam. After less than two weeks in the field, participants were not responding to this term or other issues of displacement. Conversations with participants kept redirecting back to "home" and the notion of "home." As such, after introducing the study to participants, I moved away from my script and allowed participants to direct the dialogs.

Participants

Research participants were nine Khmer women and five Khmer men, with ages ranging from 28 to 64. Participants were chosen due to their proximity and access to the Mekong Delta and status as registered or unregistered Khmer members. All participants were born in Vietnam, and their occupations ranged from rice agriculture, animal husbandry, fishery, hair stylist, small business owners, to homemakers. In this study, men and women under the age of 45 were more open and felt more comfortable sharing their stories with me than the older women. Older female participants would often hesitate, offered shorter answers, and divert the conversation back to me with questions about my own family, what I liked to eat, and other personal inquiries.

Procedure

Open-ended interviews were carried out with participants in Soc Trang and Can Tho. I have chosen these two provinces because of my formal and informal networks. Heifer International Vietnam located in Can Tho was my primary formal network; the organization on multiple occasions have directed me in the right direction and provided

background knowledge on the socio-political atmosphere in both provinces. Although I am fluent in Vietnamese, I have no background in Khmer, and had a translator accompanied me to the field on multiple occasions. However, all participants from this research can speak and understand Vietnamese, and a translator was not used during the latter portion of the study.

Interviewees were approached using the 'snowball' technique (Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey, 2011), in which I used my connections with Heifer International to meet one source and asked through word of mouth to extend further contacts. One-on-one interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and lasted between 45 minute to 2 hours, generally in the participant's home and on occasions to the participant's farm or relative's home. Participation for my study was voluntary and participants was made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time, but no one expressed any concerns. Prior to the interview, each person was given consent forms and a description of the research, however, due to the literary nature of the Khmer community, all members offered verbal consent. Following the consents, home interviews were recorded on my phone and transcripts were written up afterwards. Interviews conducted while on participants' farms and at relative's home were noted immediately after the interview in a personal journal.

Besides formal interviews, I interacted with participants informally, through social meetings for coffee and buying food at the local markets. I spend countless hours

at participants' home prepping food, and my experience ranged from enjoying all types of Khmer cuisines to having tea and coffee while waiting for the summer rain to subside. On one occasion, I had to cancel a meeting with a participant due to food poisoning, and upon hearing that I was ill, the participant came to my home with rice congee and ginger tea. My participants not only offered me a short window into their lived reality, but also welcomed me into their lives. It is of upmost importance for me to take care, respect, and ensure my participants' confidentiality. To do so, *nom de plumes* are used in the write up and in this paper.

Data collection and analysis

Grounded theory, a qualitative research method designed to aid the systematic collection and analysis of data was used as the primary method of development for this paper (Patton, 2002). My data composed of audio recordings, field notes including body language of participants, their facial expression, and my own impressions of the participants and the interview process. The analysis of interviews began almost immediately and certain parts and passages of each transcript were coded. Upon returning to the United States, certain codes were recoded to connect common themes that participants had indicated during the study. During this process, grounded theory was used to put these codes into categories and themes that inductively emerged from the data to reflect participant's narratives. Additionally, the analysis and coding of transcripts and the development of themes were then further explored in an amalgam of

readings in refugee, migration, displacement, culture, religion, geography, and identity studies, and academic courses at Clark University.

Limitations

My findings were undoubtedly shaped by the composition of my sample, comprised through word of mouth, and my connection with a local INGO. Of my fourteen participants, two from Soc Trang initially described themselves to me as Vietnamese, but later disclosed that they have parents or grandparents of Khmer descent. Likewise, I often met people in this region with a Khmer appearance who insistently say they are Vietnamese. As Kibreab (1999) explains, refugees or displaced persons have every reason to be suspicious of outsiders who enquired about their past and present. Thus, they claim to not be internally displaced persons or refugees, but content integrated citizens. Additionally, as a strategy for survival, marginalized communities would often silence their frustration to keep peace; to avoid the risk of police harassment, public bullying, as well as to gain access to employment and livelihood opportunities in terms of land use rights and slots at the local markets (Ibid.). It is fair to say that participants may not have fully enclosed their frustration with me, as I am Vietnamese and a non-local. Similarly, my connection with the local INGO may have also sparked overly positive conversations, as participants may believe their optimistic respond may generate economic or livelihood assistance.

Additionally, my prior knowledge of the shared history between the two countries created subjective and bias understanding towards what participants were sharing to me in interviews. Per-occupied with Cambodia and Vietnam's era of conflict and violence, it was difficult for me to understand why and how this unrecognized indigenous community could be content and feel so at "home" in Vietnam. At the end of my research, I had developed a comfortable relationship with Vu, a farmer and grandfather of two beautiful young girls. While other participants were curious about my upbringing and why I was not married at my age, Vu asked me about my experience in Armenia and my political views on world issues. One afternoon, I build up the courage to ask him about the Khmer Rouge and his family's history in Vietnam.

> "They [Vietnamese citizens] are not my enemies. Their grandfathers were innocent boys, tools of the government during times of war. Like our grandfathers…like my father, maybe he fought in a war he didn't believe in. This here, …. Quyen, is my home… it is where you can have a life for yourself and your family." – Vu, 64

Even after my return to the United States, I am ashamed to admit that it was difficult for me to comprehend Vu's and other participants' comfortability and notion of home along the Delta. I struggled with my data for a while, and constantly questioned whether my findings were filtered due to my position as an outsider. Finally, I realized after coding and recoding, the problem was that there were too many memories and histories between the two cultures, and not enough understanding of the present. A realization on my part is the separation between the Khmer Rouge and the individual. It took me stepping back and seeing my participants as individuals instead of linking them to their

shared history of violence, to acknowledge what they were constantly presenting to me, that they are indeed at “home.”

Additionally, when working with qualitative data, it is often predisposed to the researcher’s subjectivity. No text is universal and all knowledge or understanding of text and language is contextual. How I come to understand something may be different than what my participants were trying to convey. To the best of my ability, I cross referenced with participants during times of uncertainty. I acknowledge that I come from this personal reflective position and may have carried it forward into my data analysis and during the development of notions of “home.”

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the daily practices, livelihood opportunities, and mythical perception of my participants in Soc Trang and Can Tho may differ from Khmer Krom in other provinces, in that there could be less economic opportunities and/or community support. The interlocking relationship between the Khmer Krom and Vietnamese communities in Soc Trang and Can Tho demonstrates the shifting shape and content of lives in multiple ways, changing the community members’ experiences as both individuals and as members of a collective community. Due to lack of time and resources, my study was only able to capture a small window into their lived reality. To fully understand the interlocking relationship between the two communities, more time need to be spend living and integrating with these two populations.

