

Confronting Media Representation: Cambodian Diaspora and Self-Expression as Counter-Narrative

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メディアによる表象との対峙： カンボジア系ディアスポラとカウンター・ナラティブとしての自己表現

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概 要

20世紀における政治情勢の変化や内戦により祖国を離れ、難民として第三国に定住したカンボジア系市民は多数にのぼり、その結果、北米、ヨーロッパ、そして日本などの国々にカンボジア系ディアスポラが存在する。2010年に3カ国(カンボジア、日本、カナダ)で実施したインタビューから得られたデータに基づき、本論文では2010年当時カンボジアと日本に居住していた被験者に注目した検討を行っている。とりわけポル・ポト政権下を生き抜いた2人の女性及び自らの意思でカンボジアから来日し、研究活動を行う大学院生たちの様々な自己表現に焦点を当てる。クリフォード・ギアツ(1983)によって提唱された“blurred genres”の概念を用いることにより、従来の学問領域をまたいだ学際研究が可能となる。そうした手法によりつつ、民族誌的アプローチによる研究とディアスポラの作家の文学作品の要素分析を結合させつつ、カンボジア国、国民(民族)、文化がメディアによってどのように表象されているのか、そして被験者たちはそのような表象についてどのように反応し自己表現を行うのかということについて考察する。本論文は、メディアが生み出す表象や移民問題に関わる研究に向けて批判的な問題提起を行っている。

キーワード：メディアの表象, カンボジア系ディアスポラ, 自己表現, アイデンティティ
Key words: media representation, Cambodian diaspora, self-expression, identity

1. Introduction

The notion of belonging is diverse in the twenty-first century. Citizenship does not necessarily represent where we live. Scholars, educators, and writers have long presented various notions of belonging through the description of the border-crossing subjects such as the migrant, the exile, the refugee, the nomad, and hyphenated people (e.g., Ahmed, 2000; Anzaldúa, 1987; Kincaid, 1988; Said, 2000; and Trinh, 1994). Focusing on Asian women in

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diaspora, Choi (2006) investigates "... the dynamic, fluid, and heterogeneous nature of diaspora identities and examines the complex interplay between 'home' and 'host' cultures in (re)fashioning self-perceived identities" (p.68). Choi delineates how the movement from the homeland to the host country affects the ways in which her research participants identify themselves. Are diasporic identities simply constructed by the subjects themselves who move between countries? Is there any impact of their "host" culture on the construction of the identities? How about those who stay in their "home"? Surrounded by a great deal of information constantly produced by mass media, how are their identities constructed? Based on the accounts of those who participated in this research project, I seek to explore the everyday practices and forms of expression of the individuals using digital and/or non-digital media. How does the media (i.e., TV programs, newspapers, magazines, movies, etc.) represent Cambodian people and culture? How does that influence the ways in which these people express themselves? What reactions to the representation created by the dominant discourse can be found?

Cambodian people have gone through colonization as well as politically chaotic times. Cambodia had almost ninety years of the French rule (see Welaratna, 1993). As portrayed by Chandler (1991), the country also has a long history of conflict. During the civil war between 1970 and 91, there was genocide by the Khmer Rouge. In consequence, a large number of Cambodian citizens fled to refugee camps in Thailand and Vietnam, and many of them resettled in North America (Haines, 1989). Many of the studies on refugees and immigrants relocated from Southeast Asia to North America have concentrated on the living conditions in their "homelands", symptoms of mental disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and diseases including tuberculosis (Beiser & Wickrama, 2004; Boehnlein, Kinzie, Sekiya, Riley, Pou, & Rosborough, 2004). In this way, people from Southeast Asian countries are victimized, pathologized, and treated as the objects of research.

