

# *Cultures of decolonisation*

TRANSNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS  
AND PRACTICES, 1945–70

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## CHAPTER SIX

# Cultural heritage as performance: Re-enacting Angkorian grandeur in postcolonial Cambodia (1953–70)

*Michael Falser*

In 1964, a decade after the realisation of Cambodian independence, Robert Garry, the Canadian professor of Far Eastern geography, delivered his eulogy on Norodom Sihanouk's political and cultural action programme to the sixteenth International Congress of Orientalists in New Delhi. Norodom Sihanouk had been elected king of Cambodia by the French colonial rulers of Indochina in 1941, but in 1955 he abdicated in favour of his father Suramarit and named himself prime minister and leader of a new political movement, Sangkum Reastr Niyum (the People's Socialist Community). In 1960 Sihanouk became the autocratic head of state before he was deposed in March 1970 by a *coup d'état* sponsored by a pro-American military regime. Under his influence, Cambodia experienced what Garry described in his talk (and in the version published by the Département de l'Information in Phnom Penh shortly afterwards) as a 'theatre of profound transformation': major developments occurred in the country's infrastructure, including in agriculture and industry, public instruction and public health, communication lines, urbanism and architecture. As Garry correctly surmised, Cambodia's 'renaissance from decadence' and its development towards an independent kingdom and modern 'Khmer nation' was also completely embedded in, and justified through, a social and political rhetoric of cultural heritage. This cultural heritage was founded upon a collective 'inheritance [*héritage*]' of the cultural 'grandeur' and oeuvre of the 'great kings as builders [*rois bâtisseurs*] of Angkor'.<sup>1</sup> Angkor, a temple site in the north-west of Cambodia dating from the ninth to the thirteenth century CE and the focus of this chapter, was the crux of much of this activity.

The topos of (legally) inheriting the built legacy of Angkor had been a vital element of the French colonial civilising mission (*mission civilisatrice*) in Cambodia from 1863 onwards; it was continually

visualised through hybrid replicas of Angkorian temples during universal and colonial exhibitions in France between 1889 and 1937.<sup>2</sup> Yet this claim was subject to a novel ideological twist under Sihanouk's regime: the classic 'salvage paradigm' once practised by the European colonial power in order to 'rescue something authentic [and pure] out of destructive historical changes'<sup>3</sup> was now appropriated by the newly independent nation and its commentators. Particular attention was paid to a proclaimed direct continuity between Sihanouk's regime and the historical tradition of Angkor's ancient kings. In his article, 'La Renaissance du Cambodge de Jayavarman VII roi d'Angkor à Norodom Sihanouk Varman', Garry displayed an uncritical readiness to celebrate a seemingly unbroken link between Angkor's Buddhist king Jayavarman VII (who reigned around 1200 CE) and Norodom Sihanouk as the princely leader of independent Cambodia. In doing so, he effortlessly effaced five hundred years of intermediate post-Angkorian and colonial history.

This cultural-political construction surrounding Sihanouk and Angkor was unique in Asia's postcolonial history: not only did one of the smallest new nations on the decolonising planet of the 1950s inherit the world's largest temple site for use in the construction of its new identity, but it also instrumentalised a direct genealogical and religious continuity from ancient times by way of its simultaneously Buddhist, royal and secular charismatic leader.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, comparable postcolonial nations like India and Indonesia also incorporated their former colonial masters' research on the ancient histories, kingly genealogies and art historical classifications of their countries into their new cultural self-understandings.<sup>5</sup> However, in the case of Cambodia, Sihanouk – a renowned Francophile – displayed a particular discipleship to France which actually intensified during his reign: throughout his premiership he continued to delegate the high-tech restoration and presentation of the Archaeological Park of Angkor<sup>6</sup> (institutionalised in 1925–30) to the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (established under the French around 1900), and he disseminated virtually all of his cultural-political visions in a series of newly founded journals that were published in French (or English) rather than in the Cambodian language.

Yet it would be too reductive to conclude that Cambodia's decolonising effort was a simple 'copy and paste' affair of the French colonial prescription of an Angkorian past. Investigated from an art historical viewpoint, Sihanouk's engagement with Cambodia's heritage will be shown to be a creative process of adaptation, appropriation and reinterpretation. Further, the self-inflicted task of inheriting a past Angkorian *grandeur* – or as Milton Osbourne

described it, this aim to 'extol the virtues of the Angkorian age as a guide for modern actions'<sup>7</sup> – would result in a conflict-laden inferiority/superiority 'temple complex'<sup>8</sup> for the new nation-state. Indeed, it would prove to be an insurmountable burden. As Charles Meyer, Sihanouk's long-time adviser, claimed: 'With their mania of scientific research the Occidentals let arise the demons of history and helped impose on Cambodia a heritage [*héritage*] which was much too heavy for this state.'<sup>9</sup>

How, we might ask, was Angkorian cultural heritage conceptualised, materialised and performed during Cambodia's decolonisation? To answer this question, this chapter will focus on three specific forms of heritagisation which emerged in the creative recycling of the colonial topoi of grandeur, purity and origin(ality) of a glorious past for the postcolonial mindset. First, the religious and political reincarnation of Jayavarman VII in the name of Norodom Sihanouk will be examined; second, the revival of the built Angkorian legacy in a modern-day architectural interpretation will be investigated, and finally the various cultural performances à la Angkorienne within Sihanouk's strategies of cultural diplomacy<sup>10</sup> will be unpacked.

We will conceptualise these performative genres as highly creative, but also – in line with Elin Diamond's definition – as 'contested spaces where meanings and desires are generated, occluded, or multiply interpreted'.<sup>11</sup> In cultural studies, performances have been defined as socially relevant 'in the midst of profound disturbance and/or transformation',<sup>12</sup> and – even more relevant to our specific Cambodian context – as 'precarious liminal moments of a profound transition from a colonial to postcolonial state configuration'.<sup>13</sup> Here, we will also understand heritage performances in terms of their 'unity of kinaesthetic imagination and the affirmation of cultural memory'.<sup>14</sup> When performances take the form of historical re-enactments, they often use the latest multimedia instruments to compress space and time, restore ancient history or 'socially relevant events' and make living history directly palpable.<sup>15</sup> As will become evident in our case of Angkor, 'historical re-enactments' also employ supposedly authentic actors with historical apparatus, and often take place on credible, original cultural heritage sites.<sup>16</sup> As with heritage performances and historical re-enactments more broadly, in Cambodia the boundaries between fact and fiction were blurred in order to progress a global heritage industry; here, French-colonial research data were used to produce historical imaginaries on the one hand and postcolonial narratives of cultural rebirth on the other, with Angkor being one of the most prominent attractions.<sup>17</sup> In the following pages, we will consider these practices and examine

the colonial source material of a reimagined past, the media used to exploit such material, the events of representation and their audiences, the spatial strategies used to connect specific sites of decolonisation, the temporalities employed and the concrete agency of the patron and the actors behind these scenarios.