Repatriation: the less ideal option

"i want to go home, but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home tells you to
leave what you could not behind,
even if it was human.

no one leaves home until home
is a damp voice in your ear saying
leave, run now, i don't know what
i've become."

Excerpt from "Home" by Warsan Shire

In the first half of the 20th century, the topic concerning the relationship between people, place, and identity have increased in refugee and migration studies. In parts, this is due to the worlds growing number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. The international community's response or rather lack of response have created and constructed in the context of assumptions and theories about citizenship, the nation-state, and ideas of returning "home" (White, 2002). Scholars in the field have labeled this as a "repatriation discourse," categorized by assumptions that the ideal situation for refugees and displaced persons is to return to their homeland (Stefansson, 2004). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in the past two decades there has been a steady increase of displaced persons

returning to their homelands (Oxfeld and Long, 2004). However, UNHCR fail to state whether the return was for a temporary visit, a homecoming, or forced deportation.

Organizations and many international leaders believe repatriation to be the best scenario for displaced persons, for return of certain groups may have positive economic effects on redeveloping or war-torn economies (Koser, 2000). However, it is equally important to acknowledge the negative consequences for returnees. As Levy (1999) observes, when refugees and IDPs return to their homeland, what exactly are they returning to? Especially in forced repatriation, most displaced persons are returning to their former nation, not their actual house or land, which may no longer exist due to conflicts or natural disasters (Koser and Black 1999). In her research, Hammond (2004) examined the post-return experiences of Ada Bai returnees' settlements in northwestern Ethiopia. She found that upon return, the reality of return was unlike what returnees envisioned for themselves. Lands that were once owned by the displaced communities were taken by local government officials. Who, in turn, had redistributed the land of the displaced communities to those that remained. To avoid further partitioning by returnees, officials offered plots of farmland that were too dry and small for much productivity to returnees (Ibid.). Although they did not return to a community or life that was familiar to them, years later Hammond found that returnees have recreate "home" in their new environment. This recreation of home will be further explored in "theoretical home."

To revisit an important point from Hammond's research, while displaced persons are in fact returning to their country of origin, there is still a sense of homelessness due to unexpected circumstances such as lack of land ownership.

Moreover, for many people, the conflict or reason for displacement makes returning to their nation a traumatic experience. In such cases, displaced persons' memories of their homeland do not match with the current condition nor the reality of their present homeland. For instance, as Long found from her study in 1997, when many Viet Kieu[2] returned to Hanoi, Vietnam; the political system has changed so much that those who came back to reestablish permanent ties had to re-nationalize themselves in contemporary socialist Doi Moi terms. Different social or class status have made these returnees cultural outsiders in what was once their local community (Oxfeld and Long, 2004). As Long's study demonstrates, when displaced persons return to their physical land, in some cases, the social and political atmosphere may have changed during their time of displacement, and 'home' as they remembered, is but a fragment of their memory.

Thus, returning to the homeland or repatriation does not always guarantee an immediate connection or homemaking, but rather it involves creating new relationships and relinking with old ones. As Stefansson (2004) observed, Bosnian returnees felt aliened and ashamed over accusations of being a coward for their departure during the

[2] Overseas Vietnamese

Bosnian War. Media and pop-culture intensified this structure of discrimination between Bosnian returnees and people that stayed with t-shirts that reads, “I was here from 1992-95, where were you?” and songs which lyrics include (Ibid.):

> “Sarajevan raja (people) / While the cities of Bosnia burn / You've been far away / When it's hard, Sarajevo's remained / This isn't your struggle, others make war / However, friend, you are over there, and I am still here … When you return one day, I will greet you/ Nothing will still be how it was / Don't be sad then, it's not anyone's fault / You saved your head, I remained alive.” by Mugdim Avdić Henda

Similarly, a study conducted in the village of Santa Maria Tzeja in Guatemala by Taylor (1998) found that there were tensions between returnees and the local community that stayed during the country’s civil war. While returnees faced traumatic experiences in refugee camps, their struggles were ignored and undermined by those that stayed. People that stayed argue that they also faced violence and conflict by militants, but did not flee due to their allegiance to the government; and is therefore more deserving of government support. As Manzo (2003) observes, the notion of “home” encompasses a broad range of physical settings and is an ever-changing phenomenon that exists in a larger socio-political environment. Thou physically at “home,” Taylor and Stefansson’s studies illustrates how the notion of “home” is influenced by returnees’ sense of community and the support they receive from different social networks.

Despite the difference in culture and nationality, countless scholars (Taylor (1999), Hammond (2004), Long (1997), and Stefansson (2004)) have demonstrate the hostility that returnees often face in the pursuit of home. In such cases, "return may be more traumatic than the experience of flight and exile itself" (Sepulveda, 1995: 84). Regardless of the struggles that returnees and displaced communities encounter, there still exist a strong yearning for repatriation among certain displaced persons. In parts, it is a natural human desire to return to a place that is memorialized as "home." But, what exactly encompasses the notion of "home" and why is it so important?

Context of Khmer Krom in Vietnam

Since the late seventeenth century, this southern part of the Mekong Delta was claimed by Vietnamese lords, colonized by France in the nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century, and ceded to Vietnam in 1949. Kampuchea-Krom or Khmer Krom are a group of Khmer people living in South-western Vietnam[3]. The term "Krom" is used to differentiate them from the Khmers (Cambodian) in Cambodia. While the two groups are similar in looks, and share common cultural traditions, spoken language, and religious ideas, there are subtle differences that makes the Khmer Krom people unique to both Cambodia and Vietnam.

[3] In Vietnam, Khmer Krom are known as Khơ-me Crôm, which translates to "Cambodians from below, "below" refers to the lower areas of the Mekong Delta.

In this section, I will explore the history of Khmer Krom in three different periods, from 1862 to 1949 while under French rule, from 1949 to 1975 as part of South Vietnam, and finally from 1975 to present day in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (See Table 1). I will conclude with the current issues at hand, and my own observations of Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho, Vietnam.

