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Sitting Between Two Chairs: Cambodia's Dual Citizenship Debate

Kathryn Poethig

California State University, Monterey Bay, kpoethig@csumb.edu

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5 **Sitting between two chairs**

Cambodia's dual citizenship debate

Kathryn Poethig¹

By the time I arrived in Phnom Penh in 1996, the Second Prime Minister Hun Sen had called a French Cambodian government official a “dog” and declared vigorously that those holding two passports were “down-grading for the nation” (Ker 1996). One month later, Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) declared single citizenship for government leaders an official position. During the fracas, I interviewed the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Marina Pok, a French Cambodian citizen. When asked about her position on the dual citizenship of government officials, she queried in French-accented English: “Why should one give up one’s dual nationality? Is it against the interest of the nation? Is it to have a pure Cambodian nation?”² This dual affiliation had become as excruciating as “sitting between two chairs.” My paper focuses on the charged debate in Phnom Penh regarding the status of dual citizens in the Cambodian government during the 1990s. Through it, I show how the sense of “true” belonging to the post-war nation diverged between local and transnational government officials. Those who were against government officials carrying dual citizenship included both CPP members and diaspora Cambodians, though their arguments differed. Ultimately, the arguments for and against dual citizenship sought a baseline definition of national identity and a way to identify those who could signify its center.

That the debate on dual citizenship was possible at all reflected new global developments regarding multiple citizenships. Dual citizens have increased worldwide in the last 20 years.³ A significant increase in this trend was related to the 1990s “decade of return” as the break-up of the Soviet Union and its client states sent thousands of refugees who had resettled in North America, Australia, and Europe, back to homelands undergoing free market makeovers and a “transition to democracy.” The most controversial dual citizens were those returning to high-level government posts in the countries they had fled. Such rewards of exile transpired in several new nations in Eastern Europe, but Cambodia’s government of dual citizens was unique in rank and scope.⁴ The majority of Cambodian exiles returned from the US, Canada, Australia, and France, which recognized some form of dual citizenship. For the first five years of the new

government, more than half of the National Assembly and the top officials of key ministries were dual citizens. Prince Norodom Ranariddh, one of the co-prime ministers, was a French citizen, and high officials of such powerful ministries as the Interior, Information, Foreign Affairs, and Finance were citizens from France, Australia, and the US.

Cambodia's "two-headed government" offered an unusual example of the impact of diaspora politics on globally monitored "transition to democracies" in the 1990s. The 1991 Paris Peace Agreement stipulated that Cambodian exiles could return to their homeland to run in the UN-monitored 1993 elections. Cambodian officials of the Vietnamese-backed State of Cambodia had re-organized as the CPP, and as the sole power brokers through Vietnam's decade-long occupation, they were markedly reluctant to relinquish the government to returning exiles.⁵ When the royalist FUNCINPEC party won the largest number of seats in the government, the CPP refused to step down. In order to ease the transition, the two parties agreed to a "two-headed" solution—two party representatives for a single position, hence, a First and a Second Prime Minister.

Given the catastrophic Khmer Rouge era and the decade-long Vietnamese occupation that followed in the 1980s, Cambodians everywhere were concerned with a crisis of national identity (Ebihara *et al.* 1994). Indeed, the 1993 Constitutional Convention expressed that one of its "future tasks" was to "determine who, precisely, are 'THE PEOPLE OF CAMBODIA.'"⁶ Just who, precisely, the Cambodian people were precipitated a series of highly charged debates about citizenship in the immigration, nationality, and electoral laws that were drafted in the first years of the new democracy. For overseas Cambodians who were returning as dual citizens, the public debate involved their place in the politics of homeland and host nation. From 1994 to 1996, I interviewed Cambodian refugees who had returned to Phnom Penh to explore how their multiple political subjectivities affected their moral discourse of Cambodian citizenship. The subject of our discussions was a slate of new citizenship laws that were the first outputs of the new government. What emerged was a peripatetic morality, investing arguments with a moral authority based on their various identities as refugees, Cambodians, Americans, Christians or Buddhists, and dual citizens (Poethig 2003). The controversy about government officials with two passports was already circulating among prominent Cambodian Americans in Phnom Penh in 1995. Cognizant of their own ambivalent citizenship, their argument for and against dual citizenship drove to the heart of transnational identity.