In response to the clinical research tradition as such, ethnographic studies have been done to reveal the life conditions of "newcomers" living in North America (Dorais, 1991; McLellan, 2004; Ong, 2003; Smith-Hefner, 1990). By contrast, research on those who reside in Japan is mostly incidental. According to Oishi (1991), Japan has a small population of immigrants and many Cambodians living in the country are socially isolated. Yamaguchi (1993) asserts that Japan needs to become "... multicultural and multilingual society on a global scale" (p.21). Filling in the research gap, I aim to attain the following objectives in this study: (1) to uncover the research participants' (re)actions to the dominant meaning and representation of Cambodia, the people, and culture created by the media (i.e., TV, newspapers, magazines, movies, etc.) and (2) to propose an alternative approach for education and research, which brings a critical lens in dealing with the issues of media representation as well as immigration.

2. History of Cambodian Diaspora

In the discussion of Cambodian diaspora, it is important to note Um's statement describing some key terms:

War, revolution, genocide and exile have marked the political history of Cambodia over the past 30 years. ... During this period of turmoil, over 1 million Cambodians perished under the Khmer Rouge and another half a million sought refuge in third-country resettlement in the aftermath of the regime's collapse. (2007, p.253)

Atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge as well as the control of Pol Pot were documented based on the survivors' accounts (e.g., Chandler, 1991; Kiernan, 1996; Welaratna, 1993). In April 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh, the capital city, they ordered the residents to move out to rural areas to work as peasants. People were deprived of their liberty and forced into labor with little rations. Those who were considered as dangerous elements such as the former regime's officials and intellectuals including doctors, teachers, and Buddhist monks were executed (Welaratna, 1993). The Khmer Rouge accelerated revolution by abolishing the monetary system and prohibiting religious beliefs such as Buddhism, which were both rooted in the lives of the people of Cambodia (Kiernan, 1996). Chandler (1991) indicates that under the absolute control of Pol Pot, "Cambodia soon became a gigantic prison farm" (p.239). While the hierarchy between the poor and the wealthy was gone, Chandler suggests that another type of hierarchy came into existence between the people under control and those who were in power and "... had access to three commodities that most of the population lacked: food, weapons, and information" (p.241).

During such chaotic times described above, a large number of Cambodian people had to leave the homeland to be safe from terror, suffering, and foremost death. Those who managed to arrive in refugee camps left for their destinations such as North America, Europe, and other Asian countries. Haines (1989) states that both the United States and Canada played a key role in granting resettlement to those who came from Indochinese countries including Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. He shows that a total of 141,031 Cambodian people as refugees relocated to North America (128,800 to the U.S. and 12,231 to Canada respectively) between 1975 and 1985.

The number of Cambodian refugees who resettled in Japan cannot be comparable with the cases of the U.S. and Canada. According to the Foundation for the Welfare and Education of the Asian People (2004), the Japanese government granted resettlement to 1,353 Cambodian individuals (1,309 persons who were at refugee camps outside Japan and 44 persons such as students who were already in Japan before the political change). Table 1 shows the number of Southeast Asian refugees who were granted resettlement in Japan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2014) provides that Indochinese refugees are people from the three nations—Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Japan’s official policy on refugee resettlement, which granted resettlement to people from Vietnam at first, was established in 1978. Since then, the policy has been revised so that Cambodians and Laotians could be granted resettlement as well.

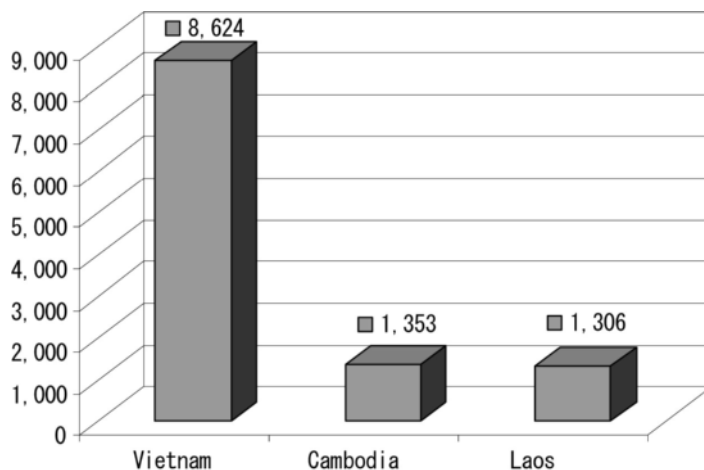


Table 1 Southeast Asian Refugees in Japan

(Source: Foundation for the Welfare and Education of the Asian People, 2004)