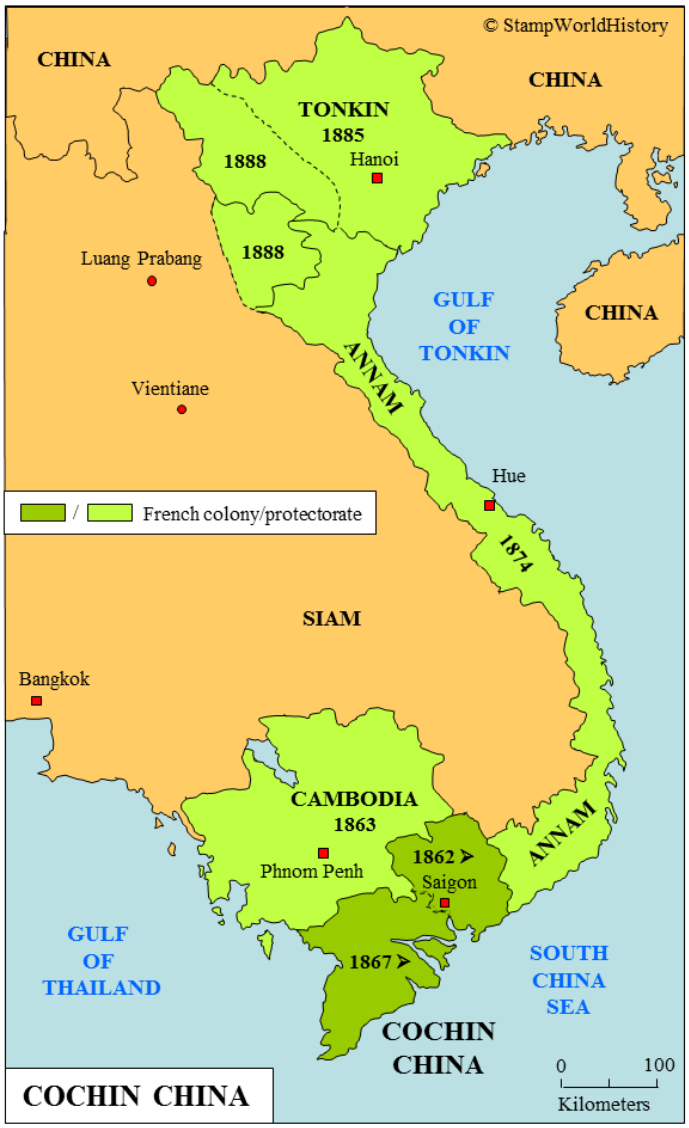
Table 1: A Brief History of the Kampuchea-Krom by Peter Scott and the Kampuchea-Krom Federation, 2016

Timeline	**Kampuchea-Krom has been known as:**
1 – 550	Funan or Nokor Phnom
550 – 681	Chenla (Zhenla)
681 – 802	Water Chenla
802 – 1862	Kambuja
1862 – 1949	Cohin China (Cohinchine)
1949 – 1975	South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam)
1975 – Present	Vietnam (Socialist Republic of Vietnam)

Cochin China (1862-1949)

The histories of many nations are shaped by conflicts and series of colonialization, this was no different for southern Vietnam. In 1858, with the help of Spanish troops, the French government of Napoleon III invaded and eventually ceded southern Vietnam in 1862 (See Map 1). In 1887, this southern part merged to the French Indochinese Union (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). While under French rule, it was renamed to Cochin China until it was transferred to Vietnam in 1949.

During this period, Cochin china went from a nation heavily structured around rice agriculture to an influx of Chinese traders, transporters and rice millers, and a flood of technicians and clerical workers from surrounding nations. For Khmer Krom, whose identity are heavily tied to being rice farmers, they were unable to keep up with the shift of manual work to machinery, factories, and mass production (see Brocheux, 2009). In existing Vietnamese histories of Khmer Krom, they are often represented as victims pushed into marginality by French imperialist rule, through the exploitation of land in the name of development. During this time, Khmers were considered farmers and poor peasants, and ethnic Vietnamese largely worked for the government while commerce was dominated by the Chinese (Taylor, 2014).



Map 1: Cohin China 1862 – 1949 *Source: Stamp World History*

Map 2: South Vietnam 1949 - 1975 *Source: David Burns, 2016*

In 1945, Viet Minh[4] seized political power in Hanoi and proclaimed northern Vietnam as the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This led to the First Indochina War of 1946 between France and Vietnamese communists and independence fighters under Ho Chi Minh[5]. In 1954, the Vietnamese Communists defeated the French and negotiations divided the former French Indochina into four states: Cambodia, Laos, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam (See Map 2). In the next three decades, North and South Vietnam experienced a series of military conflicts, often coined by historians as the "three Indochina wars.[6]" In the postcolonial rebuilding process, Khmers in South Vietnam

[4] Viet Minh: League for the Independence of Vietnam
[5] Ho Chi Minh: Vietnamese Communist leader who was prime minister (1945–55) and president (1945–69) of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).
[6] First Indochina War from 1945-1954, Vietnam's transition from French colonial rule to independence. Second Indochina War from 1960 to 1975, between South Vietnamese government backed by the United States and its opponents, both the North Vietnamese-based communist Viet Cong (National

were subjected to citizenship, schooling and military services (see Taylor, 2014). As such, from the 1950s to 1960s, many Cambodians expressed concern and accused the Vietnamese government of trying to detach the Khmer Krom from their cultural roots. From 1970 to 1975, Lon Nol, the anti-Communist prime minister of the Khmer Republic planned to take back the country's former eastern regions, including the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam as an attempt to protect and restore the Cambodian identity. However, his plans failed due to the rise of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge regime. [7]

Khmer Krom in Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1975- Present)

In 1975, North Vietnam and the Viet Cong armies' overthrow Saigon, the then capital of South Vietnam, leading to the expansion of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (See Map 3). During this period, the Cambodian government was conquered by Khmer Rouge forces, and in 1976, Pol Pot became the formal head of the Khmer Rouge's Democratic Kampuchea (see Hay, 2013). Under Pol Pot's administration, Khmer Rouge leaders went to great lengths to classify different groups of people they deemed enemies of the state. From 1975 to 1979, approximately 2 million men, women, and children

Liberation Front) and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). Third Indochina War from 1975 to 1989 between Cambodia and Vietnam, during the Khmer Rouge regime.

[7] Led by Pol Pot from 1963 to 1997, the Khmer Rouge was the name given to followers of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in Cambodia. The establishment stemmed from Pol Pot's suspicions of the Indochina Communist Party (ICP), which he believed was Vietnam's plan to absorb all of Indochina after independence (Hay, 2013).

were killed during the Cambodian Genocide.[8] There are countless cases of ethnically mixed Khmer-Vietnamese children, who had to choose between being with one parent over the other. Mixed families were often send to detention camps or execution centers, in part due to their perceived affiliations with Vietnam. Needless to say, during this time violence was bleeding into the borders of Vietnam, increasing tensions between the two countries. In 1978, the Vietnamese army with the help of the Cambodian Salvation Front (FUNSK)[9] launched a full invasion and a year later, captured Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. In 1979, a new Cambodian government under Heng Samrin[10] is declared, and over the next ten years, although out of power the Khmer Rouge begins a long war against both the Vietnamese and Cambodian government. Finally, in 1989, under economic and political stress the Vietnamese government withdraw out of Cambodia, but it wasn't until 1998, when Pol Pot dies in a jungle that the last Khmer Rouge fighters surrendered to the Cambodian government in 1999 (Hay, 2013).