Transnational identity and the government debate

Dual citizenship occurs because there is no uniform guidance under international law on the acquisition of citizenship (Weis 1979).⁷ It erodes the basic premises of modern political citizenship as singular and sacred and

betrays the rhetoric of belonging so primary to the nation state. Anthropologists claim that de-territorialized peoples upset the assumption that one's identity is fixed to a place or a national culture (Appadurai 1993; Clifford 1994; Hannerz 1996), indicating instead that transnational cultures are formed through multi-stranded social relations between homelands and settlement (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1995). The identities of those who shuttle across borders are thus hybrid, their allegiances multiple. Cambodians in diaspora uniquely embody this fractured legal, political, and cultural status when they return to Cambodia. Cambodians who became American citizens, for example, chose to retain their original citizenship when they learned that US rulings were amenable to dual citizenship. One could possess two passports as long as the dual citizen produced the US passport upon entry to US territories. At the time, there was, however, considerable confusion around citizenship laws in Cambodia as both immigration and nationality laws were being redrafted. Upon their return, these former refugees often used their US, Australian, or French passport to enter Cambodia and were thus treated as aliens requiring residency visas.

The debate on the dual citizenship of government officials pitted the CPP as the opposition party against FUNCINPEC and other less visible exiled parties. For CPP officials, dual citizenship contradicted their notion of a nation of cultural purity based on stationary Khmerness. They argued that returning Cambodians' cultural hybridity meant that they were not true Khmer. Furthermore, dual citizens would not be able to adjudicate conflicts of interest between the nations in which they held membership. The argument here turned around the terms "Khmer Angkor" and "*anikachun*." "True Cambodians" and authentic members of the nation are Khmer Angkor, signified by an ancient glorious era in Cambodian history. Returning Cambodians are called *anikachun*. In some cases, they are also referred to as "*anikachun chochuh*," a derogatory term. Originally, *anikachun* or *anikajan* referred to citizens of a country living abroad or resident aliens, and commonly designated settler Chinese and Vietnamese in Cambodia (who are now called *antaoprâve* or immigrant). Those I interviewed felt that even a neutral reference to overseas Cambodians as *anikachun* was an unwanted affiliation since settler Vietnamese have long been a pariah group due to the anxiety Cambodians felt towards a history of Vietnam's aggression.⁸ To be *anikachun* or, worse, *anikachun chochuh* thus implied that overseas Cambodians had not only lost the Khmer "soul" in exile but were allied by association with the historic enemy of the motherland. They thus returned as the inassimilable "other." Although they too had fled the country during the Khmer Rouge era, the CPP claimed identity as Khmer Angkor and counterpoised it to *anikachun*. Given this distinction, dual-citizen government officials redefined national purity, loyalty, and commitment. They claimed a more hybrid national community, argued that even single citizens could have mixed loyalties, and celebrated the benefits of dual consciousness in the international sphere.

Prime Minister Hun Sen's case against dual citizens: noodles or rice gruel

By early 1996, a controversial clause in the pending Nationality Law requiring single nationality for senior government officials revealed the widening gap between the CPP and FUNCINPEC. As the Electoral Law was still in draft form and both commune and national elections were looming, there was intense pressure to establish the role of dual citizens in the government in the Nationality Law.⁹ Bou Thang, chair of the CPP Commission handling the draft of the Nationality Law, questioned dual citizens' ability to be "[loyal] to the country" (Heng and Seng 1996). In a series of public attacks, Second Prime Minister Hun Sen urged FUNCINPEC officials to "give up [their] extra nationality now or [they] will have no right to run in the elections" (Hun Sen 1996a; see also Barber 1996). By June, the CPP Central Committee Plenum issued a statement to "support the principle of one nationality of political leaders" (Cambodian People's Party 1996). Prime Minister Hun Sen and other CPP officials argued that expatriate government officials were a liability to the nation for two reasons. First, anyone holding two passports lacked a "single-hearted" nationalism and would endanger national security because of their conflicting allegiances. Second, as returning refugees, these officials were "fair-weather" citizens who were no longer truly Khmer and would be unable to endure the necessary hardship of a poor struggling country. He juxtaposed this with his own party's status as Khmer Angkor, aligned with the common folk.