*Norodom Sihanouk as the new Jayavarman VII:  
Khmer socialism à la Angkorienne*

When the Cambodian Ministère de l'Information published the booklet *Considérations sur le socialisme khmer* in 1961, the Non-Aligned-Movement had just been founded in Belgrade by some of Sihanouk's most important political partners in the worldwide project of decolonisation. India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesia's president Sukarno, Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser and Yugoslavia's president Josip Broz Tito were all involved. Yet while Cambodia joined this global movement of internationalist, partly secular-Marxist socialism and anti-colonialism, Sihanouk nevertheless tried to provincialise this contemporary concept by tying it back to ancient Angkor. He emphasised both the 'morale of Buddhism ... as a precious guide [in] fighting social injustice' and the tradition of Angkorian kingship as the cornerstones of a socialism for a 'Khmer society which had [supposedly] never seen class struggles of a feudal regime or colonialist exploitation system (except from the outside)'. Furthermore, he characterised the Khmer kings 'not only as great temple builders' but also, in their socialist function to 'protect the soil', as 'realisers of great works of economic and social interest'.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Sihanouk underlined the benevolence of Jayavarman VII by quoting one of the king's twelfth-century steles at Say-Fong which reported on the king's creation of hospitals and pilgrims' inns (notably translated by the French in 1903). Finally, he subtly merged the claim of state control, collectivism in the name of 'Khmer socialism' and Buddhist principles in order to develop, as the French *Le Monde* journalist Jean Lacouture termed it, 'a tacit monopoly of power and an immediate monocracy'<sup>19</sup> of an enlightened dictator.

Two questions arise: what sources did Sihanouk have available for this bricolage of historical facts and cultural myths of Angkor and its kingly rulers? How was his creative reinterpretation of Angkorian royal religious leadership made visible and staged?

Concerning the first, it is safe to quote one crucial French colonial figure behind this modern myth-making process: the French archaeology-focused epigraphist Georges Coedès (1886–1969), who



directed the Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) between 1929 and 1946. With his 1935 booklet *Un grand roi du Cambodge, Jayavarman VII*, published in French and Cambodian by the Phnom Penh-based Éditions de la Bibliothèque Royale, he disseminated for the first time the image of the glorious Angkorian king Jayavarman VII. The eloquent, if scientifically low-key choice of wording and the essentialising topoi employed made this publication a unique source for all following treatises on this king's historical relevance, and for Sihanouk's contemporary self-identification. Curiously, Coedès himself confessed that 'almost nothing had been known' about Jayavarman VII around 1900, but in 1935 he was already 'considered the greatest Cambodian sovereign who had pushed his country to the extreme limits, and covered the capital [Angkor] with the most prestigious monuments a monarch had ever planned'.<sup>20</sup> Here, Sihanouk's enormous building programme in the new-old capital Phnom Penh and the provinces would almost sound anticipated. A few years later, in his book *Pour mieux comprendre Angkor* and the chapter 'Le Dernier grand roi d'Angkor – Jayavarman VII', Coedès inflated his findings of 1935 to 'restitute for the descendants of the ancient Khmer the sentiment of a past grandeur'.<sup>21</sup> The characterisation of Jayavarman VII as a powerful and megalomaniac god-king, yet with a down-to-earth, humanist affection for his subjects, was essentially influenced by French colonial art historical research. Just recently, in 1927, the Parisian art historian Philippe Stern had reprovenanced Jayavarman VII's architectural masterpiece, the Bayon temple with its famous bas-reliefs, from its previous, early dating point to the end of the stylistic development of the Angkorian temples.<sup>22</sup> Only this chronological correction in the genealogy of the Khmer kings made Jayavarman VII instantly relevant for the personification of Angkor's cultural apogee around 1200 CE.

Certainly the most inspiring source on Angkor for Sihanouk was the book *Angkor, hommes et pierres* of 1956, written by the historian and Conservateur des Monuments d'Angkor between 1960 and 1973, Bernard Philippe Groslier (1926–86). Groslier not only made 'archaeology a branch of history'<sup>23</sup> so as to situate Angkor prominently in a universal history of civilisation, he was also a close friend of Sihanouk and served as what we can call a cultural broker between postcolonial Cambodia and the former, yet still active, French colonial regime.<sup>24</sup> The book was unctuously formulated through a blend of scientific knowledge, hypothetical imaginings of Angkor, and impressive black and white illustrations of temple sites and sculptures; the section on 'L'apothéose d'Angkor'<sup>25</sup> that painted Jayavarman VII as Angkor's greatest, charitable, empathetic and, in modern parlance, socialist king and patron of the arts<sup>26</sup> served

as a perfect script for Sihanouk's own desire to revive the notion of Angkorian kingship. In 1962, Cambodia's Ministry of Information published a further 300-page book, *Cambodge*, where the French colonial epigraphic, archaeological and art historical findings and imaginations of Angkor were now poured into the first large-scale master narrative of Cambodia's postcolonial efforts.<sup>27</sup>

If the 1961 publication *Considerations sur le socialisme khmer* had introduced the ancient *and* actual kings of Cambodia as 'protectors of the soil', then this role had also to be re-activated and visualised in public. In its English issue of May 1967, the journal *Kambuja* published the richly illustrated article 'At Angkor Thom, a Thousand Year Old Rite: "Chrat Preah Nongkol"' (with *chrat preah nongkol* translated as 'ploughing of the sacred furrow'). As the reader was told, from 1963 onwards, Sihanouk had decided to reintroduce (re-enact) this abolished rite at different places in Cambodia. In the specific year of 1967, 'on Thursday, the fourth day of the declining Pisak moon, in the year of the Goat, 2510 in the Buddhist calendar (27th April 1967)',<sup>28</sup> this re-enactment seemingly tried to decolonise the Archaeological Park of Angkor from its French secular, touristic connotations and, for a short moment, bring the ancient temple site back to its former authentic, religious and kingly context. In order to do this, a sacred rice field was symbolically delimited by four small canvas pavilions housing four Brahman divinities, and by a fifth central structure with a Buddhist statuette dominated by a 'traditionally roofed pavilion' for sheltering high officials and the diplomatic corps. A temporary exhibition structure was placed along the top of the ancient palace walls. An article and a double-page photograph (Figure 6.1) described the event: 'King Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Head of State', in his old brocade-clad garments, had initially 'listened to the invocations made to the supernatural powers by a monk, which asked for peace and prosperity for the Kingdom. The Victory verses, called "Chayanto", had then been recited by a group of 38 monks' on the upper palace grounds. Then, the king was carried in a palanquin to the sacred paddy, where he took the sacred plough, drawn by two decorated grey oxen (see insert in Figure 6.1), to cross the field three times. He was accompanied by high officials and a traditional orchestra and followed by his daughter 'Princess Norodom Bophani [who acted as] the sower'. After 'taking a bath' in the enthusiastic crowd, Sihanouk entered the ancient Elephants' Terrace (archaeologically restored by the EFEO) to guide his high guests through the exhibition on Sangkum's achievements, and finally – bringing the mythical achievements of Angkor to an overlap with those of Cambodia as a modern nation-state – watched

AT THE ROYAL SQUARE OF ANGKOR, A MILLINAKY KIE: "CHRAT PRAEH NONGKOL"



*Clad in silk, brocade and gold, which they have worn since the days of the Khmer Empire, the millinaky kie (background) use traditional Khmer tools and plow. A similar carriage provides the Royal Palace and provincial officials. In the*

"CHRAT prae nongkol", which literal translation is "to lean on the handles of the sacred plough" to open up the first furrow of the year in the sacred paddy, is a particularly important ceremony practiced by all nations from China to Australia. After the harvest and, according to the region, the rest taken during the winter or the dry season, the first days of spring, or the first rains, mark the beginning of a new agricultural cycle.