[8] Cambodian Genocide: Between 1975 and 1979, anyone with connections to the former Cambodian government or had any sort of education were considered polluted by Western ideas and were killed by militants. Additionally, the Khmer Rouge carried out their "cleansing policy," executing ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, mixed Cambodians, and other minorities including Cambodian Christians, Muslims, and Buddhist Monks (Nhem, 2013).

[9] FUNSK also known as Kampuchea (or Khmer) United Front for National Salvation, a pro-Hanoi umbrella organization of the Marxist Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP) opposed to the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The Khmer Viet Minh (about 5,000 Khmers pushed into exile from Cambodia for their alliance with the Vietnamese in the 1950s) were instrumental in the foundation of the organization

[10] Heng Samrin was originally a member of the Khmer Rouge communist movement led by Pol Pot, and became a political commissar and army division commander in 1975. But in 1978, after a series of violent purges within the Khmer Rouge leadership, he fled to Vietnam. In Vietnam, he was one of the founding members of FUNSK. Later that year, Heng returned to Cambodia and organized a resistance movement with the backing and support of Vietnam and the Soviet Union (Hay, 2013).

Decades of war and fighting on the same team have led to a shared history between southern Vietnamese and Khmer Krom. In Vietnamese literature and poems, Khmer and Vietnamese soldiers often refer to each other as "anh em dân tộc", which translate to "ethnic brothers." During my conversations with participants, the term ethnic brothers is still used when Khmers are referring to their Vietnamese neighbors and vice versa. Many people compare the Cambodian genocide to the Holocaust of Jewish families under the Nazis, but there are two fundamental differences that makes it even harder for some Khmer people to forget the past. First, nearly twenty percent of the Khmer population was murdered not by outsiders, but by other Khmers. And second, every single Khmer in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 participated in the genocide, either as a victim, a perpetrator, or both. Thus, there still exist tensions between elders, especially between city dwellers and country people.[11] For Khmer Krom in Vietnam, as Taylor (2014) found after spending fourteen years along the Mekong Delta, they are not fully accepted in Cambodia and are considered Vietnamese souls in Khmer bodies, meanwhile Vietnamese locals consider the Khmer Krom as Cambodians due to their cultural roots.

Current Issues and Observations

In modern day Vietnam, the Khmer Krom population is highly concentrated along the Mekong Delta, in areas near the Cambodia border. These areas include Soc

[11] The Khmer Rouge favored people that resided in the country, called Khmer Ja or old people. They felt city people were polluted with Western thoughts, who they called Khmer Tmai or new people.

Trang, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, An Giang, and Kien Giang provinces. It is estimated that 1.2 million Khmer Krom are currently living in the south-western part of Vietnam (Census, 2009), but other scholars report that the number is closer to 7 million, including unregistered Khmer Krom communities (Taylor, 2014). The disparity in data is influenced by mixed Vietnamese and Khmer people, who considers themselves more Vietnamese than Khmer, but are still reported as Khmer by researchers. Additionally, Khmer people in rural villages often choose not to participate in census collection due to language barriers, and many living in highland areas of central Vietnam are not included in the census. During the wars of the twentieth century, the Khmer population along the Mekong Delta was displaced and resettled, and in the process, many lost their land. In the last three decades, economic development resulted in over fishing, mining, deforestation, and tourism industries have drastically forced the Khmer Krom population in this area to become economically marginalized and displaced (see Taylor, 2014).

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and various minority rights organizations including the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), Khmer Krom communities displaced along the Mekong Delta are denied the right to freely practice their religion and are treated as second-class citizens (UNPO, 2015). When forced to move to another community, internally displaced persons (IDPs)[12] are not local citizens,

[12] According to the 1998 Guiding Principles by Dr. Francis Deng, IDPs "are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in

which means they are not registered as residents of that district or province, and therefore are not the responsibility of the local administration (see Brun, 2003). As the majority of Khmer Krom are farmers, being displaced effects their main source of livelihood. In 2007, after Vietnam signed the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, over two hundred frustrated Khmer Krom protested in front of Can Tho's Office of Ministry to demand immediate return of ancestral land (RFA, 2007). However, authorities announced that first, the Khmer Krom community is not recognized as an indigenous group by the government and second, under Vietnam's land laws[13], land will not be returned but instead Khmer Krom will be given financial compensations, which to date, many claimed they never received. Vietnam's lack of policies on land confiscation and land grabbing by its own authorities have effected hundreds of farmers, including Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese, and Khmer Krom members.

During my research, I came across numerous villages inhabited by Khmer Krom, including local markets and restaurants selling only Khmer cuisines. The Khmer cultural and religious presence in southern Vietnam is incredibility robust, as barefoot monks with bright orange robes are seen walking along roads and at countless beautiful

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particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. (1)"

[13] Per Vietnam Constitution and Land Law 2015: Land is the property of the entire people, which is allocated or leased by the State to organizations, households or individuals for long-term or limited-term use. Depending on their status, land users are fully or partly granted the rights of land to exchange, transfer, lease, sublease, inherit, donate, mortgage land use right, contribute capital in form of land use right.

Theravada Buddhist temples. Temples are lined along the Delta and one could be spotted nearly every few miles. My conversations with Khmer monks have led to dialogues about the Khmer Krom as a group of people that was able to avoid history altogether and maintain where they have been since the seventeenth century. Though somewhat influenced by the socio-political atmosphere around them, this group of people as a monk described to me, "is like a thousand-year-old tree witnessing the change of its environment."

Map 2: Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1975- Present *Source: University of Texas Libraries 2001*

Theoretical "Home"

> *"Home is often identified as the archetypal landscape, standing alone or joined with journey, with road, shrine, and garden. Home is magical… This insistency on home as archetype persists… despite evidence all around us that home is an extraordinarily malleable concept." (Riley, 1992: 25)*

If "home" is solely the physical environment that embodies nationality, culture, and religion; what happens when these factors no longer exist? Historically, places have not stayed fixed and have changed in physical environment, politics, culture, and even religion. Furthermore, people are frequently mobile and routinely displaced, and invent homes and homelands in the absence of territorial and national bases (Malkki, 1992).

