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Folklorizing Northern Khmer identity in Thailand: intangible cultural heritage and the production of "good culture"

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Abstract:

Growing recognition of the contested nature of heritage has prompted critical reassessments of official heritage discourses and the demand for more inclusive heritage processes. Field research in Surin, Thailand, reveals the challenges of implementing participatory approaches in a context in which the concept of cultural heritage is employed to domesticate the nation's ethnic Others. The history of state-sponsored, folklorized performances of the ethnic Khmer genre of **kantruem demonstrates** the ways in which the recent listing of kantruem on Thailand's national registry of "intangible culture" elides histories of cross-border linkage with Cambodia and meanings of kantruem as a site of memory and affect.

Keywords: kantruem, intangible cultural heritage, folklorization, ethnic identity, Northern Khmer, Northeastern Thailand.

Full Text:

Since its inception in nineteenth-century romanticism and historicism, heritage has been inextricably implicated in the territorialization of the nation-state. Premised upon foreclosures and exclusions, heritage as a field of practice invokes official representations of history and choreographed performances of culture which naturalize the bounded nation-state by mobilizing collective memory, constructing origins and domesticating difference.

For scholars focusing on traditional modes of expressive culture, including ritual and performance, the term that most succinctly sums up the adverse effects of heritage discourses on living practices is "folklorization". First employed by scholars and activists in Latin America as a critique of state appropriations of indigenous culture for political ends (McDowell 2010, p. 182), folklorization has gained wide currency as a concept that conveys the negative impacts and abiding problems of state intervention in the management of living culture, including alienation, fossilization, decontextualization, homogenization, commodification and standardization.

Over the past three decades, growing recognition of the inherently contested and politicized nature of heritage has prompted critical reassessments of official heritage discourses and the demand for more inclusive and reflexive heritage processes. One important outcome of these efforts was the promulgation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter ICH Convention). Drafted with the explicit aim of redressing histories of folklorization by states and colonial authorities (Seitel 2002, p. 3), the ICH Convention seeks to return the power of defining, representing and conserving living cultural practices to "culture bearers" (ibid.). Towards this goal, UNESCO calls on the signatories to the ICH Convention to support bottom-up, community-based, participatory approaches to safeguarding the performances, rituals, handicrafts and bodies of knowledge that constitute intangible heritage.

Drawing on field research in Surin, Thailand, a multi-ethnic province on the Thai-Cambodian border, I intend--in this article --to expose the complex challenges of realizing a more inclusive, participatory approach to heritage in a context in which the concept of cultural heritage continues to be deeply embedded in the dominant narratives and symbolic hierarchies that have long served to contain and domesticate the nation's ethnic Others.

Engaging with the theory of performativity (Butler 1997b), the first part of this article traces the history of state-sponsored, folklorized performances of ethnic difference as national heritage in Surin Province. Exploiting the desire for "continuity, visibility and place" (Butler 1997b, p. 29) within the Thai nation, state authorities created spaces for ethnic Khmer to perform their ethnicity as national heritage, while simultaneously disavowing and eliding those aspects of Khmerness that blurred boundaries or otherwise threatened to unsettle national unity.

Turning to the 2003 ICH Convention and the Thai draft bill for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the second and third parts of this article argue that the Thai state's selective interpretation of the former international instrument intentionally sidesteps the call for community engagement and decentralization of decision-making, and instead perpetuates a territorialized and hierarchical ordering of national heritage. Looking at the example of the process for listing the ethnic Khmer folk music genre of kantruem on Thailand's national ICH registry, I show that, rather than creating opportunities for dialogue about the meanings and forms of this genre, the listing of kantruem has re-inscribed political boundaries and fuelled contested claims and local anxieties about the ownership of this cross-border musical and ritual tradition.

In the final section of the article, I argue that, in order to gain insight into the dynamic social meanings of kantruem as a site of memory and affect, it is vital to explore the spaces of kantruem performance outside the folklorized forms of state sponsorship, including spirit mediumship, Buddhist ordinations and popular kantruem, or kantruem prayuk. Returning to the participatory mandate of the ICH Convention, I consider whether it is possible to imagine a redefinition of cultural heritage in the Thai context that recognizes this genre's alterity, hybridity and links to musical traditions in Cambodia.