Mr. Bernard Grollier, the eminent Angkor Conservator, explains that "only through his ancestors, is the sole owner of the soil, can pay due homage to the gods and secure the successful success of the first tillage. In some countries, however, in order not to court the dangers which he might encounter in the field, he delegates this honor to a Daye, is chosen to designate him, followed by the "Queen for a Day" who sows the first grain."

When the rite is performed by the King, it marks the beginning of the same time the new progressive year. He thus appears as the centre of space and time which he dominates and commands.

Space, like time which surrounds and pervades, is divided into four major axes: the two main directions of space: north-south and east-west, and the two directions of time: past and near. The throne is located at the meeting point of this sixbranch cross.

Figure 6.1 The 'Plowing of the Sacred Furrow', performed by Norodom Sihanouk on 27 April 1967 on Angkor Thom's Royal Square inside the Archaeological Park of Angkor.

'the procession of mechanical harvesters (tractors)' pass by. After this, sports teams demonstrated ancient games and exercises. By staging ancient ritual practices and emphasising the actual ruler's royal links to ancient Angkor, Khmer kingship had, for a short moment in Cambodia's decolonising phase, found its re-enacted modern double in Norodom Sihanouk.

### *New Khmer architecture – in the name of Angkor*

When Vann Molyvann (born in 1926 in Ream, Kampot Province) was an architecture student at Paris's prestigious École National Supérieur des Beaux-Arts in the 1940s, his mother country was still occupied by the French. Returning to Cambodia with his diploma in 1956, he was almost instantly chosen by Sihanouk as state and star architect for the new country's era of independence.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to the French colonial essentialising paradigm of cultural purity, Vann voted to fuse Western, in this case, US-European architectural and technological trends, with a modern interpretation of Angkor's built legacy. What he termed *La nouvelle architecture khmère*<sup>30</sup> was stylistically and structurally situated somewhere between the Angkorian spiritual, symbolic and monumental legacy, inspiration drawn from wooden pagoda and vernacular traditional house architecture, and the fruits of 'modern, Occidental civilisation'.<sup>31</sup> By this last phrase Vann was referring to the International Style of streamlined, rationalist buildings and the building technology of reinforced concrete.<sup>32</sup>

Besides these new visions as they were realised in Vann's many astonishing buildings, connecting ancestral traditions with a postcolonial claim of national continuity through the re-presentation of Angkorian style became especially relevant when King Suramarit (Sihanouk's father) died in April 1960. In this context, the gifted master builder Tan Veut from Battambang was commissioned to design Suramarit's funerary *stupa* (originally a mound-like or hemispherical structure containing Buddhist relics) after the examples of those for King Norodom (who died in 1904) and his wife on the same palace grounds. The stupas of Norodom and his wife were themselves based – as Vann Molyvann explained in the journal *Kambuja*<sup>33</sup> – on the tradition of the stupas in the post-Angkorian capital of Oudong. During King Suramarit's funerary ceremony in January 1961, before all kinds of family, state, military and ethnic representatives, the Royal Khmer Socialist Youth and the Corps de Ballet Royal, the reliquary of Sihanouk's daughter, Princess Kantha Bopha (1948–52), was also placed in a smaller stupa by Tan Veut 'in the style of the [ninth-century] tower of Banteay Srei' near Angkor.<sup>34</sup>

If these stupas were on private palace grounds, then another structure stood out in the public centre of the new-old capital Phnom Penh as Cambodia's most important modern-day interpretation of Angkor's stylistic grandeur: the Independence Memorial, built by Vann Molyvann, Tan Veut and others, was inaugurated on Independence Day, 9 November 1962. The delayed delivery of the memorial – nine long years after Cambodia's independence in 1953 – was most probably due to problems with the complicated subsoil structure of the site.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, just as French colonial strategies of simulating Angkor's stone temples in temporary exhibitions had utilised ephemeral hybrids or replicas made out of inner wooden scaffoldings and external lightweight fibre mouldings,<sup>36</sup> the long-term version for Phnom Penh was not made of solid stone either. The ram-piled, internally reinforced concrete structure as a stepped platform was clad with external panels of grey Chinese marble with 'decorative patterns (Khmer: *kbach*) from [the tenth-century temple of] Banteay Srei',<sup>37</sup> as were the open lower walls and the five stepped tiers with their decorative *naga* (snakes). Finally, the project was finished with crushed marble to give the monument the dark-red colour of Banteay Srei. Vann Molyvann himself explained that the whole symmetric composition in the centre of a roundabout with radiating streets had been inspired by the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.<sup>38</sup>

In the following years, the Independence Memorial à la Angkorienne would become the annual central stage for Sihanouk's political theatre. For example, in 1964, 'delegations from all provinces of the kingdom'<sup>39</sup> drove past it in their honorary parade, and the monument was regularly depicted on the covers of Sihanouk's numerous self-glorifying journals, including *Le Sangkum* in September 1967. In November 1969, Sihanouk himself, in an elegant white suit – already strangely absent in his role as god-king-politician in front of the Buddhist monks present – lit the commemorative flame of Cambodia's independence for the last time before the 1970 *coup d'état*, and balloons in the colours of the national flag (itself depicting Angkor Wat) ascended towards the sky (Figure 6.2).

*Cultural diplomacy: from cultural performance to  
on-site re-enactment of Angkor*

In 1953, Sihanouk had visited the United States during his so-called 'crusade for independence'. In 1958, he returned as leader of a free Cambodia to speak at the thirteenth session of the UN Assembly in New York. Additionally, he brought with him a new tool of cultural diplomacy to foster Cambodia's decolonising cultural image of pure,



**LE XVI<sup>e</sup> ANNIVERSAIRE  
DE L'INDEPENDANCE**

Le 9 novembre, date du recouvrement de l'indépendance nationale, Samdech Norodom Sihanouk, Chef de l'Etat, ramène la flamme jaillissant de la vasque de bronze du monument. Descendant ensuite les marches, Samdech est acclamé par la foule rassemblée tout autour de la place, dans la ferveur de l'envol des pigeons et des ballons multicolores.