To begin to understand the meanings commonly attached to a certain place, it is necessary to explore how "places" are created. Before the existence of the physical home, an undifferentiated "space" evolves into a "place" as people come to know it better, instilling it with values, leading to the development of culture, nationality, and community. Space is not bounded by borders and strict divisions, but rather created through the daily activities and practices of social life (White, 2002). As such, place is intimately tied to both personal and collective memories manifesting itself in space. Moreover, emotion links all human experiences so that place can acquire deep meaning through 'the steady accretion of sentiment' (Tuan, 1977). Home is therefore a theoretical concept with empirical applications; it is a metaphor for experience of happiness, protection, comfort, and the feeling of belonging in places (Moore, 2000).

It is important to consider the various stages in an individual's life at which different places can become "home" (Hammond, 1999), as "home" is constituted by much more than the physical place in which someone live or lived, it also represents the accumulation of relationships and history (Black, 2002). Displaced or uprooted communities are in a state of constant flux and change, leaving a trail of collective memory and history about another place and time. As communities move forward, they create new maps of attachments and different "homes." In the following sections, I will argue that due to the conditions and life Khmer Krom have built for themselves in Soc Trang and Can Tho, "home" to this community is composed of shared experiences, communal cultural and religious practices, and feelings of belonging.

Community Support over shared Nationality

Refugee and displacement studies through neutral humanitarian discourses often understand refugee and displaced persons' identities as rooted in certain places such as the 'homeland,' the 'nation,' and the national soil (Malkki, 1992). Despite the spread of globalization, when people and cultures are understood as localized and as belonging to certain places, place becomes fixed locations within a unique and unchanging environment (Massey, 1994). As such, in many world nations, nationalism is still prominent in people's perception of home (Black, 2002). Literature on nationalism prove to demonstrate the complexity and subjective dimensions to the ideology.

Nationalism as a patriotic feeling towards one's nation calls for a need of a nation. But what is "nation?" Anderson (1983) defines nation as, "an imagined political community" as the majority of its members have never personally met one another. A "nation" is defined by two factors, first it is composed by its borders and second, its independence from other nations. As such, nations can give citizenship to its people, and communities that falls outside of the borders lack nationality (Ibid). In other words, when physically uprooted, displaced communities lack local citizenship and "home" becomes a matter of returning within those borders. Nations are then fixed in space and recognizable on a map (Smith, 1986). Frequently, refugees and displaced people demonstrate the importance of nationalism by requesting to be buried in their 'homeland,' proving that even in death, returning "home" implies being physically buried within the "nation."

In this section, I will argue that for Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho, the notion of "home" is less focused on being within ones' nation, and more on the sense of community at a given place. This idea of nation, as associated with home, is a place where the door will always remain open as long as you hold citizenship (Kinnvall, 2004). Thus, from a nationalist perspective, the "nation" or "home" provides a sense of security, giving both protection and safety from the abject-other (Ibid.). However, Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho are faced with a unique reality as they are not supported by the Cambodian government. Every year, many migrate to Cambodia, but are deported back as authorities view them as more Vietnamese than

Cambodian. Khmer members often had to bribe officials to gain citizenship, which in many cases they cannot afford to do. Likewise, in some incidents where Khmer Krom were to return to Cambodia for a short visit, they were viewed as a potential threat to the local government. Officials and locals fear that returnees will disseminate views that are critical of state power. As Sokhom, 55, explains;

> "I went to visit my cousin and after arriving, he [the cousin] told me to bring Vietnamese gifts to the local police… so they don't bother us. They asked me so many questions, how many times have you visited, for what reasons am I visiting, what I do to make money, am I married…"

By offering gifts and money to local officials, Sokhom hoped to gain an uneventful visit. Under such circumstances, where the nation's door is hesitant towards its' people, the notion of home as returning to ones' nation is less relevant among certain groups, as Phala, 52 explains;

> "That place [Cambodia] offers nothing if we move, here we have a foundation… yes, it is said to be my country, but here, I have a home…. besides, my sister married a Vietnamese, if the government finds out they will give us trouble. All that money will go to waste."

Additionally, Sokhom also express similar sentiments;

> "When time gets hard here … when harvest is poor we would jokingly say, 'go back to Cambodia!' But that [Cambodia] is not my home, we can't live with my cousins forever… we have no home there. At least here, we are not homeless."

From this perspective, home is having shelter, land, and independence from relying on relatives. Both Phala and Sokhom express grief towards the idea of not having a house, a foundation, which will lead to feelings of not being at home in one's "homeland." As Kibreab (1999) observes, people tend to identify strongly with national places because

of the opportunities and rights of access to resources and protection. In such cases where land still constitutes the major source of livelihood and access to land is based on national identities or citizenship, returning within the nation is considered the best solution (UNHCR and Kibreab, 1999). While that is not an option for Khmer Krom returning to Cambodia, land ownership for them in Vietnam is also complicated. Land laws and land use rights in Vietnam is complex and difficult, as private ownership of land is not permitted and people hold ownership rights under the State as the administrator. In other words, the state administers the land on its behalf, and people and organizations reply upon land-use rights to work or live on the land, but do not technically own land. Vu explains to me that historically, the land that he now rents belonged to his family. When I inquired about his thoughts on now renting land that was once under his family's name, Vu replied;

> "It is better for us to rent the land. When the land is no good, we move and rent another land. It is still our land."

Vu explains to me that owning land is a liability due to a higher level of flooding and salinization in recent years. The choice to be able to move elsewhere and rent fertile land have made it easier for Vu and other farmers to accept their condition. Additionally, the notion that "it is still our land" despite lack of paperwork relates to the socio-political atmosphere of communist Vietnam. Many scholars have argued that people have always been mobile, especially in this era of globalization, mobility has become the means of human existence. Thus, national borders are not as significance as

they once were, and national identity has become de-territorialized. On a microlevel, Khmer farmers rely less on personal ties to land, and more so on livelihood opportunities. For Vu and others like him, their refusal to be tied to a particular place have allowed them to continuously reconnect and reestablish notions of "home." Moreover, Khmer farmers' familiarity with the environmental conditions, regardless of land ownership, have reinforce a sense of community across different ethnic groups. As Sann observes;

> "When the soil is poor my Vietnamese neighbors will ask for my help, and I share knowledge with them on how to take care of [the land]. They watch my Heifers[14] when my wife and I sell our yogurt in the market... when the soil is bad, we all suffer." Sann – 58

Additionally, Heng, 38 states;

> "Some of my [Vietnamese] friends lost their land too… Too dry and no harvest. They had to sell their cows…luckily, they made a profit. When time came and we had to sell our land, we asked and they helped us."