In the first case, the Second Prime Minister noted that he had initially rejected the idea of dual citizenship for government officials when it had been raised at the 1991 Paris negotiations. But afterward, he had reluctantly agreed to a grace period:

It did not seem to be appropriate for some of the brothers to make the minimal sacrifice of relinquishing their foreign nationality because there was then no real stability, no assurances that our country would have the necessary peace to hold elections. Forcing them to relinquish their foreign nationality seemed to be too cruel.

(Hun Sen 1996a)

With a second national election in 1998 looming, the grace period for the forced collaboration of CPP and FUNCINPEC was over. Prime Minister Hun Sen and his party instigated a call for this "minimal sacrifice." If the loss of a second citizenship was "too cruel," its sacrifice would indicate intent to place Cambodia before all other interests. Claiming the better part of nationalism, he caricatured officials with dual citizenship as the nation's bigamists:¹⁰

When one wife is angry with him, he runs to the embrace of the other wife. He steals things from one place and keeps them in the other

place . . . [P]oliticians should have only one nationality in order to be fully responsible to the nation and to maintain equity between two nationalities.

(Hun Sen 1996b)

But a pledge of unaligned allegiance was difficult for either party to claim. As CPP officials had risen to power during the Vietnamese occupation and FUNCINPEC officials returned from nations that had funded the anti-Communist resistance, all Cambodian officials were highly sensitive about any compromise of Cambodian sovereignty. Attacked by his opponents as a “Vietnamese puppet,” Hun Sen’s own allegiance had been questioned. Earlier in 1996, FUNCINPEC officials had opposed the celebration of January 7 as an official Cambodian holiday established by the Vietnamese to commemorate their rout of the Khmer Rouge in 1979. Both parties had to relinquish foreign patronage to gain legitimate claim to the nation.

In his second point, Hun Sen played on a perceived moral weakness of dual citizens who were formerly refugees. His argument challenged the political category of refugee identity itself as the modern icon of victimization and statelessness. He intimated that the burden of suffering was borne not by those who fled, the common refugee plight, but by those who remained. Refugees had chosen self-preservation over duty. Statelessness was thus reconfigured as voluntarism and abandonment. This abandonment had not been punished but rewarded by multiple privileges, one of which was a second nationality. The only way to recover trust was to lose something again—the second passport. This argument negated not only the efficacy but the authenticity of “*fake nationalisms*” (Anderson 1992) against local nationalisms. When Cambodians fled their homeland they betrayed their patriotism so fundamentally that they should not be trusted with its renewed expression in better times. The efforts of exiled Cambodians scattered through France, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, and the US who lobbied for Cambodia’s reconstruction were lost on a populace for whom transnational citizens were fair-weather cousins. They arrived during the good times; they would leave during the bad times.

Furthermore, these returning refugees who had lived in luxury while others suffered did not “know what Khmer Angkor are, what really poor people, people in difficulty are.” They were not able to eat “only morning glory and fish paste” (Hun Sen 1996c). Alluding to starvation conditions under the Khmer Rouge, he remonstrated:

If we eat grass, rice gruel or noodles, let us eat them together. We should share weal or woe with each other. It is not desirable to have leaders who join in only when it is time to eat good things, such as noodles, and who quickly run away when people are forced to eat rice gruel.