Figure 6.2 Norodom Sihanouk and the Independence Monument during the 16th anniversary of Cambodia's National Independence on 9 November 1969.

tradition-bound and peaceful (politically neutral) Khmerness. As *Cambodge d'Aujourd'hui* reported, his 1958 diplomatic mission was highlighted with a series of dance performances by the Ballet Royal, who were accompanied by two of Sihanouk's children, Princess Bopha Devi and Prince Chakrapong. The first performance took place during a reception at the New York Waldorf Astoria hotel on 19 September, where it was part of a 'discreet exhibition on the Khmer civilisation with traditional art objects, plaster casts of Angkorian statues and photographs [of Cambodian temples]' to help a 'particularly unstressed atmosphere [in which] political personalities of the two rivalling [Cold War] blocs came together'; the second came after the presentation of an original Khmer sculpture to President Eisenhower in the White House on 30 September, when the high-ranking dinner party at Cambodia's embassy watched 'a classical Khmer dance in all its purity'. A third took place on 16 October, after a reception conference in the Sheraton Hotel in San Francisco (Figure 6.3a). As Sihanouk himself explained to the readers of the journal, 'The Khmer royal dances have a very old origin which is hard to date with precision, but they attained their highest perfection during the apogee of Khmer grandeur. ... if one judges them on the basis of the bas-reliefs of the temples of Angkor, their gestures and the attitudes of the dancers have hardly changed until today [and] conserved their highest purity.'<sup>40</sup>

At this point, Sihanouk's Corps du Ballet was a fixed part of his diplomatic missions – some called them a charming '*Cirque Sihanouk* [with] acrobatic, illusionist and imitating diplomatic acts'.<sup>41</sup> Regular visits were conducted to China, Indonesia and India, and missions followed to the United Arab Republic and Yugoslavia in 1959, and, in 1960, to Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. In 1962, with stops in Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka, Sihanouk was received by the Indonesian president Sukarno. Again, his daughter, Bopha Devi, was on the spot to perform her Khmer repertoire and also to 'interpret a classical Indonesian dance'; after all, as the journal text reconfirmed to diplomatic benefit, 'between the Indonesian and the Khmer dance [there had] existed very close links for about one thousand years'.<sup>42</sup> Again in 1962, Sihanouk's Ministère de l'Information contributed to the essentialisation of a '*danse classique*' in the voluminous publication *Cambodge*: 'The Corps de Ballet, *véritable conservatoire* of the Khmer classical dance, is the oldest choreographic formation of the world. Thanks to the personal care of Her Majesty the Queen [Kossamak] it came back with an incomparable *éclat* through the rigorous preservation of its traditions and thousand-year-old techniques'.<sup>43</sup> The Royal Khmer Ballet's biggest success, however, took place during Sihanouk's state visit to France in 1964: Bopha Devi's



*Past and present: a 15th century bas-relief and Princess Bopha Devi*

**WOMEN IN ANGKOREAN HISTORY**

**Figure 6.3 3a/left:** The Khmer Ballet performing in San Francisco's Sheraton Hotel on 16 October 1958. Private Archive Charles Meyer/Paris; 3b/right: Princess Bopha Devi as dancing Apsara in front of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat.



troupe had 'a triumphal success' on 26 June in the Opera of Paris for a *soirée de gala Franco-khmère*, competed with the Paris Ballet de l'Opéra, and repeated its repertoire in the Théâtre des Nations. As a result, the visit helped to deepen the mutual diplomatic relations with President Charles de Gaulle who hosted the event.<sup>44</sup> What was staged in 1964 almost 10,000 km from Cambodia in the Paris Opera House as a mobile commodity of authentic Khmerness corresponded exactly to what Sihanouk's journal *Cambodge d'Aujourd'hui* (or in this case its English version, *Cambodia Today*) had propagated as the founding myth of pure Khmer dance: 'the 12th-century bas-reliefs' of Angkor Wat, as brought back to life by 'Princess Bopha Devi' (Figure 3.6b).<sup>45</sup> Here, the carefully arranged propaganda photograph of Bopha Devi mirroring the goddesses of Angkor perfectly aligned with Sihanouk's myth-making ideology and even hinted at some feminist (albeit still conservative) undertones by highlighting the apparently important role of 'Women in Angkor history'.

Again: where did these topoi of purity and originality in the Khmer dance and Angkor Wat's bas-reliefs initially come from? And how did Sihanouk's decolonising regime use them for its own performative strategies around the globe and at original temple sites in Cambodia?

An examination of French colonial history again provides the most important lead. Besides a traditional dance troupe which, in fact, existed inside the Royal Palace of Phnom Penh for the king's private entertainment, the first dance performances for a European public were organised by the French authorities in Phnom Penh, and staged as 'imaginative representations of the exotic "East"' in front of the fantastic Khmer-styled pavilions in Universal and Colonial Exhibitions in Paris and Marseille in 1889, 1900 and 1906.<sup>46</sup> In a second step, under French direction, the dancers were stereotyped as 'direct descendants of the Apsaras [celestial nymphs] on the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat'<sup>47</sup> and gradually trained to help in re-enactments centred on the scale replicas of Angkor Wat built in 1922 at Marseille and in 1931 in Paris. In 1922, the same ballet troupe also performed at the Parisian Opera and was praised for its authenticity, purity and timelessness.<sup>48</sup> Nine years later, the Parisian International Colonial Exhibition of 1931 topped all earlier undertakings of exotic representations in scale, variety and performance: the 'illuminated apotheosis of Angkor [Wat]'<sup>49</sup> was a full-size replica of its Cambodian source temple, and its central causeway was used for cultural performances. These half-faked versions of the royal Khmer dance already contained characteristics of cultural performances as cultural theorists define them today; and these characteristics were exactly exploited by Sihanouk for his diplomatic Corps du Ballet Royal

decades later during Cambodia's short period of independence: they were made for a specific occasion with a structured programme, and used real actors to satisfy the gaze of a defined audience.<sup>50</sup>

In 1907 the temples of Angkor became part of the French protectorate of Cambodia and, following this constitutional shift and as part of their consolidation of the region, the new political French owners wished to reconnect (i.e. salvage and re-establish) ancient Angkor – as an apparently authentic marker of ancient, unspoilt glory – to the wider contemporary canon of Cambodian culture. However, recreating the present within a supposedly *pure* Angkorian past tradition without *any* foreign influences was a delicate task. In reality, Angkor had been captured (indeed colonised) by the Siamese in the fifteenth century, and the royal court dance – like some of the Cambodian kings themselves – had only survived until the nineteenth century as a result of its 'Siamisation' at the royal court in Bangkok. These cultural influences from Siam were still considerable around 1900 when, in Phnom Penh, a 're-Khmerising' process<sup>51</sup> was initiated by the new occupants. As French authority increased, the entire system of art education in Cambodia was systematically grouped within the colonial 'salvage paradigm' of rescuing traditional Cambodian art forms from supposed degeneration, agony and impurity; the (re)writing of the history of Cambodia's traditional dance was no exception.