Performing the Border: Folklorizing Thailand's Ethnic Khmer Periphery

Thailand's approximately 1.3 million ethnic Khmer (Suwilai 1996, p. 18) are concentrated in the three northeastern provinces of Surin, Sisaket and Buriram, which border Cambodia to the south across the Dong Rek escarpment. The ethnic Khmer of these provinces refer to themselves as khmer leu, or upper Khmer, referring to their geographical position on the plateau above the Dong Rek range and distinguishing themselves from the khmer krom, (1) or lower Khmer, who live below the plateau in Cambodia. I will refer to the upper Khmer using the standard English term used by linguists--Northern Khmer.

While the Northern Khmer can claim genealogical descent from inhabitants of the ancient Khmer empire, which encompassed much of present-day Thailand at its zenith between the ninth and fifteenth centuries CE, the Northern Khmer today tend actively to identify with the Thai nation and to disavow ethnic kinship with the Khmer of modern Cambodia (Denes 2012, p. 179; Vail 2007, p. 114). Various factors contribute to this disassociation. Linguists have emphasized the distinctiveness of the Northern Khmer dialect, which diverged from lowland Khmer as a result of geographical isolation after the dissolution of the Angkorian empire in the fifteenth century CE (Jenner 1974, p. 2; Smalley 1994, p. 137). Adding archival weight to this argument, historians (Paitoon 1984, pp. 49-50; Toem 1999, p. 130) have shown that from the eighteenth century CE, the area inhabited by the Northern Khmer was known to the Siamese courts of Ayutthaya and Bangkok as the "domain of the forest Khmer" (huamuang khamen padong)--a semi-autonomous chieftaincy that periodically offered tribute to the Siamese court in the form of forest products and conscripts during war, in exchange for protection and feudal status conferred by the king. While local lords were connected to Siam through tributary relations, there were no political borders containing the Northern Khmer within Siam, and belonging to a pre-modern "galactic polity" (Tambiah 1977, p. 91) did not necessitate cultural and linguistic assimilation or preclude participation in longstanding regional trade and migration networks across the Dong Rek escarpment (Paitoon 1984, p. 51). In spite of the differences in dialect observed by early explorers like Aymonier ([1895] 2000, *passim*) and by the linguists noted above, there can thus be little doubt that in the pre-modern era the Northern Khmer would have had more in common culturally with Khmer living across the Dong Rek range than with their distant Siamese overlords in the capital.

While linguistic differences have certainly supported the narrative of Northern Khmer distinctiveness, their disavowals of kinship with people in Cambodia in favour of sentiments of allegiance to Thailand are largely an outcome of twentieth-century nation-building and geopolitics. The process of incorporation of the Northern Khmer into the modern Thai nation began around the turn of the twentieth century, when King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868-1910) instituted reforms to replace the indirect tributary system of statecraft with a centralized bureaucracy. Faced with French colonial ambitions in Indochina and a discourse of race that threatened to undermine the legitimacy of Siam's multi-ethnic, tributary empire, King Chulalongkorn initiated the territorialization of the nation to incorporate its ethnic Others as "Thai". As a process of asserting hegemony over the peoples within a bounded nation-state, territorialization involves myriad strategies, ranging from the bureaucratic to the metaphorical. In the case of Thailand, or Siam as it was called prior to 1939, the construction of a sense of collective unity that corresponded to the modern cartographic representation of the nation was achieved not only through the replacement of local, semi-autonomous chieftaincies with a centralized administration, but it also featured the dissemination of nationalist narratives and cartographic symbolism that cast Siam back in time as a sovereign, bounded nation which--except for the trauma of the "lost territories" (2)--had successfully eluded French and British colonial ambitions. As Thongchai (1997, pp. 16-17) describes, the territorialization of the Siamese nation came about when the modern map achieved a naturalized, taken-for-granted status in popular consciousness, thereby constituting the nation as a "geo-body". The meaning attached to the map thereby superseded pre-modern social relations characterized by fluidity and difference, with the hegemonic, unifying ideal of "Thainess" embodied in the three pillars of nation, religion and monarchy.