(Hun Sen 1996a)

In short, Khmer Angkor had not fled the country in hard times and would share in the country's suffering. Returning refugees' weak nationalism could not compare with the nationalism of leaders who, in local parlance, had "gone through the blood."

This rhetoric, however, obscured the fact that many CPP officials who were formerly Khmer Rouge (including Hun Sen) deserted their posts and fled to Vietnam early in Pol Pot's genocidal regime. When they returned with the Vietnamese troops in 1979, most were installed in the Vietnamese-backed socialist government. As most Cambodian refugees fled at the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, it is ironic that Hun Sen claims a share in the suffering of Cambodians—presumably under their own decade-long administration under Vietnam. It is thus striking that Hun Sen characterizes refugee flight as a choice of self-preservation over duty, a choice made by members of his own party.

But the CPP challenge to the legitimacy of refugee flight played upon a deep ambivalence towards refugees in the general population. No doubt, a good measure of populist envy also entered into this calculation. Officials of the Lon Nol regime who left Cambodia before 1975 were the primary targets of disdain. Those who survived the Khmer Rouge years might inspire the empathy of fellow survivors, but their departure at the point of critical reconstruction at the installation of the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea was also a betrayal. The link between postcolonial refugee statelessness and colonial affiliations demystified refugee identity. The deposed elite often sought refugee status in the nations that had supported them. If as refugees, Cambodia's elite turned their early French and US contacts into resettlement sites, returning with the mantle of *Métropole* citizenship and often under their financial backing, how could their claim to Cambodian nationalism escape suspicion?

Dual citizens had given away the country, and their plea for the hybrid identity of officials could further destabilize the government, claimed Hun Sen (Hun Sen 1996a). If the two parties were wrestling for the meat of the nation, the Second Prime Minister charged that the "foreign" dog (*chhkae sot*) had its jaws on the leg of the government. If dual citizens could run for office, then Vietnamese and Chinese, also *anikachun*, could take advantage of such an opportunity, producing a "Cambodian parliament and government . . . full of half-blood foreigners" (Hun Sen 1996a).

Hun Sen's diatribe against "half-blood foreigners" in the government percolated on the diaspora Cambodian internet as the debate raged in Phnom Penh. It traveled between a listserv and a newsgroup when I initiated a discussion on the matter from May 9 to May 14, 1996. As many overseas Cambodians were subscribers to both groups, the responses shuttled between them. While there was general assent that Hun Sen's move was a crass ploy to destabilize FUNCINPEC, and that Hun Sen's loyalties were split between Cambodia and Vietnam, the morality of multiple citizenships for officials was vigorously debated. A minority argued that

government officials could hold two passports; some proposed it as a temporary measure to encourage more highly skilled “Khmer expats” to return; most agreed that government officials should give up their second passport to show a commitment to building a Cambodian state. After all, one noted, “[Hun Sen] did not say that expatriates cannot hold high offices—just that they are not dual citizens” (online posting by psu0000@odin.cc.pdx.edu 1996). Many subscribers condemned the corruption and moral turpitude of FUNCINPEC and other exiles. The general sentiment of the group was that it was “time to test the seriousness and honest integrity of Cambodian politicians . . . If ones [*sic*] do not have courage and principles to fight for Cambodia, they should have no damn business in the decision-making that affects the destiny and lives of Cambodian people” (online posting by psu0000@odin.cc.pdx.edu 1996).

***Anikachun* nationalism**

For Anderson (1991), national identity is an ideological process in which a political community “thinks” their nation into being; the nation is an imagined community. Such communities are made up of citizens who espouse a “deep horizontal comradeship.” In an era of transnational linkages and flexible citizenships, Cambodian returnees asserted the virtue of multiple “comradeships” and the dangers of an ethnic basis for nationality. Impatient with their discursive and political marginalization as *anikachun*, dual citizens in Cambodia did not take the quest for a single-hearted nationalism as seriously as their diasporic kin or local Cambodians. Hun Sen’s claim that leadership required an originary Khmerness led one Cambodian American to remark confidentially:

All of our leaders came from elsewhere and were supported by them. If you see Sihanouk, supported by French, if you see Lon Nol, supported by who-you-know [*sic*]. If you see Pol Pot, he was in France and supported by China; Hun Sen, Vietnam. It’s coming back to French again, French and Vietnamese . . . and American.