The central figure in this project was George Groslier (1887–1945), the first French citizen born in Cambodia, a Parisian École des Beaux-Arts graduate, gifted artist and writer, and director of the École des Arts Cambodgiens in Phnom Penh. Observing a contemporary crisis of religious beliefs, traditional morals and performing arts, his 1913 book *Danseuses cambodgiennes anciennes et modernes* was the first modern, in-depth study on the 'indigenous origins' of the Khmer dance. Here, Angkor Wat again seemed to provide the most authentic source material for his thesis. In his sketches, Groslier let the ballet dancers emerge – or be reborn in their purest reincarnation – from the celestial maidens on the temple's bas-reliefs, despite the fact that, from an iconographical standpoint, they had never been conceived of as earthly dancers *per se*, but as celestial guardian figures for the entertainment of a dead king after apotheosis. Concluding his study, Groslier reimagined a '*spectacle grandiose*' of an ancient procession at Angkor Wat,<sup>52</sup> depicting a virtual re-enactment of the past which included reinvented elements of contemporary dance performance. After Groslier, in 1927, Sappho Marchal, the daughter of the General Angkor Conservator Henri Marchal, published a detailed study on the costumes and hairstyles of the '1700 devatas' of the Angkor Wat

temple.<sup>53</sup> Both Groslier's and Marchal's publications served as perfect catalogues and pattern books with which to re-Khmerise and purify the Royal Ballet à *la angkoriennne*.<sup>54</sup>

As Groslier and Marchal were compiling their publications, the French authorities in Phnom Penh were simultaneously trying in vain to keep complete control over the real Royal Ballet in order to save it from 'decadence' and 'agony'.<sup>55</sup> Circumventing the ruling king's resistance to relinquishing authority over his real ballet, the French chose Say Sangvann, the wife of a member of the royal family who had already organised performances for the Résident Supérieur in Phnom Penh, to create a privatised substitute which was equipped with costumes and masks from Groslier's art school.<sup>56</sup> With this essential shift from 'authentic' court dance to commercialised performance a dividing line was irreversibly crossed, even though the show was still sold as 'original' Khmer and 'of the greatest purity even from the viewpoint of Siamese *connoisseurs*'.<sup>57</sup> The reinvented performances for the exhibitions in the French metropole had, from a transcultural viewpoint<sup>58</sup> on Euro-Asian exchange processes, considerable consequences back in Cambodia: the aesthetics of these (more folkloric than historical) dance spectacles once shown in front of fabricated temple skylines by torchlight and later by government-sponsored electric floodlights in France, were now reimported back to the real site.<sup>59</sup> Say Sangvann's private troupe had gained 'the monopoly to perform the dance for tourists at Angkor Vat'<sup>60</sup> and her dancers produced a kind of 'staged authenticity'<sup>61</sup> in gestures and costumes even more perfect than the depictions on the ancient bas-reliefs behind them.

The fight for the monopoly over the authentic Khmer ballet continued during the early 1940s as Princess Kossamak, the mother of Norodom Sihanouk, came to play a crucial role in decolonising the Khmer Ballet and in reloading it with new significance. She certainly took advantage of the detailed studies on the Khmer ballet by Groslier and Marchal which had re-established the ballet's purified link to the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, and she capitalised on the dance's international popularity in France and back home. Feeding the movement of an (anti-colonial) cultural nationalism, Kossamak changed the choreography to form a group precision dance, added entertaining effects by incorporating scenes from well-known stories and popular tales, and shortened the previous day-long private royal dance ritual into a publicly suitable two-hour programme. Outwardly, the result was meant to underline the new cultural self-confidence of the Khmer nation on the occasion of international state visits, and inwardly it symbolically demonstrated the authority of the new

king (her son Norodom Sihanouk), who was rooted in a continued Angkorian antiquity traceable to his direct ancient royal ancestors. With this shift in format, the status of the Khmer dance now changed from its mere spectacular, almost folkloristic, effect at former French exhibitions to a deeper political meaning back in Cambodia. Between the late French colonial 1940s and Cambodia's decolonising phase in the 1950s the royal dance with its (ostensibly) apolitical ritual-like appearance beyond a specific time, space and direction was in fact the perfect performative medium with which to minimise tensions that opened up in Cambodia's 'liminal phase'<sup>62</sup> or ambiguous in-between stage between the end of French rule and the installation of a re-indigenised Khmer nation-state.

After Cambodia's independence in 1953, Kossamak succeeded (once again after the efforts of the French) in re-Khmerising, and now politicising, the royal dance with a new central element as part of what she called a national 'reconstruction and revival programme'.<sup>63</sup> She invented the *Apsara Dance* or *roban Apsara* which perfectly served the new Khmer national ideology. Ironically, in ideal fulfilment of Groslier's 1913 colonial study, the postcolonial choreography led five Apsaras to materialise out of the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, only to perform a dance of salutation before disappearing again into the stone surface.<sup>64</sup> To add density to the ideological message of an unbroken link between the ancient Khmer dance and Sihanouk's current political power, Kossamak made the Apsara dance with light and portable stage sets à la Angkorienne the showpiece for Bopha Devi, King Sihanouk's daughter. Cultural performance, cultural nationalism and cultural diplomacy were now, as elements of Cambodia's decolonising period, merged into one amalgam. The results of Kossamak's efforts were finally summarised by the Cambodian Information Agency in the comprehensive English publication *Royal Cambodian Ballet* in 1963.

In this context, another performative strategy had been invented: a diplomatic tour from Cambodia's new capital to its old centre and back, planned by Sihanouk's regime as a thematic itinerary and performative *parcours* with predefined spots of ideological indoctrination.<sup>65</sup> The tour included not only an obligatory showcasing of Phnom Penh's architectural modern highlights such as the Independence Memorial, the State Palace or the National Stadium (see below), but also side trips to new state projects in the countryside. The highlight, however, was certainly a visit to the Archaeological Park of Angkor, where Sihanouk himself and his friend and chief conservator Bernard Philippe Groslier acted as private guides through the ruins along the French colonial Grand and Petit Circuits, only to conclude the stay with a Khmer ballet performance and – a new

invention – a *son et lumière* show in front of, and a firework show above, Angkor Wat.

One of the most detailed of these diplomatic *parcours* was elaborated for the eleventh anniversary of Cambodia's independence in 1964 and the inauguration of the National Sports Complex in Phnom Penh in the *Programme de visite pour toutes les délégations gouvernementales des puissantes amies* from 7 to 18 November.<sup>66</sup> In three groups, from 7 to 13 November, the 'governmental delegations of the friendly powers' (non-aligned countries, but also other major investor countries in Cambodia) were guided through optional blocks of activities with official audiences at the Royal and State Palaces: they could choose from a visit to the royal tombs at Oudong with a picnic and folkloric representations; a military parade on Independence Day; a visit to the hill station of Kirirom with lunch at the Chalet Royal; a visit to a nearby handicraft village; a tour of the artistic representations in Phnom Penh's Chadomukh Hall; a visit to the building of the royal flotilla and to the community development centre at Along-Romeat; a folkloric representation and the inauguration of the Permanent Exhibition of the Realisations of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum at the Bassac river front; the inauguration of the National Sports Complex (12 November); and a visit to the National Museum Jayavarman VII (today known as the National Museum). On 14 November the departure for Siem Reap by aeroplane was scheduled with military honours, followed by visits to the temples, tea at the Angkor's Srah Srang (water reservoir) with the folkloric representation of the *Trott dance*, and an official dinner at the Grand Hotel. At 10 p.m. the artistic representation by the Corps du Ballet Royal took place on the *parvis* (esplanade) in front of Angkor Wat with the 'Dance of Welcome and Good Wishes' and a fragment of the Ramayana epos, and finally a visit of Angkor Wat in full illumination, before a return to Phnom Penh the next day.