Once refugees arrived in Japan, some were transferred to the Himeji Center, the refugee resettlement promotion center built in 1979 in Himeji city in Hyogo prefecture. Others moved to the Yamato Center established in 1980 in Yamato city in Kanagawa prefecture. In 1983, the International Refugee Assistance Center was built in Shinagawa ward, Tokyo. The first two resettlement promotion centers as well as the Shinagawa center were closed, and the Refugee Assistance Headquarters in Tokyo now plays the central role in assisting refugees. In the case of Cambodian refugees, almost all of them were transferred to the Yamato Center in Kanagawa (Foundation for the Welfare and Education of the Asian People, 2005).

3. Methodology

In this study, I apply an ethnographic approach combining a postcolonial, feminist perspective with the essence of diasporic literature. It is an approach based on the concept of “blurred genres” proposed by Geertz (1983). I suggest that interweaving various scopes in research has the great potential. Looking at scholarly works blurring the borders between the social sciences and the humanities, Geertz argues that “... what we are seeing is not just another redrawing of the cultural map ... but an alteration of the principles of

mapping. Something is happening to the way we think about the way we think” (1983, p. 20). As an example of “blurred genres”, Geertz refers to studies on theatre performance: “At a time when social scientists are chattering about actors, scenes, plots, performances, and personae, and humanists are mumbling about motives, authority, persuasion, exchange, and hierarchy, the line between the two ... seems uncertain indeed” (1983, p.30). Geertz thus suggests that such an attempt gives rise to the novel scope, which helps the researchers think beyond the conventional disciplinary boundaries. I practice Geertz’s “blurred genres” in this study and seek to create an alternative view transgressing the boundaries between the research traditions as well as negating the conventional way of perceiving gender, race, and ethnicity.

This article is based on interviews conducted in Cambodia, Canada, and Japan. The ethics approval for the study was issued by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia, Canada in April 2010. I conducted interviews in Ottawa, Tokyo, Hiratsuka, and Phnom Penh at such locations as school, gallery, workplace, café, and park, preferred by the study participants between April and August 2010. There were three criteria for the selection of the participants. First, all the participants were Cambodian adults who were over the legal age in each country. Second, they resided in Canada, Japan or Cambodia. And lastly, they utilized digital and/or non-digital media on a daily basis such as photographing, filming, performing, painting, writing, and teaching. This research paper limits the discussion to the cases of the following research participants who were living in Cambodia and Japan during that period of time (see Table 2).

Table 2 Names of Participants in Alphabetical Order

Research Participants	Occupation	Location
Chan	Graduate student Specializing in Accounting	Living in Tokyo
Mean	Graduate student Specializing in Electronic Engineering	Living in Tokyo
Ms. P	Writer	Living in Hiratsuka
Sophat	Graduate student Specializing in Economics	Living in Tokyo
Ms. T S	Director of Women’s Media Centre of Cambodia	Living in Phnom Penh
Theara	Graduate student Specializing in Economics	Living in Tokyo

Two research participants—Ms. T S and Ms. P—survived the war. Ms. T S in her 50s was born in Phnom Penh and underwent regime changes including the rule of the Khmer Rouge. She talks about the dramatic transition of her life at that time:

When talking about Cambodia, as you know, Cambodia faced almost two decades of war and I have been passing many regimes. ... [D]uring the Pol Pot times, the Khmer Rouge times, I mean in 1975,

I was sent to a province in the rural area to work as a farmer, which was absolutely different from the works I had done before because before the Khmer Rouge times, I was a student and then I worked for an international NGO.

Ms. T S acts as the co-founder and executive director of a non-governmental, non-profit organization called the Women's Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC) in Phnom Penh. WMC is comprised of several units such as producing and broadcasting radio and television programs, conducting research, providing mobile broadcasting across the provinces, extending the cooperation nationally and internationally, and so forth.