While First Prime Minister Ranariddh kept silent, other dual citizens in office argued that their dual nationality did not jeopardize the state but in fact augmented it (Heng and Seng 1996; Ker 1996). They stressed that they had sacrificed productive lives in the West to return and contribute to Cambodia’s reconstruction (*Cambodia Times* 1996). Other transnational Cambodian officials stressed the usefulness of their dual national identities. Ahmad Yahya, representing Cham Muslims in the National Assembly, asserted that he would maintain his American citizenship if he had to give up one passport because “nationality is not important. What is important is patriotism” (*Cambodia Times* 1996). His claim to Cham ethnicity and advocacy for their rights already disrupted the implied ethnic Khmerness of “true

Cambodian” patriots, and his American passport pressed this point further. His particular form of patriotism reflected the flexible interpretation of “nationality” held by most formerly exiled Cambodian officials. In our meeting, he noted that if his colleagues came from the US, they were “pro-US, if they came from France, they’re pro-France, Australia, pro-Australia.” But unlike their Cambodian communist counterparts, they shared the “same mentality” about democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

When queried on their “flightiness,” dual citizens in Phnom Penh were often quite curt. One Cambodian American woman remarked dryly, “Cambodian people here, I’ve heard it many times, they think that once something happens, we’re going to fly away, leave them.” This argument against refugee flight indicted all returning Cambodians, though its implication for government officials held the most weight. Various Cambodian Americans stated that if such a political crisis would emerge, money and political power would trump a second passport. A Cambodian American in Phnom Penh stated a simple truth: “The people with the money will leave; the poor will stay.” As for the claim that returning Cambodians had more wealth to protect, the same man admitted that many FUNCINPEC officials were certainly corrupt, but added that many former classmates who had never left Cambodia were now much wealthier than he was. However, in the summer of 1997, a brief but violent power struggle between CPP and FUNCINPEC did prove the efficacy of the claims about returning Cambodians. Many former exiles fled to Bangkok or further abroad, and among them First Prime Minister, Prince Ranariddh.¹¹ But in 1996, FUNCINPEC officials still claimed sure-footedness, and noted that the CPP’s reference to their fleet-footedness hid the hope that FUNCINPEC officials would abandon the government to its former proprietors in a time of duress.

Espousing a diaspora nationalism, returning Cambodians argued that their “flightiness” freed them to “speak out the truth” away from the locus of repressive power. Cambodians in diaspora—like those on the internet—were aware of their impact on the Cambodian state. The Cambodian nation was now scattered around the globe and the Cambodian state had to contend with its de-territorialized constituency. Officials of the CPP, once isolated from international scrutiny, now found themselves answerable to influential donor nations, the United Nations, the international development community, and 300,000 Cambodians in diaspora. If the CPP appealed to local Cambodians by declaring the moral authority of a single nationality, they had also to address the complaints of the transnational Cambodian lobbyists who took national politics onto the streets and into the legislative halls of other cities. Hun Sen’s challenge to FUNCINPEC officials’ dual citizenship included an admonishment to Cambodians demonstrating in France (Hun Sen 1996a). Those whose “feet are planted in two countries” did not know the lived realities of Cambodia. He asked: “do they know the conditions of democracy in the countryside?” Until they were able to leap over canals with him in the countryside, “it is not

right to hurl insults at each other in Paris, Belgium, Washington or Phnom Penh” (Hun Sen 1996a). Frustrated by his inability to restrain diaspora dissent, he warned against demonstrations within his reach: “Be careful! I will act. I will use military force to deal with you” (Hun Sen 1996a).