On Thailand's multi-ethnic periphery, this territorializing project was realized to a large degree through the educational curriculum, which inculcated Thainess through the Thai language, promoted embodied, ritualized expressions of loyalty and deference to social hierarchy and national symbols, and conveyed the grand narratives of Thailand's historical origins and its rise to regional ascendancy through the virtue, discipline, and astuteness of its rulers (Keyes 1991, p. 115; Paitoon 1984, p. 188). Rather than completely eliding ethnic plurality into a paradigm of bounded unity and sameness, however, the Thai state created discrete spaces for the articulation of ethnic difference within the frame of national heritage (Rhum 1996, p. 333). Indeed, the school was one of the sites of the production of folklorized ethnic difference, as teachers often took the lead in choreographing and performing ethnicity, as I will demonstrate in the case of kantruem below.

While early constructions of Siam's cultural heritage centred on classical court performance--on, for example, khon classical dance--and on religious monuments and artefacts of kingship symbolizing the nation's illustrious past, under the military rule of Field Marshals Phibunsongkhram (1938-44, 1948-57) and Sarit Thanarat (1957-63), the meaning of cultural heritage expanded to include refurbished folk expressions as a form of symbolic tribute to the nation and the monarchy. Under Phibun, a new word for "culture" (watthanatham) was coined, combining the Pali-derived terms for "progress" (watthana) and "morality" (tham) (Thanapol 2008, p. 156). This new concept of culture--combining artistic refinement, progress, civility and loyalty to the nation--was propagated widely via radio programmes and via the dissemination of a series of twelve cultural edicts (ratthaniyom) prescribing proper conduct, discipline, dress codes, the use of Central Thai language, and deference to national symbols (Barme 1993, pp. 144-63; Peleggi 2007, p. 53). These prescriptions were enshrined as law in the National Culture Act of 1942, which included penalties for violators (Connors 2005a, p. 528). Nevertheless, Section 6 of the Cultural Act stated that "National customs are ... subject to local variations" (Thak 1978, p. 256), thereby maintaining a space for the expression of regional differences. Accordingly, during this period, the Fine Arts Department refined regional music and dance forms through an upgrading of costumes and standardization of gestures to fit the new definition of national culture (Chai-anan 1991, p. 72). (3)

Pivotaly, in 1955 Phibun organized the first visits of King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit to fourteen provinces in the Northeast (Chalong 2012; Kukrit 1955, p. 4). I argue that these unprecedented royal visits were foundational performative events in the construction of folklorized ethnic identity on the margins, inasmuch as ethnic groups were called upon to represent their identity to the visiting monarchs in the frame of choreographed and standardized folk culture. Rather than being singular instances, the performances of ethnicity as heritage during these visits became the normative templates and reference points for subsequent embodied "citations" (Butler 1993, p. 15) of ethnicity and difference within the nation.

For the royal visit to Surin Province, provincial authorities and local elites organized a cultural performance of ethnic Khmer folk dances, including roam anre, roam tros, and jueng mui, which were accompanied by kantruem folk music. In choreographing this performance, Ms Phongsi Thonglo--a native of Surin who had studied in Bangkok and returned to teach at a local school--adapted the folk dances and songs according to Central Thai standards of refinement, so that they would meet the criteria of a royal audience. This folklorized performance was the first event in which Surin's ethnic cultural heritage was performed as a form of symbolic tribute for the monarchy, thus constituting a place for ethnic Khmer identity within the national imaginary.

As Phongsri Thonglo explained to me in an interview, this event was an opportunity to transform and refine a local New Year's tradition into something of national value. Talking about the roan anre dance, she described it as follows.

In the old days, there weren't any rice mills. There were only hand mills. And this long wooden pestle (krathop sak) was used to mill the rice. And the young men went to encourage the young women. There weren't any drums in the old days either, so they used these objects as instruments. This was the beginning of the courting between men and women. For the New Year Festival [songkran] we had to have roan anre. And the villagers, they would teach each other how to dance roan anre, so that this would be passed on to the next generation. And even today, when the villagers hear the sound of the mill and the music they want to dance. But they dance according to their own style, their own tradition. And we arranged the dance so that it was formalized [pen rup baep]. (4)