As the statement indicates, support from both parties during difficult times have strengthen this diverse community. Vu, Sann, and Heng bond with their Vietnamese neighbors through shared troubles, a sense of inheriting a collective tie over the lack of something and aiding each other through times of difficulty. This development of community is not ethnic-bound, but is built on shared visions and commitment to one

[14] Heifers: cows that are given to the community from Heifer International Vietnam (INGO).

another, regardless of nationality. Thus, the characteristics and role of place is influenced by its society and how people come to give it meaning.

Culture is not static

When culture is tied to land, it nurtures the expectations that those coming from the same land will have a cultural bond to one another. This assumption is problematic as it ignores the diverse cultural oppressions that often exist within populations from the same country. Additionally, when culture is tied to land, culture is isolated, rooted in the soil, and limited to a place. For instance, we will consider the development of the "native" status. Natives are persons from certain places, and technically belong to those places. Often, they are also incarcerated or confined to their land, and will hold certain beliefs that is associated with their native status. In such cases, land plays an important role in cultural practices and cultural identity. However, if a "native" community wanted to resettle elsewhere, would their disconnection from ancestral land force them to lose their "native" title? Similarly, as Chow (1994) states, if natives from the People's Republic of China does not hold the same political ideology as their country, is it fair to consider them corrupted and not "authentic" Chinese natives? In this section, I will use my interviews with Khmer Krom to argue that "home" in the sense of cultural identity does not necessarily have to be stapled to ones' homeland, but is a complex and fluid notion that is influenced by others.

As a concept, culture is the mechanism through which people have a common perspective on their conventional understanding of their environment and share a collection of customs, values, and beliefs that could be used to distinguish them from other groups. Groups conventional understandings are often the premise of actions, thus communities that share a common culture will often engage in common means of action (see Redfield, 1941). As understandings, perspectives, and actions change overtime, new culture will develop and 'old' culture will be altered. With the influence of other cultures and a rapid increase in advance technology, how we learn, interact, and behave will continue to alter in an effect to accommodate its' changing environment, effecting "culture" in the home, at school, work, and in our daily lives. Therefore, culture is not a static entity but a continuous process that is constantly changing to shape the experiences and needs of the group as it assimilates with its social networks. In this sense, culture could be argued as a product of communication and vice versa (see Shibutani, 1955). Thus, if culture is not shared through communication, written text, or practice, eventually it would fade away. Language and communication heavily affects an individual's notion of "home," as it allows for people to connect with one another.

In many repatriation rhetoric on home identity, displaced communities have expressed language barriers in their host country as a reason for feelings of limbo. In such cases, dominant groups often saw the displaced community as static and regressive. Those who did not assimilate were blamed for their lack of participation in the 'progressive' culture or willingness to learn the dominant group's language.

However, it is argued that minority groups tend to hold onto their language of origin to maintain self-esteem and as a force of resistance towards the dominant group's discrimination (see Castles, Haas, and Miller; 2014), as well as holding onto the feelings of "home."

I have found during my research that the majority of Khmer Krom living along the Mekong Delta are multilingual. The ability to communicate and exchange "culture" is not a challenge for residents in Soc Trang and Can Tho due to the diversity in the area, but participants have expressed concern of possible language barriers outside those regions. As Chhay explains;

> "I can't read or write Vietnamese, but I can speak and understand. I have an accent but my ethnic brothers understand me…some also speak Khmer, they will go to our market and speak half Khmer and half Vietnamese (laughs). I feel good here, but if we must move, I think other Vietnamese will not understand my Vietnamese. I have the same feeling about moving to Cambodia, maybe my Khmer is not understood there." Chhay- 38

As the statement indicates, after decades of interactions between the two cultures, participants sense there has been a blend between languages and a mutual understanding between the two groups. The ability to communicate have made Khmer Krom in this region feel socially included and "at home" among their Vietnamese neighbors, or as they call each other, "ethnic siblings."

Additionally, culture is held together through habits; be it the rituals, religious practices, style of dress, ways of thought, and or shared cuisines (see Wise, 2000). Within Khmer traditions, monks are the spiritual leaders of their society, and as such, at

the center of all Khmer communities is the *wat*, a temple and monastery of Theravada Buddhism. During my research, I stayed in an apartment in downtown Can Tho, near Wat Munirangsyaram. Nearly every morning around 5am, I can hear the chants and prayers of monks from my window as they start their meditation rituals. In the evening, two sections of study and teaching is available for the Khmer community. As I observed the socialization[15] between monks and Khmer members from different demographics, I was humbled by the commitment and leadership, and the many roles that monks contributed to their society. Many of the monks spoke not only Khmer and Vietnamese, but also English and French. The *wat* was constantly busy with people coming in and out, often for long periods of time, participating in the meditation, or for short visits dropping off fruits and vegetables as offerings. Botum is 36, a mother of three, she wakes up at 4am to pick water spinach to later sell at the local market, feed her cows, make breakfast and lunch, bring her children to school, and still she finds time to visit the *wat* before going to the market at 8am. When I asked Botum about her trips to the *wat*, she replied;

> "I do it every day, sometime I forget I am even doing it. A lot of my family and friends visit the *wat* at least twice a week. It is part of my morning routine, when I am unable to go I feel uneasy… I went to another *wat*, it was beautiful but I like my home *wat*…"

For Botum and many others, despite their busy schedule, going to the *wat* is a behavior that is no longer conscious but it is a habit that is instill in the Khmer culture. The

[15] Socialization is the process through which culture is learned through interacting with one another and passed down from one generation to the next.

groups' activities and the habitual repetition of their motions and thoughts have strengthen the groups' cultural identity and their formation of home. They live their culture not only through thoughts and discourses, but also through certain movements, ways of behaving, and their involvement in routines. Cultural identity is not territorial or tied to land, but is held together by the collection of communication, texts, shared practices, and habits of society in a given space. The ease of communicating with others and the chance to develop cultural habits for Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho have made this region *home.*

Religion and its' role in the notion of "home"

For many cultures, "home" is also linked to religious ties to the guarding spirits and gods of the physical environment. The tie to land and the need for roots is essential in the group's construction of home. In such cases, the notion of home is linked to ancestry's burial grounds, family origins, and religious links to gods and goddesses of the land. As geographer Tuan Yi-Fu observes, religion could either bind people to a place or set them free from it. When land and religion are so closely linked to the notion of home, exile could be the worst fate, as it deprives people not only of their physical means of support but also of their religion and the protection of laws guaranteed by the local gods (Tuan, 1977).