This threat to suppress opposition was a good reason to support the dual citizenship of officials, noted a Cambodian American on the internet:

It is already sad enough that people must exile out of the country in order to speak out the truth on the current situation inside Cambodia . . . The very least we can do is to extend our moral support for politicians that risk their lives by trying to bring changes to Cambodia.

(Thean 1996)

Between two chairs: what is true loyalty?

If Ahmad Yahya was not a “true Cambodian,” Marina Pok, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, was neither “true” nor “pure” Cambodian. She was the daughter of a French Cambodian mother and Cambodian father; her family had escaped to France before the Khmer Rouge arrived in Phnom Penh. As a recipient of “dual cultures” as well as dual nationalities, she vigorously rejected the pressure to relinquish either. During my interview with her, she asked, “Is it against the interest of the nation? Is it to have a pure Cambodian nation?” She demolished the conflation of nation and ethnic purity at the heart of Hun Sen’s diatribe by arguing that neither true nor pure local Cambodians exist. The ideology of a pure Khmer ethnicity was a dangerous legacy in Cambodia that had inspired both General Lon Nol’s racist nationalism and the Khmer Rouge policy of extermination. Furthermore, if pre-war Cambodian society was the benchmark for cultural authenticity, it was, as another Cambodian American put it, “deep under the sea.”

Marina Pok then struck at the heart of Prime Minister Hun Sen’s charge that those like her were not Khmer Angkor—stationary Khmers who represented the heart of Cambodia. “Are Khmer nationals better citizens?” she asked, “Is their allegiance more certain?” Arguing that historical experience affects morality more than legal affiliation to a second state, she remarked that those who survived the Khmer Rouge period and subsequent regimes “had to betray their neighbor, to kill their neighbor in order to survive.” Their “values,” she noted cautiously, were “very . . . diverted.” Then she added:

Being a returnee, I need to have a relationship with my colleagues, and loyalty is a basic part of the relationship of work. It’s very difficult, because these people today need me because I am in a strong position. But tomorrow, they will just turn back and follow somebody else who is in a stronger position to serve their interests. And these are people who have one nationality.

Loyalty, concluded Undersecretary Pok, was a trait that did not sit well with pragmatists; personal affairs often trump national interests. The number of passports cannot measure loyalty and national diplomacy.

If, according to Undersecretary Pok, neither ethnic purity nor possessing a single passport has any claim on national loyalties, does dual affiliation affect the course of national diplomacy? As Pok was Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs and the liaison to ASEAN, the highly regarded regional affiliation of Southeast Asian nations, her dual associations did have multiple effects. She offered three examples. In the first case, she referred to her participation in the negotiation between an “Asian” state and “Western” pressure for Cambodia to adhere to human rights standards. The weight of her “heritage of Western education” predisposed her to the human rights agenda more readily than her ASEAN colleagues. In domestic affairs, however, she took an “Asian” interpretation of rights concerned with economic development over civil rights. If in the human rights argument she identified an Asia–West binary cultural position, her status as an official of an “underdeveloped” post-socialist country set her at the bottom rung of Asia’s aggressive modernity. She related in a second example how she was dismissed by a Western official as an unrealistic diplomat from an “emerging country.” She felt the sting as a Cambodian subjected to the disdain of those with whom she shared, in other circles, similar cultural capital.

The bargaining tables of both ASEAN neighbors and Western donors, she suggested, were minefields that one must maneuver. Neither local nor transnational Cambodians evaded the humiliations, but for those whose identities were doubly ambivalent, the consciousness of being associated with both was more acute. Thus Marina Pok related this final tale of Fanon-like epiphany of collapsed consciousness. In a conversation with a French colleague about an upcoming trip to Thailand for a meeting with private investors, they discussed what clothes they would bring:

“Are you going to bring a national dress?” my friend asked. And I said “Yeah, I am.” And she said, “It would look so ridiculous . . . because investors want to see the modern. Thai women active in Thai society do not wear Thai national dress anymore . . . You would look like [you were wearing a] boubou” (you know, African women in France who are dressed in the bright African dress). I never thought that if I go to a meeting wearing a Cambodian national dress, it would look like a boubou!