Following the establishment of the Tourist Organization of Thailand in 1960, the promotion of heritage tourism and folklorized cultural spectacles of Surin's difference were yet further elaborated through the organization and sponsorship of cultural events, such as the annual Elephant Roundup, featuring lavish pageants, folk performances, and a parade of hundreds of elephants (Chalong n.d.; Tourist Organization of Thailand 1975, p. 29). The week-long annual Elephant Roundup continues to this day as Surin's grandest cultural spectacle, involving hundreds of local participants and drawing throngs of domestic and international tourists. Reflecting the insights in Hayami's discussion of multiculturalism and the "management of diversity" in Thailand (Hayami 2006, pp. 289-90), these events were a form of heritage performed for the purpose of containment, aimed at commodifying, domesticating, standardizing and depoliticizing ethnic Khmer, Lao and Kui identities. Given these aims, the process of heritage-making during this period was necessarily selective. While state authorities showcased the silk textiles, silver handicrafts and stylized dances of the region's ethnic minorities, unassimilable histories and aspects of cultural practice and identity, such as language, magic and spirit mediumship, as well as historical links to Cambodia, were quietly ignored.

It is important to note that royal visits to the provinces and the accompanying promotion of folk culture were a part of the Thai government's economic development and containment strategies for the Northeast during the Cold War. Fearing the spread of communism from neighbouring Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos into the Northeast, Thailand's U.S.-backed military government introduced policies to develop the region economically and incorporate it culturally and ideologically into the national imaginary (Thak 2007, pp. 241-42). As Vail (2007, pp. 118-21) and French (2002, pp. 442-43) have argued, the politics of the Cold War and the atrocities of the Pol Pot years (1975-79) had the greatest impact in shaping Northern Khmer ambivalence towards Cambodia. To this day, an older generation of ethnic Khmer in Northeastern Thailand still shares memories of bombs falling near the border, and tells sombre stories about encounters with Democratic Kampuchea soldiers and Khmer refugees. In her account of the chilling effect that the militarization of the Thai-Cambodian border had on cross-border relations beginning in the 1960s, the anthropologist Lindsay French has described how Cold War anxieties fed a local perception of Cambodians as a communist Other. She noted that prior to this period, "government officials from Bangkok were no doubt more foreign to rural ethnic Khmer in Thailand than Cambodian villagers from across the border" (French 2002, p. 445). French notes, however, that

This situation changed in the late 1960s, when the Thai military began its suppression of suspected subversives in the countryside, hiring local spies to report on the movement of outsiders through villages, and punishing anyone with connections to Vietnamese, Cambodian or Lao nationals. Nationality began to matter to people on the Thai side of the border in a way that it had not before. It had become dangerous to associate with Cambodians. It was important to be able to demonstrate Thai citizenship and loyalty. (ibid.)

Viewed in this context of heightened suspicion of Cambodians, folklorized representations of Khmer ethnicity in Thailand were a means of demonstrating loyalty and deflecting the stigma of neighbouring Cambodia. The established pattern of choreographing and performing Surin's "good culture" (in the official phrase, *watthanatham thi di ngam*) (5) for state-sponsored events and touristic performances continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, driven by the "culture for development" discourse (*watthanatham phuea kanphattana*) (Connors 20056, pp. 267-68). With the thawing of Cold War tensions in the 1990s, plans to promote cultural tourism focusing on the region's Angkor-era temples increased significantly. These plans contributed to state-led initiatives to represent the ethnic Khmer as heirs to Thailand's ancient Khmer culture. (6) Notwithstanding state-led efforts to improve diplomatic relations with Cambodia in the post-Cold War period through economic and cultural initiatives, longstanding political tensions have continued to play out along the border, as seen in the violent disputes over the Preah Vihear Temple --an ancient Hindu temple situated on a promontory of the Dong Rek escarpment. Moreover, in spite of the conciliatory discourses of ASEAN regionalism, negative perceptions of Cambodians as "traitors" prevail in mainstream Thai media (Chamvit 2003, p. 4; Pavin 2012, p. 90).

Why did the Northern Khmer participate in this folklorized cultural performance of their identity throughout the period of nation-building? Why have they continued to perform their "good culture" through state-sponsored cultural events in the post-Cold War period? In addressing these questions, I have found it helpful to draw upon Butler's ideas on performativity, subjection and agency. For Butler, performativity refers to "the stylized repetition of acts" and the repetitive miming of dominant linguistic and social conventions which constitute the subject (Butler 1990, p. 179). She argues that understanding subjection involves "an account of the way regulatory power maintains subjects in subordination by producing and exploiting the demand for continuity, visibility and place" (Butler 19976, p. 29). Although subjection to the social is always a form of violence that entails subordination and foreclosures, the subject is nonetheless driven by the desire for recognition.