Ms. P in her 40s was born in Phnom Penh as well. She was 10 years old when the Khmer Rouge seized power. She lost her parents and siblings under the control of the Khmer Rouge and arrived at a Khao-I-Dang refugee camp with her brothers and relatives. She resettled in Japan in 1980. She has been engaged in writing her experience in Cambodia and Japan, and her latest book written in Japanese was released in 2009. The Khmer version of the book came out in 2008 and also the English version was published in 2009. She recalls the past as follows:

In Cambodia, approximately four years since April 1975 was under the control of Pol Pot. Because of that, the cheerful people including me were not allowed to express the feelings freely. The point that makes human beings different from other animals is that we can express our feelings and communicate with each other in that way. Being unable to be expressive means that there is no joy in living as a human. Recalling those days, I feel that it is very dark and desolate. Everyone was doing his or her work in silence with knitted brows.

Unlike the case of Ms. P, the following research participants decided to live in Japan of their own free will. Chan, Mean, Sophat, and Theara are pursuing their graduate studies in universities located in Tokyo. While conducting research as international graduate students, they served the year of 2010 as the executive committee members of the Cambodian Students Association in Japan (CSAJ). Disseminating information through their own website, they strive to broaden the network of Cambodian students studying in Japan and also play a significant role as a bridge between Cambodia and Japan. In this way, the study participants have Cambodian roots in common but their positions and locations differ from each other.

In addition to the interviews, this article refers to a literary work by U Sam Oeur (1998) as an illustration of Cambodian diaspora. In *Sacred Vows*, which is a collection of his poems, U Sam deals with various themes such as mythology, the words of Buddha, the war, and the situation of Cambodia. He was born in Svey Rieng in 1936. After he was educated in the United States, he returned to Cambodia and lived in Phnom Penh. However, when the Pol Pot regime was in power, he and his family were forced to move out of the city. During the control by the Khmer Rouge, U Sam pretended to be illiterate and concealed his knowledge. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, he started working in the Ministry of

Industry but he was fired after his poem praising democracy was found. He then requested political asylum and now he resides in the United States. He describes his memory of the war and the Khmer Rouge as dark:

Listen to my howl through winds,
look at my sorrows through the gray skies,
feel my tears through the rains (1998, p.21)

Here U Sam's grief and despair are synchronized with the gray sky accompanied with wind and rain. Why did U Sam decide to face the dark-colored past without averting his eyes from it? It is because he has a message that he aims to distribute by daring to remember and writing about it. Borrowing the concept of "blurred genres", this article explores the ways in which the study participants convey their messages.

4. Critical Lens on Media Representation

A mass of information is created and circulated by newspaper, radio, television, cinema, and the Internet. As a result, there is an emerging need to look and think critically about what is conveyed by the media (see Hobbs, 2011; Hodgkinson, 2011). Focusing on television in particular, Hall (1980) points out some notable issues in his work "Encoding/decoding". First, Hall states that codes with certain message inscribed are given priority for broadcasting by producers/encoders: "... [W]e must recognize that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange ..." (p. 129). In addition, according to Hall, the viewer's interpretation is not necessarily consistent with the producer's original intention: "The codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical" (p.131). He elaborates on this mismatch as follows:

The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of 'source' and 'receiver' at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. (p.131)

Then, what messages regarding Cambodia, the people, society, and culture(s) are encoded and distributed by the mass media? And how do the research participants as viewers interpret, in other words, decode such messages? As indicated elsewhere (see Hara, 2012), some study participants have revealed the codes portraying typical images of Cambodia and the people. These include Angkor Wat and the country's abundance of nature. Ms. P explains this point in detail:

When it comes to Cambodia, a picture of Angkor Wat, the World Heritage site is projected on the

screen in the first place. It is shown as if it were the gateway to Cambodia. ... Another image of Cambodia I often see is that children are smiling without precaution. ... In addition, the abundance in nature is often depicted. Cambodia is a country where growing two or three crops a year is common. Therefore, people do not suffer from lack of rice, the staple food; the country has fertile land.