To be signified by a *boubou*, then, is to be identified as an inassimilable postcolonial immigrant in the *Métropole*. Which mask does she wear? Marina Pok was neither a French Cambodian wearing a *boubou* nor a Khmer Angkor stateswoman. Seven Cambodian women were elected into office, and in official photos they posed in “Cambodian national dress.” She related the message that dual citizens know so well—as citizens of

several countries, they are native to none. In their second homes, they are hyphenated; in their first home, they are *anikachun*.

But it is also an argument made in my presence to indicate that as an official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Undersecretary Pok was cultivating a sophisticated national identity to accommodate Asia's high modernity. Given the contentious transition in the following year, when many FUNCINPEC officials were expelled, Pok's inference is important because it stresses that dual citizens could be critical to maneuver Cambodia's transition into a new global polity. This was because, she argued, dual citizens were adept at the reflexive manners of modernity, and able to market Angkor's vestigial glory while interpreting Cambodia's particular democratic polity to humanitarian donors.

Conclusion

The issue of dual citizenship that arose during debates on the Law on Nationality in 1996 was, in some ways, a politics of dissimulation on both sides. On the one hand, it was staged as a vociferous campaign by officials of the former regime who invoked a nation of cultural purity based on stationary Khmerness, a status few could authentically claim in twenty years of massive displacement, occupation, and civil war. Returning Cambodians were characterized as morally compromised because they had been self-serving as refugees, and thus unreliable; they were now *anikachun* and thus not fully members of the nation; and finally, their dual allegiance was dangerous for a fragile democracy. As both parties were the subject of proxy politics, these claims might have been dismissed were it not that they exploited a deep-seated anxiety about Cambodia's political stability and general desire for a clear national identity.

The dual citizens in government with whom I spoke articulated a moral discourse of dual commitments that resolved for them the dilemmas posed by local officials and their diaspora compatriots. They first rejected the discursive distinction between *anikachun* and true or pure Khmer. Because their "purity" had been questioned, diaspora Cambodians depicted purity itself as a ploy to keep them outside the nation. In its place they argued for a heterogeneous body of peoples as Cambodia's future. Plurality in Cambodia's home space re-narrated the meaning of membership to include its transnational citizens in diaspora communities around the world. Their defense of refugee "flightiness" was less articulate and proved to be prophetic during the 1997 coup when many FUNCINPEC officials fled the conflict. Their claim to patriotic altruism by returning from lucrative salaries to assist with Cambodia's reconstruction belied the popular perception that returning Cambodian officials were as corrupt and greedy as their local counterparts.

Because singular national identity was held as a standard for government service, dual citizens challenged the sacred character of this

singularity. Their strategies sometimes slipped across the hyphen, asserting Cambodian patriotism while claiming US interests. As far as allegiance was concerned, dual citizens in Phnom Penh contested the inviolability of Khmer Angkor loyalty. Pok's responses represented a general sentiment among returning Cambodians. If refugees were held suspect for fleeing, those who stayed survived by morally questionable means. Pragmatism often trumped the higher principles of loyalty in difficult times, and no one was above reproach. Rather than a detriment, dual consciousness could facilitate Cambodia's re-entry into the complex, sophisticated dynamics of international affairs.

How does transnational identity affect this moral discourse? The study of the moral reasoning of Cambodian Americans suggests a strategy for inclusion that employs all subject positions available to them. If they spoke as Cambodians to the media, and dual citizens in the Assembly, others adjusted in my presence to identify as US citizens. But this identification with two nations is not co-equal, or a slippery status that one can shift into—and out of—easily. It is played along various vectors of power. Claiming the West offers one a taste of positional superiority when returning “home,” it is also a painful reminder of one's secondary status among those with whom one shares the more privileged passport. Claiming to be Cambodian ranks one as third class in the global hierarchy of nations, and with “locals” one is dismissed by the exclusionary tactics of nationalist and *ressentiment* politics. This hybrid positionality redefined such politically charged words as national purity, loyalty, and commitment during Cambodia's reconstruction in the mid-1990s. This was, perhaps, for those engaged in the struggle, as difficult as sitting in a space between two chairs.