In this section, I will draw upon an interesting idea that Tuan conveys, that religion could either bind people to a place or set them free from it. Throughout history, nations have gone to war over people's religious attachment to a certain place, and the role of the land in biblical doctrines. In this case, it could be argued that religion have bind people to a place. During my twenty-seven months in Armenia as a Peace Corps volunteer, many Armenians expressed sorrow over the loss of Mount Ararat. Historians and religious figures claim Armenia was the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion in 301AD (U.S. Cong, 2001). Many Armenians identify and take pride in their Christian faith; and Mount Ararat, which was part of Armenia until it was ceded to Turkey in 1921, was believed to be the traditional resting place of Noah's Ark. For centuries, Mount Ararat was the national symbol for their country, and is still featured in Armenian literature, art, and is well known to be part of the country's identity. Nearly a century later, "home" to Armenians still feel incomplete due to this missing piece. During my stay in Armenia, over coffee and tea, my counterpart and Armenian friends would watch Mount Ararat from across the borders and recite poems and feel deep grief and sorrow due to their religious tie to the land that was once theirs.

Religious link to land is formed in many ways, for some it is the interactions between people and land, and for others, an explanation for their existence among different cultures. As Tam explains to me,

> "We [Khmer Krom] are meant to be scattered across the Mekong Delta, we are supposed to live among Vietnamese and Chinese…We were reincarnated, this is my *số phận*[16] (destiny)." – Tam, 29

The communal "số phận (destiny)" that is expressed in the statement above stems from a Cambodian myth about Goddess Neang Vimean Chan. According to Tam and other participants, Chan was a Khmer queen most loved by the King, who later had to escape from her palace after jealous allegations from other queens that she was trying to prison the King. While fleeing from the King's troops, Chan threw herself into the river and drowned. Upon death, she shed different body parts along the river, symbolizing the disintegration of the Khmer Krom populations along the Mekong Delta. Another participant, Chau, uses this myth to explain her outer appearance.

> "I was born during the rainy season, which is why I look more Khmer." – Chau, 28 Mixed Khmer and Vietnamese

Here, Chau relates her outer appearance to the Khmer Goddess Neang Chan, who embodies femininity, rainy seasons, water, and flooding. By being born during the wet seasons, Chau's Khmer roots is more dominant than her Vietnamese half. Stemming from a Khmer goddess, who is now in the soil, plants, fish, and every single Khmer person that lives along the Mekong Delta; Tam, Chau, and many others have used their religious beliefs to justify their existence among different cultures. Here, religion have set people that are bind to a place, spiritually free.[17] Through storytelling, people have

[16] After clarifying with participants, "số phận" is used here as "destiny." Depending on context, it could also translate to "fate", "[food] portion", or "[one] cup."

[17] Along the Mekong Delta, there are numerous Khmer temples and pagodas, and each one holds special meanings and stories for the community it serves (see Map 2).

compared localities and occurrences to tales of gods and goddesses as a way to understand and accept their current reality. As Taylor (2014) explains, for many Khmer Krom they have used Buddhist teachings and doctrine as a way to describe the decline in their population and culture. They believe in their coexistence with the surrounding environment, and as the environment change so will those that inhabit those environments.

Finally, religion could be used to set people free, as Naidu (2016) found in her study in Zimbabwe. By going to church and being around others, displaced Zimbabweans felt a sense of community which helped many cope with their violent past. When an individual is sick, he/she have faith that elders at the church will pray for a quick recovery, cultivating feelings of "home" (Ibid.). Religion is then, not tied to a place, but is instead practiced and celebrated by individuals in each space. This approach suggests that space is constructed from social relations, and that place is an articulation of those relations (Massey, 1994). Place, or rather the feeling of place, are a collection of moments in those social networks, following certain cultural patterns and religious routine. Thus, religious groupings provide feelings of commonality, shared heritage, and support; all of which do not depend upon an actual place (Massey, 1994b). Similarly, Chau explains to me how her mother has found peace along the Delta,

> "My mother's uncle was killed during the Khmer Rouge; can you blame her for not wanting to visit Cambodia? We can travel there in one day, it's not far. She is religious so I told her about the beautiful temples, but she said she rather pray here."

Religion could be argued here as a tool to set communities free from a place with negative ties, while allowing them to recreate trust and resilience in their new home. For instance, despite my interaction with Armenians feeling a sense of loss over Mt. Ararat. In contemporary Armenia, especially among inner city youth, the notion of home is perceived less as a bounded place but rather as an imagined state of being or moral location. The youths' acceptance of "New Armenia" without Mt. Ararat enabled them to continue forward, and recreate their own notion of home. As such, although communities may lose what once constitutes as "home" for them, they did not lose their values, nor their ability to express their faith and principles.

Conclusion

Interviews with Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho illustrates the complexity surrounding the notion of home and displacement. Personal and group identities' perceptions of "home" is simultaneously local and global, and occupy multiple scales. As this paper demonstrates, the concrete definition of "home," and the challenge of defining it, let alone reaching it, remains an ongoing issue in refugee and displacement studies. Moreover, the notion of home can be defined differently at different times, and is influenced by the socio-political environment, as well as livelihood opportunities that are available to the communities. As Brun and Fabos' (2015) analytical framework suggests, "home" is both an idea and a practice. Multiple

concepts of home can exist simultaneously as the people who hold them move from one location to the next. Brun and Fabos call this the "constellations of home," described as;

> "The metaphor of constellations is useful here to demonstrate how human beings turn points of reference into meaningful patterns, but that the same points may be imagined differently from each site of observation… to distinguish between the different strands that make up this constellation, we visually code them as "home," "Home," and "HOME." (Brun and Fabos, 2015: 12)

Here, "home" is explained as the day-to-day practices of homemaking, while "Home" represents values, traditions, memories, and feelings of home, and "HOME" refers to the broader political and historical context that is often associated with borders and nations (Ibid.). As such, in this final section, using Brun and Fabos' framework to reflect on participants' narratives, "Home" will align with "Theoretical Home" and "HOME" will be considered "Physical Home." "home" in the context of Khmer Krom is fluid as it could be both "Theoretical" and "Physical" as daily practices can take place between the inside and outside realm of self.