Indeed, Angkor Wat serves as one of the major icons representing Cambodia; the image is created and reproduced on television and the Internet.

In addition to the codes as such, the research participants who are "... operating with what we must call an *oppositional code*" (Hall, 1980, p.138; original emphasis) point out some "negative" images of Cambodia and the people produced by the mass media:

Ms. P: Another image I see is that the scars left by the civil war are still clearly visible. Places such as the so-called Killing Fields are included in sightseeing tours. This is not a very fine image. So I hope to get rid of the images as such little by little.

Theara: In the media, on TV, everything is about all bad images of Cambodia—about poverty, landmines, and something. Most of Japanese people just think about landmines. When they step out of the airport, they think there are landmines over there. ... They know nothing about the investment chance, no, they don't know. So not many Japanese people go to Cambodia.

Mean: Sometimes the Japanese media broadcasts too much about the danger of Cambodia. In fact, it is not too dangerous.

In this way, the negative code input in the images— "war", "the Killing Fields", "poverty", and "landmines"—"... serves to reproduce the dominant definitions ..." (Hall, 1980, p.136).

The research participants demonstrate that rather positive images of Cambodia illustrated earlier as well as the negative ones generate stereotypes, which lead the audience to have a limited view. To put it another way, there is a risk that people with different personalities might be classified simply as a single, unitary group of "Cambodians". Dyer (1993) offers a critical analysis of stereotype and writes its operation clearly: "This is the most important function of the stereotype: to maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it" (p.16). Dyer thus suggests that stereotypes make people have perception based on binarism.

Ms. P talks about her uneasy experience encountering the stereotypical view as portrayed by Dyer:

Looking at the media, they cover various news reports of illegal immigrants and foreign workers. In consequence, there are times when some people stare at me, as if they were wondering which case this person fits. There is a sense of inferiority concerning that.

Here Ms. P refers to the way of broadcasting news about non-Japanese residents and the gaze of the Japanese citizens toward herself. The incident that happened to Ms. P implies

that certain images and stories broadcasted by the media cause stereotypes of race and ethnicity, which lead some viewers to act on an unbalanced principle drawing a line between those who fit the norm and those who do not. Sholle and Denski (1993) point out the power of the media in producing and renewing the hegemonic discourse, namely, “creat[ing] systems of normalization and subjectification” (p.307). In connection with this powerful discourse, stereotypes are generated by various types of mass media. Larson (2006) remarks about it:

News story selection, visuals, and terminology convey racial stereotypes similar to those found in television entertainment and film. System-supportive themes in the news include those celebrating assimilation and those that emphasize the need to control or monitor racial minorities. (p.82)

As Larson argues, some messages about race and ethnicity are created and passed down to the viewers for the purpose of maintaining the dominant system.

5. Decoding Critically

Through decoding messages critically, Chan, Mean, Sophat, Theara, Ms. P, and Ms. T S uncover the latent qualities of the mass media. For example, Chan states that:

Japanese society is really influenced by the media. When they broadcast one story, they talk about bad points, every bad point. If it's a good story, they talk about good points only. They don't mention both. If they mention both, the balance, the content of the story will be blurred. So if they want to phrase some footballer, they talk about something good like 'He's good' and they don't talk about bad points. So it's kind of being caught in the thinking of the media.

He also indicates that the way of broadcasting in Japan is one-sided: “... If they talk about a bad point, everything is about the bad point.” Other CSAJ committee members support his argument:

Mean: They try to make it very bad and for a good point, they try to make it really good.

Chan: They don't show both.

Sophat: I think maybe it is also the problem related to the recent resignation of the previous Prime Minister. When his popularity went down, they just started talking bad mouth and then he just became worse and worse, and then finally, he stepped down.

Theara: So the problem of the Japanese media is like that.

Sophat: Actually, everyone has good and bad points but when something happens, they just blame those bad points, so to me it's not very valid in conveying a message.