Notes

- 1 Fieldwork for this paper was partially funded by the Social Science Research Council. I wish to acknowledge the two editors, Leakthina Ollier and Tim Winter for their support and careful editing. I am indebted to Leakthina Ollier for her assistance on the linguistic analysis of *anikachun* identity. Khatharya Um, Aihwa Ong, Claire Fisher, Marty Stortz, and Jane Margold also offered feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.
- 2 All material quoted without a source in this chapter is from personal interviews with the author conducted in Cambodia in 1996.
- 3 South America and the Caribbean have had various dual citizen treaties for many years (Jones-Correa 2003). Asian countries where labor migration and immigration are high are also following suit. Among these countries are Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and most recently, India and the Philippines (see Renshon 2001).
- 4 Included here are Milan Panic who was offered the post of prime minister in Serbia in 1992, and Mohammad Sacirby who was offered the post of Bosnian ambassador to the United Nations. Rein Taagepera ran unsuccessfully for president of Estonia, and Canadian citizen Stanislaw Tyminiński ran against Lech Walesa for president of Poland (Anderson 1994).

- 5 Initially named People's Republic of Kampuchea under the Vietnamese occupation, the government changed its name to the State of Cambodia on April 30, 1989 as Vietnam withdrew.
- 6 The Cambodian Constitution, www.constitution.org/cons/cambodia.htm.
- 7 Dual citizenship and dual nationality are often used interchangeably though they differ slightly. Bar Yaacov (1961) identifies five ways to acquire a dual citizenship: naturalization, through the naturalization of one's own parents; acquisition through marriage; military service in a second state without loss of earlier citizenship; as an illegitimate child born in one country after which the foreign-born father is identified; and finally, return to the country of origin and reactivating former citizenship.
- 8 Vietnam was Sino-Confucian, and its attitude towards its "barbarian" neighbors included a civilizing mission that in the mid-1800s involved a "Vietnamization" of language, dress, and administration (Chandler 1993a: 123ff.). Additionally, its colonizing strategy involved replacing Cambodian peasants with Vietnamese settlers. This slow appropriation of Cambodian territory and Cambodia's perception of Vietnam's ethnocentrism is a large contributor to the long-standing hatred and fear of the Vietnamese expressed by generations of Cambodians.
- 9 It finally became evident that dual citizenship was not the domain of the Law on Nationality but the Electoral Law. Though the former determined who would be eligible as citizens to vote, the Electoral Law would identify which citizens could be candidates. The Law on Nationality, passed in October 1996, supported dual citizenship, and the Electoral Law, passed in December 1997, did not bar dual citizens from office.
- 10 Geyer (1996) also uses the metaphor of bigamy when arguing against American dual citizenship.
- 11 Donovan (1998) argues that the *coup de force* by Hun Sen revealed his understanding and use of political theater over written law. Ranariddh, a law professor in France, and other exiles were schooled in legal culture of the Western liberal tradition that relied on the force of written law. Hun Sen employed the more ritualized features of the "theater state" of Indic Southeast Asia. Hun Sen could have legally unseated Ranariddh when it was discovered that he illegally imported arms, with further dealings in arms from the Khmer Rouge. Instead, because he controlled the military, Hun Sen sent troops to encircle Phnom Penh. In the meantime, Ranariddh fled the country and was replaced as First Prime Minister by Ung Hout, an Australian citizen. On July 5 fighting broke out between the two forces in Phnom Penh. By the end of the following day, Hun Sen was victorious. Thus instead of using law, Hun Sen employed the armed forces and political theater to establish his sole legitimacy for political leadership.