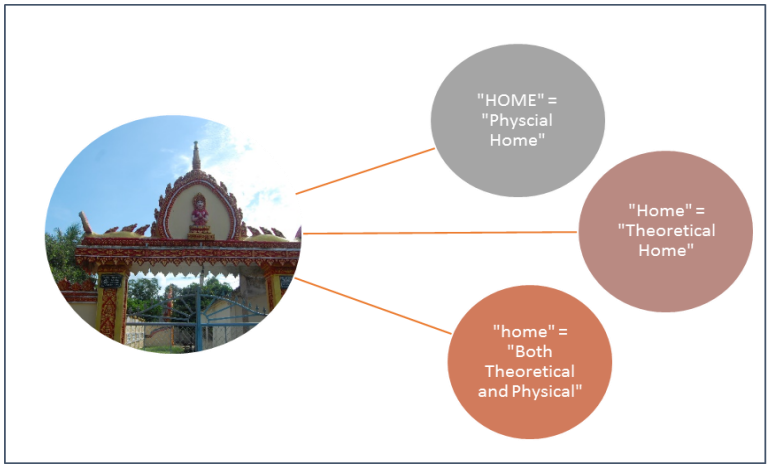

Figure 1: "Home" for Khmer Krom using Brun and Fabos' "home, Home, and HOME" analytical framework

"HOME" as "Physical Home"

To many Khmer Krom, southern Vietnam is not only their host country but also their birth place. Despite their lack of citizenship, many participants made comments such as "this is my country" and "this is where I was born." We are born into relationships that are always based in a place. This primary place and the human attachment to it is quite natural, but so is the feeling of loss when moving forward in creating new homes. As my participants observed, for them the notion of "home" is influenced by both the physical and theoretical entities of home and homemaking. Through storytelling and religious doctrines, Khmer Krom have compared their physical environment to tales of gods and goddesses to understand their existence in each space.

While this physical connection to land embodies home for some, for others the negative memories and attachment to a place have influenced their notion of home. In many ways, the historical violence and conflict of the Khmer Rouge have shaped participant's unwillingness to return to Cambodia. As Chau explains earlier, her mother's refusal to travel to Cambodia is tied to her negative memories of family casualties during the Khmer Rouge. Physical places certainly hold strong emotive values, and those values are reflective of the individual's past, present, and future reality.

"Home" as "Theoretical Home"

Khmer Krom's interpretation of home in terms of their "physical environment" is prejudiced by their emotional, traditional, and religious values, as well as their memories and understanding of their past. It is important to note that people's attachment to the physical environment is not static either; it changes in accordance with the people and the activities that are involved in the attachments. Chau used her "theoretical" notions and understanding of home to interpreted her current physical environment, while her mother uses her own memories to denounce another physical environment as "home." As these values are fluid and reflex those that carries them, the nuances that exists are continuously remaking and reshaping these communities.

Although living in a swampy area prone to saline-infestation, Khmer Krom in Soc Trang have expressed livelihood security and access to a vibrant cultural and religious life. From this theoretical perspective, home is where an individual or group is included in the social environment and have a sense of belonging. Home is no longer linked to nation and territory, but rather it is where one can carry forth dreams, participate in income generating activities, feel a sense of community, and can care for family. As Sann explains earlier, his memories and relationships with his neighbors, sharing knowledge on preventing soil degradation and watching out for each other, is what makes Soc Trang his home. Support from both parties during difficult times have strengthen this diverse setting; home is then not ethic-bond but is built on shared visions and commitment to one another.

"home" as both "Theoretical and Physical"

When entering participants' home or at a local market, it is hard for one to ignore the deep citrusy smell of Kroeung, a spice and herb paste that is often used in Khmer cuisine. In the early morning hours, I am woken by calm morning chants and smokes from incense burning outside my apartment window. Pagodas are busy with people coming in and out, a routine rooted into the locals' daily life. These day-to-day practices of homemaking, or "home" per Brun and Fabos framework, is essential in the feelings of belonging. "home" for Khmer Krom, is both theoretical and physical, in that their actions are stimulated by preconceived knowledge, traditions, and culture. Ideas and beliefs are then set in motion, such as the formation of pagodas, Khmer markets, restaurants, and shops. Daily practices, be it holding values that are linked to notions of home, or physically visiting a market or a community that shares your principles, have demonstrate that home and homemaking is a continuous cycle that is dynamic and intersects with one another. As Botum explains earlier about her and her relative's daily visit to the wat, despite their busy schedule, the habitual repetition of their motions and thoughts have strengthen the groups' cultural identity and their development of "home."

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Anyone working in a highly-contested environment such as the Mekong Delta must consider the complex and multiple nuances that co-exists in this given space; that is continuously remaking and influencing the community's current reality. The Mekong

Delta is a physical location full of linguistic and cultural enclaved, functioning as a protected and familiar "home" for its' community. Therefore, it is not a surprise that strong social networks and communal bonds have foster the notion of "home." However, as local and international politics shifts, larger influence on borders and the idea of nationalism could indirectly perpetuate racism through the inclusion and exclusion of people that do not share certain cultural and racial types (see Rose, 1997). Lack of citizenship for Khmer Krom is a factor that needs to be addressed immediately to ensure their protection against potential discrimination. In the case of displaced persons in communities that severely limits their freedom of movement, rights to religious and cultural practices; the inability to "feel at home" is a harsh reality that needs further research. As such, it would be premature and naive to expect that all displaced populations embrace the theoretical notions of home when faced with community exclusion.

While Khmer Krom in Soc Trang and Can Tho is at "home" in southern Vietnam, there is still a need to acknowledge and support the decision-making and income generating capacities of this unrecognized indigenous group. More policies and sustainable projects need to be set in place to combat the effects of climate change along the Mekong Delta, to maintain and increase employment opportunities as well as protect different means of support for all ethnic groups. Lack of fertile land, harvest, and livelihood opportunities due to climate change can potently lead to feelings of hostility among different ethnic groups. How the local government respond to displaced

Khmer and Vietnamese farmers will influence the relationship between the two groups, and effect the notion of home and belonging for Khmer Krom.

Additionally, this paper wants to stress the importance of recognizing that different members have different interests and attitudes towards "home." While one may feel at "home" in a certain location, there is still room for improvement. For some, "home" is where they can find work. However, if home is solely where one can provide for family and participate in income generating activities, "home" is then unsettled and a temporal proposition that moves with livelihood opportunities. For others, "home" is where there is a sense of community and belonging, but one could also argue that the inclusion of one group may lead to the exclusion of another. In the case of Khmer Krom in Soc Trang, participants feel secure along the Delta by having been excluded from another place, specifically Cambodia and other parts of Vietnam.

Finally, a gendered perspective on home and homemaking among the Khmer Krom community is a fascinating approach that was not taken in this paper. I trust that if participants were among peers of the same gender during the interviews, my findings would have been slightly different. I advise future scholars interested in this topic to consider the different roles of men and women, and how it intersects and influence the notion of home and homemaking. Regardless of the consequences of returning or not returning, the notion of "home" remains an important and fascinating concept for refugee, displacement, and migration studies. While more research needs to be done, I

hope this paper offered some merit and have filled in gaps for those interested in the notion of home and homemaking.

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