If the above-mentioned 1964 celebration may easily count as the largest effort of Sihanouk's regime to merge past Angkorian glory with the present cultural-political ambitions of the new Cambodian nation-state in front of an international diplomatic audience, then one event in 1966 was no doubt the most important international event during Cambodia's independence: the visit of Charles de Gaulle. On his way from Ethiopia and continuing to Oceania to observe a French nuclear bombing experiment in the Pacific, the president of the French Fifth Republic – Sihanouk's greatest political reference – arrived on 30 August at Phnom Penh. On almost ninety pages, Sihanouk's journal *Kambuja* reported on the stay with its series of receptions and visiting tours in Phnom Penh. On 1 September, in the National Stadium, de

Gaulle gave a *discours de Phnom Penh* as a homage to the mutual French–Cambodian friendship and neutralist Cambodia, and as a warning against American aggression in Vietnam.<sup>67</sup> Reportedly, ‘one hundred thousand people’ greeted him with a mass performance of varying collective cardboard images. The ‘final climax’ of Charles de Gaulle’s visit was a *son et lumière* show at Angkor Wat which was billed as ‘the most perfect of all Asian monuments pay[ing] homage to the most famous of all Western Heads of State’.<sup>68</sup> At this show, the Khmer Ballet as a cultural performance became part of a large-scale historical re-enactment as, in line with Vanessa Agnew’s definition, ‘collapsing temporalities’ and the recreation of a ‘historical continuity [were] exploited for ideological ends’.<sup>69</sup> If re-enactments are predicated on their ‘credible setting’<sup>70</sup> and their ability to narrow the ‘mimetic gap’ between fact and fiction,<sup>71</sup> then this was very much the case in Cambodia. Here, the king of a postcolonial nation let the pre-colonial, ‘authentic past’ of his direct ancestors be theatrically re-enacted in front of the head of the former colonial power at the original setting: in a ‘*reconstitution historique grandiose*’, 900 laymen and 600 monks in historical and religious costumes participated in the re-enactment of a historical coronation ceremony and procession of an Angkorian king in which the children of the real King Sihanouk, Prince Naradipo, and his daughter, Princess Botum Bopha, were cast as the historical royal couple (Figure 6.4). Never before or since in Cambodia’s decolonising history were performative cultural elements, the original historical temple setting of Angkor Wat and hundreds of real and faked actors merged into a more impressive spectacle to evoke a newly born nation-state in the name of its ancient glory.

The gigantic illumination of Angkor Wat had been designed by Vann Molyvann and made possible by the electrification system by Siemens Germany. The acting Angkor general conservator, and George Groslier’s son, Bernard-Philippe Groslier, wrote the script *The Voices of One Night in Angkor* for this performed journey into Angkor’s re-staged past (although, notably, in a later paper he would explicitly correct his father’s inventions regarding the ‘dancing maidens emerging from the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat’<sup>72</sup>). If Bernard-Philippe Groslier’s approach tried to situate the Angkorian Empire in the all-encompassing grid of entangled world civilisations, then his poetic text for this event in 1966 counts as one of the most astonishing, myth-making documents to foster Cambodia’s revived postcolonial notion of cultural *grandeur*. The first phrase of the text was all telling: ‘Mon Général, La grandeur seule sied à la grandeur’ (My General, only grandeur befits grandeur).<sup>73</sup> It was a classic example of the political role of re-enactments in the form of ‘pageantry’<sup>74</sup> and concluded with



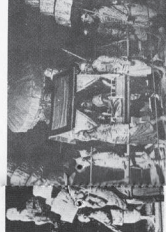
Angkor Wat illuminé, le plus parfait des moments d'une ved lumière sur des temples du site d'Angkor Wat.



Le temple principal, le moment.



Le temple principal, le moment.



Le temple principal, le moment.

ENFIN LE "CLOU" DE LA VISITE DU GENERAL A SIEMREAP : SON ET LUMIERE A ANGKOR WATT

Une reconstitution historique de la cérémonie traditionnelle locale qui rassemble 500 figurants pour célébrer le prince Naradippo dans le rôle de roi et la princesse Beum Bopha dans celui de reine. Sans compter les éléphants et les buffles, les bijoux d'or, de brocart et les bijoux d'or, de diamant et de pierres précieuses.



Figure 6.4 Illustrations of the son et lumière-show at Angkor Wat during the visit of Charles de Gaulle on 1 September 1969.

a rather decolonising and 'affirmative address' to the French president and the Cambodian king alike: tellingly, Angkor Wat was described as the symbol of a 'conjoint caring effort of both nations'. At this final point, King Sihanouk used the staging of the Khmer emergence myth to subliminally communicate (paradoxically through the voice of a French archaeologist) a new political self-confidence to his former colonial master.

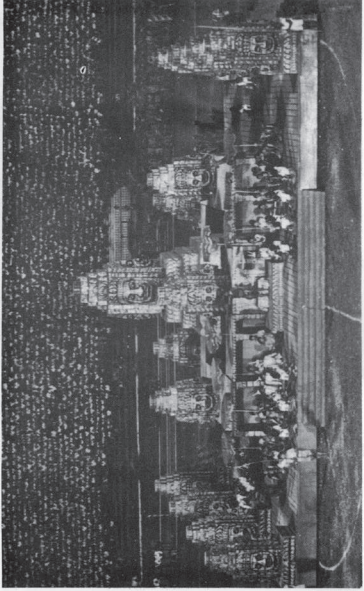
However unique this *son et lumière* of 1966 might have seemed, it was repeated two years later for a political guest at the other end of the ideological spectrum. Josip Broz Tito, president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, visited his non-aligned brother country with quite a similar *parcours* through Phnom Penh from 17 to 22 January 1968,<sup>75</sup> and a reduced de Gaulle-style sound and light show was performed on 19 January at Angkor Wat. Groslier's text from 1966 was only perfunctorially modified to give it socialist undertones: now, the 'Monsieur le Président de la République' and 'Maréchal' was addressed, but in this later version the Romans did not conquer the Gauls, instead 'Trajan and Hadrian brought the *pax romana* to the Dacians' (today a territory in Eastern Europe), and both the Cambodian and the Yugoslav nations were 'united in a common history of battles' against imperial politics.<sup>76</sup>

On 9 November 1968 Cambodia celebrated its fifteenth anniversary of national independence in the newly built National Sports Complex designed by Vann Molyvann and other international specialists (Figure 6.5). The stadium was the largest architectural complex of postcolonial Cambodia which itself had been promoted as a project of Angkorian scale and reference.<sup>77</sup> Vann's collaborator Vladimir Bodiatsky (a Russian-French architect, colleague of Le Corbusier and CIAM member, teacher at the École des Beaux-Arts during Vann's formation in Paris and UN construction expert at Cambodia's Ministry of Public Works) focused on the political and social aspect of this 'Forum of the city of Phnom Penh'. In his description of the complex, Bodiatsky noted that the stadium was

not only assigned to national and international sport competitions, but also to all kinds of popular manifestations and reunions, national and religious festivities, processions and military parades, ... conferences, exhibitions and the reception of foreign guests ... in order to primarily assure direct audio-visual contact between the head of state, his adjuncts and the Khmer people'.<sup>78</sup>