The dialogue above leads to the comparison between Japanese media and Cambodian media:

Researcher: What do you think about the media in Cambodia? Do they have a balanced view?

Sophat: They are under the control of a political party. Most of them.

Chan: ... Many people in Cambodia, from civil officers to even teachers, are concerned with political thinking, so it's hard to omit and eliminate all the kinds of thinking. Maybe in twenty years, everything will be changed. We don't know that right now. But right now the Cambodian media is absolutely connected with a political party.

Sophat: So it is hard to trust information because sometimes, for example, the media supports an A Party, so what has been done bad by the A Party is not broadcasted—only the good side is.

What becomes apparent here is the influence of politics on the mass media in Cambodia.

Moreover, Sophat describes unique characteristics of broadcasting in Cambodia and Japan:

... The Cambodian media tries to conceal their bad point, the country's bad situation. But the Japanese media tries to seek the bad point and broadcasts only those bad images, so this is kind of contradictory. I hope in the future, there might be change.

A series of critical observation above suggests that the study participants are practicing what Larson indicates as follows:

Even though mainstream media are encoded with messages that support the dominant ideology, those do not have to be the messages you decode. ... Meaning is not just found in texts; it is negotiated by the readers and viewers, who can oppose intended messages with 'resistant readings.' (2006, p.278)

Indeed, applying a critical perspective to decoding messages produced by the mass media makes it possible to see what is hidden, in other words, what story is untold.

Besides the hidden and untold stories, there are messages generated and distributed repeatedly and persistently. Similar to the distribution of codes leading to stereotypes of race and ethnicity, a problematic view of gender is encoded, produced, and distributed. Ms. T S, who specializes in mass media production, comments on the representation of women in Cambodian media:

... I would like to tell you that ten years ago, women were portrayed in the media in a negative way. I have done a survey you might see on the WMC website. It's a national survey conducted in 2005.... We found that the images of women in the media were negative rather than positive.

She then mentions a project named "Improving the Portrayal of Women in the Media", which was implemented in order to tackle the problem:

... We worked very closely with all the media people and lobbied them to mainstream gender in the production. ... They [Journalists] have a misunderstanding that the portrait or the presence of women as actors, singers, and showing up at fashion shows is more attractive than portraying women in good careers. If you present women in the media as doctors or members of the parliament, etc., it doesn't attract the viewers. ... That is what they believed.

Ms. T S recognizes improvements since 1998 when the project was launched. However, she indicates that there is still some work that needs to be done:

... If you read newspapers, especially magazines, you see they talk about women as victims of trafficking, domestic violence, and things like that. ... [A]s journalists, we should write what happened but we should mainstream gender perspective in our article—why she becomes like that; what action should be taken; what the status of old time women was; and whether it should be changed.... Instead of blaming women, we have to learn how to talk in a gender perspective way.

In this way, as an established media producer, Ms. T S asserts that it is crucial for those who are in the encoding position to put a gender perspective into practice in order to abolish the reproduction of the dominant meaning assigned to women.

6. Encoding Critically

Feminist scholars have long problematized and critiqued the representation of women in the mass media (e.g., Doane, 1982; hooks, 1992; Mulvey, 1975; Pollock, 1988). Paying attention to the construction and representation of femininity in cinema, Doane (1982), for instance, demonstrates how femininity is “othered” and serves as the pleasurable object of the male gaze. Doane calls patriarchy the “dominant system” and points out that “... an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look” (p.77). Doane thus suggests that the patriarchal system constructs the binary between the male with the power to gaze and the female as the gazed object. Against the male gaze and to deconstruct the dominant system forcing women to perform ideal femininity as depicted in cinema, Doane proposes the concept of “female spectatorship”, which allows women to have the agency to see. Doane’s concept as such is relevant to the project described by Ms. T S. It is reasonable to suppose that Ms. T S practices “female spectatorship” and the project “Improving the Portrayal of Women in the Media” urges journalists as producers to have the agency to think critically and encode messages, taking a gender perspective into account.