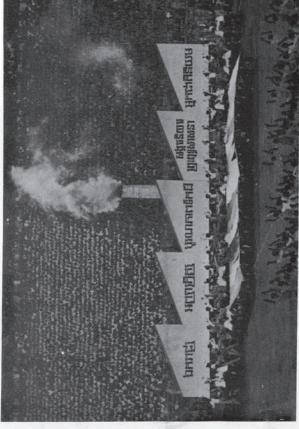
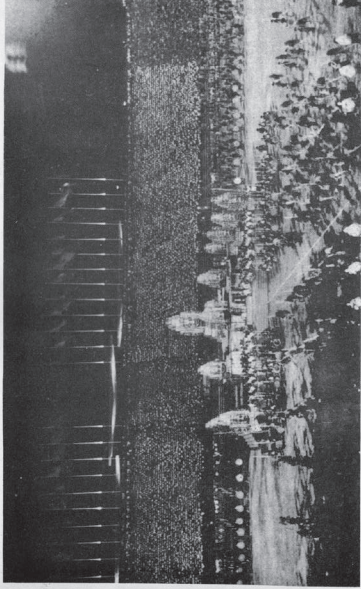
A critical article in the journal *Études Cambodgiennes* written by Alain Daniel found the perfect title for the Independence Day celebrations held there and supposedly organised by the Jeunesse





UN SPECTACLE GRANDIOSE : D'ANGKOR

ទេស្បតិយភាពដ៏អស្ចារ្យ :  
ពិសេសកង



AU CAMBODGE DU SANGKUM  
ដ៏សម័យ កង្កែបក្រហមស្បតិយ

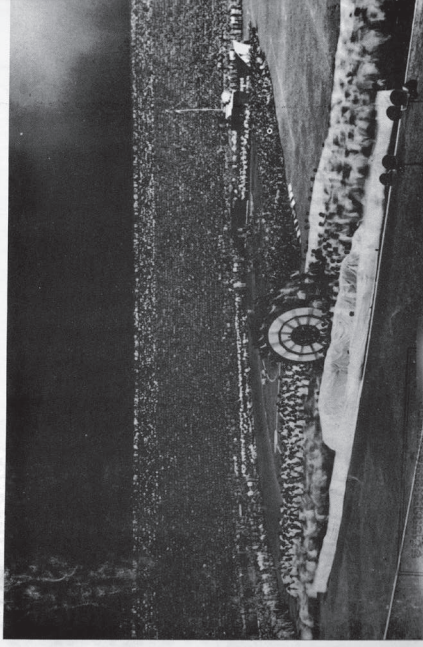


Figure 6.5 Illustrations of Phnom Penh's National Stadium during the celebrations of Cambodia's 15th anniversary of National Independence on 9 November 1968.

Socialiste Royale Khmère in honour of Sihanouk, the father of independence: *une expérience de théâtre total*. According to Daniel, the aim of this veritable mass spectacle was to demonstrate that history would ratify that public support of the throne had enabled the Cambodian nation to preserve its imperilled national independence: 'The lesson was clear: Let us unite and "the nation will never die".'<sup>79</sup> The didactic aspect of the event was mass instruction in the name of history, making the people aware of their country's past. Yet Daniel was disapproving: 'But exactly here lies the danger. The evocative power of such a spectacle is enormous, and draws much more upon sensibility than on intelligence. This power somehow chokes any critical spirit, and requires a particular rigor on the content of the message.' As Daniel continued, the two-hour show programme reached a scale unprecedented in Cambodia's modern history, including the Royal Ballet, folkloric dance troupes, 500 actors, singers, musicians and dancers with the whole personnel of the École des Beaux-Arts, 200 schoolchildren, university students and, above all, 80,000 spectators on the tiers participating, a few guests attending from abroad, and Sihanouk's whole diplomatic corps. As Daniel could quote from the official descriptions of the event, Sihanouk's 'total theatre' merged mythical history and postcolonial imaginations of past, present and future grandeur into one 'magical dream world':

The action takes place at the end of the twelfth century. Faithfully reconstituted after the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat, drawn by six people on his chariot and protected by royal umbrellas, King Jayavarman VII enters the stage, followed by a long cortege. On the vast field of the stadium he decides to build a temple to the honour of Lord Buddha. Thus, coming from all four directions a crowd of workers runs together, carrying enormous cubic stone blocks. In few moments, the familiar silhouette of the Angkorian Bayon temple with its four-sided Buddha faces is reconstituted from plywood in the middle of the stadium. ... The Royal Ballet dances around the temple for its consecration, and crowds from the neighbouring villages come to see the new construction: peasants with their tools, dancers, men and women, as on the bas-reliefs on the real Bayon temple. ... But there are also wounded and disabled people, and loiterers. Full of compassion, the king approaches and heals them, as a stele of Jayavarman VII indicates ... But Buddha announced that the life of man brings war after peace ... and the stadium becomes full of fighting warriors. ... Finally there is victory, and songs of thanks are sung for the gods. ...

The second part of the spectacle takes place in the modern epoch, the Sangkum era. After Jayavarman VII, Norodom Sihanouk in

1953 brings back again the light of independence. To illustrate the modern politics and the realisations of the regime, humour and poetry were chosen. Statistics of the results are shown in animated form: ... the politics of water, agriculture, industry, transport ... But the nation must constantly remain awake and needs collective orderliness: peasants, workers, railwaymen, sailors, dockworkers etc. ... become soldiers. And all the figures execute movements of a paramilitary ensemble. Night has fallen, all is dark apart from the very centre in shadows: the illuminated bust of the head of state. From here comes a light to illuminate the country and the whole kingdom, following the five principles of Pancha Sila: independence, neutrality, territorial integrity, Buddhist socialism and nationalism. With this image, the tiers become illuminated by innumerable fire flies, and the spectacle finishes in a magical dream world.<sup>80</sup>

If Garry had praised in 1964 Sihanouk's postcolonial regime as a 'theatre of profound transformation', Daniel's use of the term 'total spectacle' to describe the 1968 event was not only a thoughtful critique about the all-encompassing evocation of Angkor, but it also expressed his awe at this 'mass manifestation in the sign of the great [emerging] socialist countries of Asia'.

Indeed, in Daniel's description we may find a neat summary of each of the cultural tropes discussed in this chapter and used to re-enact Angkorian grandeur in Cambodia's decolonising period: first, the reimagined ancient kingship of the historical king Jayavarman VII in the person of Norodom Sihanouk in his new/old mission to bring (a new kind of socialist) Buddhism to the reborn Cambodian nation-state; second, the re-presented grandeur of Angkor's iconic temples as the ancient reference points for Cambodia's new Khmer architectural modernism, complete with its reworking of traditional spatial qualities and decorative patterns; and third, cultural performances combined with historical re-enactments à la Angkorienne used as a tool to foster – both in the domestic arena and on the external, international and diplomatic stage – Cambodia's image as a neutral and peace-loving nation of traditional vernacular culture in modern disguise.

Two themes appear in each of these tropes and deserve further emphasis and explanation here: first, the eminent and continuing role of cultural heritage from a colonial to a postcolonial state. The term 'cultural heritage' hints at a contested process of 'inheriting culture'. In Cambodia, this modern process had been initiated by the French colonial regime through its self-inflicted *mission civilisatrice* (or 'white man's burden' as Rudyard Kipling had it in

his famous 1899 poem for the US colonial context in the Philippines) to salvage and revive – and therefore legally and morally ‘inherit’ – Cambodia’s colonised cultural heritage.<sup>81</sup> Typical Western tools of scientific data production (or, in our case the tools of art history: comparative taxonomies, inventories and museum collections) and scientific restoration methods (in our case archaeology)<sup>82</sup> helped to produce historical imaginings of Angkor’s ancient glory. These imaginings were, in the decolonising phase, directly incorporated and continued as supposedly true, pure and original elements into Cambodia’s Hobsbawmian,<sup>83</sup> and highly creative, self-reinvention process as a neo-Angkorian nation-state built upon a revived, pure and authentic antiquity.

Second, throughout this chapter we have seen the continued use of the temple site of Angkor Wat as a crucial and valuable source of inspiration. Here, the world’s largest religious stone monument and the unquestioned architectural masterpiece of the ancient capital of the Angkorian Empire had gradually been turned by French colonial archaeology into a picture-perfect, ageless and anti-ageing heritage icon. In the form of a three-tower silhouette, it even became the central emblem of both the colonial and national flags of Cambodia. It is striking that (ex-colonial) French on-site restoration work continued until 1972, far into Cambodia’s independence, as if no political change had occurred. If the discipline of art history had helped to reinvent Cambodia’s self-esteem of national and civilisational grandeur as embedded in Khmer antiquity, then applied archaeology proved vital in terms of its ‘function in building nation-states’.<sup>84</sup> Politics and archaeology alike transformed the ‘real’ site into a unique cultural heritage site. As a central nationalist reference point, Angkor Wat became – and still is in today’s global cultural mass tourism – the performative stage for Cambodia’s newly ‘imagined [decolonised] community’.<sup>85</sup>

Yet the link between politics and culture was to take a fatalistic turn away from the glory of Cambodia’s decolonisation. As independent Cambodia approached its financial and social abyss with the escalation of the war in neighbouring Vietnam, the US bombing of Cambodian territory, and the internally rising concern, both on the left and the right, about the misguided politics of Sihanouk’s monocratic regime, the princely leader himself gradually left the real Cambodian stage and delved into one last refuge with which to realise his great vision of a reborn Angkorian nation-state: film-making.<sup>86</sup> After a long series of films with telling titles such as *Apsara*, *The Enchanted Forest*, *Le Petit Prince du peuple*, and

*Shadow over Angkor*, his final film *Crépuscule (Twilight)* staged him and his wife Monique in the main roles. In no other fiction of Sihanouk did all of the above-mentioned French colonial scientific and myth-making topoi of Angkor's *grandeur* shine more clearly through his historical 're-imaginaire' of ancient glory. However, the film, with its telling title and the symbolic characterisation of its protagonists, also gave melancholic, fatalistic – and visionary – undertones to the imminent downfall of the whole country and its leader.

In the short film/documentary *Cortège Royal* – with a poetical commentary unctuously spoken in French – Sihanouk drew his inspiration directly (again) from the scenic bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat. In more than twenty minutes, a long series of personnel from the Royal Palace, disguised in colourful dresses and ethnic distinctions, staged Cambodia's imperial past in a seemingly documentary way. In reality, however, it may count as Sihanouk's final artistic attempt to re-enact Angkor's kingly glory as a reflection of what by this time he had already lost in real political authority. For a last time, Sihanouk's extraordinary decolonising vision of a 'new Angkorian state', merging 'the real and suggested' and 'the present and [cultural] memory', came back to life. Here the staged procession walked into the night, as the real Cambodia approached a republican civil war and Khmer Rouge auto-genocide:

The golden gates slowly close and here is the victory drum which starts the celestial ballet of the Apsaras, messengers of goodwill, for their danced offering of golden and silver flowers. On this day, oh how full of pomp, of Victory, the Angels of celestial Paradise dance so that your life will be long and your reign will be long. And the Bakous put their shells to their mouths at the end of this wonderful night, is this then the prelude? *At the shell's last sound, all the instruments send their allegories echo heavenwards. And then the cortege drawn up again resumes its majestic march towards the many-coloured and many-shaped night, of time and space, of real and suggested, of the present and memory.*<sup>87</sup>

### Notes

This contribution is part of a larger research project entitled 'Cultural Heritage as a Transcultural Concept: Angkor Wat from an Object of Colonial Archaeology to a Contemporary Global Icon' which the author has conducted between 2009 and 2014 at the chair of Global Art History within the Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context – The Dynamics of Transculturality at the University of Heidelberg. The results of this project will be presented in M. Falser, *Angkor Wat: From Jungle Find to Global Icon: A Transcultural History of Heritage* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

## CULTURAL HERITAGE AS PERFORMANCE

- 1 R. Garry, *La Renaissance du Cambodge de Jayavarman VII, roi d'Angkor à Norodom Sihanouk Varman* (Phnom Penh: Imprimerie du Ministère de l'Information, 1964), pp. 9, 10, 1. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.
- 2 M. Falser, 'Krishna and the Plaster Cast: Translating the Cambodian Temple of Angkor Wat in the French Colonial Period', *Transcultural Studies*, 2 (2011), 6–50. In more specific investigations, see M. Falser, 'The First Plaster Casts of Angkor for the French *Métropole*: From the Mekong Mission 1866–68, and the Universal Exhibition of 1867, to the *Musée Khmer* of 1874', *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 99 (2012–13), 49–92; M. Falser, 'La Porte d'Entrée — Angkor at the Universal Exhibition of 1878 in Paris', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 76 (2013), 191–216; M. Falser, 'From Gaillon to Sanchi, from Vézelay to Angkor Wat: The *Musée Indo-chinois* in Paris: A Transcultural Perspective on Architectural Museums', *RIHA Journal*, 71 (19 June 2013), n.p.; M. Falser, 'Colonial Appropriation, Physical Substitution and the Metonymics of Translation: Plaster Casts of Angkor Wat for the Museum Collections in Paris and Berlin', in G.U. Großmann and P. Krutisch (eds), *The Challenge of the Object*, CIHA Congress Proceedings 2 (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2013), pp. 528–32.
- 3 J. Clifford, 'The Others: Beyond the "Salvage" Paradigm', *Third Text*, 6 (1989), 73.
- 4 In India, a whole postcolonial subcontinent was to deal with a more balanced correlation of territorial size and ancient built heritage; and independent Indonesia became a primarily Muslim state under President Sukarno, who claimed no direct ancestry from the country's ancient stone-built temple heritage of primarily Buddhist or Hindu origin.
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- 77 As Vann Molyvann explained in 1969, never before or since was such a close relationship established between the Angkorian architectural legacy and the new

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  - 81 For the interrelation between cultural heritage and civilising missions, see Falser, *Cultural Heritage as Civilising Mission*.
  - 82 In the colonial context, we may find these specific 'historiographical, observational, surveying/mapping, enumerative/collection-oriented, museological, surveillance-based, and investigative/classificatory and investigative modalities'. See B. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 6–14.
  - 83 After E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
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