In addition, there is another research participant, who is actively engaged in encoding and conveying an important message. Similar to the case of U Sam, Ms. P indicates what she hopes to address as a writer in the Cambodian diaspora:

The Pol Pot era impaired the value of human life, the dignity, and the prestige severely, and I thought that this was wrong. I cannot help feeling rage and sorrow for those who died. But even if I keep fretting myself about that, the deceased will not come back. It has been thirty-five years since then, so I know it well. Conveying the importance of peace and life to people is the way I have found so as not to spoil the lives of the people who passed away.

Ms. P devotes herself to publishing her writings as well as giving lectures. She explains the reason as follows:

The scenes depicting the scars of the civil war are often shown on television. On the other hand, as a matter of fact, I find a mild disposition, kindness, and benevolence that the Cambodian people have by nature, when I look at each one of my fellow companions living in Japan, including myself. Moreover, these people are the devout. A large majority of the people have faith in Buddhism and do not care for conflict essentially. ... It is the fact that the civil war was a fault. And there is a need to learn something from it so that it will not be repeated again. I would like everyone around the globe to know this. So how should we, the Cambodian people eradicate the negative point? This is a serious task, an important assignment set for us.

Her words above reflects a firm sense of mission, and her writings and lectures provide the audience with the opportunity to acknowledge unique features of Cambodia and each individual with Cambodian heritage, which are not shown in the mass media.

Ms. P's conviction has relevance to Fanon's argument that the people of Algeria in the colonial times took advantage of print media in order to distribute a counter-narrative in opposition to the radio system used by the colonial power. Fanon (1965) refers to the Algerian people's action as an attempt confronting "[t]he power of the colonialist message, the systems used to impose it and present it as *the truth* ..." (p.76; original emphasis) and remarks: "It was in this sector of news distribution that the Algerian found balance-restoring elements" (p.76). Similarly, Ms. P's writings and lectures contribute to not only illustrating what is missing in the representation created by the media but also offering "balance-restoring elements", as described by Fanon, to both sides—Ms. P herself as the producer of the message and the viewers/readers. In addition, through her activities, Ms. P inspires the audience to transform themselves to become producers sending messages of their own accord. Hence, the research participants decode media representation critically and the two of them—Ms. T S and Ms. P—even encode their own messages from a critical perspective.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on the study participants who survived the war, this article has illustrated the history of Cambodian diaspora first. In relation to this history, such elements as armed conflict, the genocide by the Khmer Rouge, and the exodus affect the media representation

of Cambodia and the people. It has become obvious that the research participants are engaged in decoding messages produced by the mass media critically. Their critical observations disclosed which stories are told repeatedly and which are excluded from encoding. In other words, they uncovered the representation created and maintained by the dominant discourse. In addition, the study participants elucidated the problematic views leading the audience to have stereotypes regarding gender, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, some participants discussed their experiences as both the decoder (viewer) and the encoder (producer). Hence, the research participants are by no means passive receivers of messages encoded by the mass media. These insightful and critical individuals present a variety of modes of becoming "... the 'creative citizen' who is source as well as destination, producer as well as consumer, writer as well as reader, teacher as well as learner" (Hartley, 2007, p.143).

The state of becoming is likened to that of travelling since it embraces such stages as "[t]he departure, the cross-over, the fall, the wandering, [and] the discovery" (Trinh, 1994, p.21). Trinh (1994) refers to three features caused by travelling: "Travelling allows one to see things differently from what they are, differently from how one has seen them, and differently from what one is" (p.23). She continues, "Travelling can thus turn out to be a process whereby the self loses its fixed boundaries ..." (1994, p.23). The past self is preserved and serves as the foundation of the self in the present. In the same way, the present one leads to the coming self in the future. As time goes by, the diasporic identity shifts in the way that the present self becomes the past and then the future self becomes ongoing. While undergoing transformation, the study participants as travellers articulate the importance of re-examining and challenging what is taken for granted and sustained by the normative view.¹

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Notes

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