[T]he subject pursues subordination as the promise of existence ... Subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere; it marks a primary vulnerability to the Other in order to be. (Butler 1997a, pp. 20-21)

The folklorized performances of Khmer culture as national heritage --choreographed and led by lineages of local elites working in collaboration with the school system and other government agencies --can be understood as a form of subjection promising "continuity, visibility, and place" (Butler 19976, p. 29) within the Thai nation. The performance of Khmer ethnicity as a symbolic offering is structurally consistent with the historical tributary relations between the Siamese court and the principality known to Ayutthaya and, later, to the Chakri kings in Bangkok as the "domain of the forest Khmer" since the late eighteenth century. At the frontier of the porous Siamese empire, the "forest Khmer" intermittently offered tribute to the Siamese court in the form of forest products and conscript soldiers, in exchange for military protection and status conferred upon chiefs by the king (Paitoon 1984, pp. 49-50; Toem 1999, p. 130).

Moreover, the many stigmas associated with neighbouring Cambodia from the 1950s onwards--including communism, genocide, poverty, and mainstream historical representations of the Khmer as the autochthonous overlords of the Thai--meant that there was little impetus for the ethnic Khmer in Surin to constitute themselves as subjects in relation to the incipient modern Cambodian nation. Even though only a small fraction of the ethnic Khmer population actually participated in folklorized performances, these state-

sanctioned representations became the preferred signifiers of Khmer ethnicity within the Thai nation, overshadowing the legacies of cross-border trade, kinship, language and shared culture that existed before the Cold War.

Thailand's ICH Inventory

The 2003 ICH Convention was intended as an instrument that would mitigate both political and commercial appropriations of living cultural practices. Describing the need for a radically new heritage instrument, grounded in rights, in a global era defined by the rampant commodification of culture, in 2002 one of the leading promoters of the ICH Convention--then director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Dr Peter Seitel--argued boldly that

No development is more important than the endorsement on a global scale and in many forums of the voices and agency of members of culture-bearing communities as essential participants in the formation of cultural and economic policy. (Seitel 2002, p. 2)

Acknowledging the problematic colonial and nationalist baggage encumbering the term "folklore", Seitel endorsed the use of the new phrase, "intangible cultural heritage", to mark a new era of community-driven heritage work. The objective of the ICH Convention, he contended, was not to sustain merely the products of culture, but rather to support "the learned processes that local peoples perform to create and re-create the shared aspects of their material and spiritual lives" (ibid.).

Looking at the UNESCO instrument that emerged from the international expert meetings attended by anthropologists, folklorists and state representatives, we find the commitment to a participatory, community-based heritage management approach expressed in Article 15, which states that "each State Party shall endeavor to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups, and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management" (UNESCO 2003, p. 7). Embedded in the ICH Convention is an affirmation of the cultural rights of local communities to maintain their identities as well as to determine what constitutes heritage and how it should be documented and represented (Blake 2009, p. 46).

In the Thai context, heritage authorities have followed the UNESCO ICH Convention closely for more than a decade, deliberating and debating on whether to pursue signatory status. In 2009, the Department of Cultural Promotion of the Ministry of Culture initiated a national inventory of ICH. As I learned from attending several of the department's meetings in 2013, (7) the listing process drew on the UNESCO Convention's "domains" of cultural practice, but otherwise chose to forego a participatory process in favour of nomination by academics and experts. At the same time, the department commissioned an advisory body of legal experts to draft a Thai ICH bill, again drawing on UNESCO's ICH framework but modifying it significantly. Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's cabinet approved the Thai ICH bill in October 2013 (The Nation 2013); it is now awaiting review and endorsement by General Prayut Chan-ocha's cabinet (Pakamard 2014). (8) While the ultimate fate of the bill is still uncertain, examination of the draft alongside the ongoing national ICH listing process of the Department of Cultural Promotion nevertheless allows insight into Thailand's particular interpretations of intangible cultural heritage.

Reading Thailand's recently drafted Intangible Cultural Heritage bill, which puts in place the national legal framework that a country needs in order to become a state signatory to the ICH Convention, one is struck by the many points of divergence from UNESCO's community-based, participatory language. For instance, the UNESCO Convention defines intangible cultural heritage in Article 2 as

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills--as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith--that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. (UNESCO 2003, p. 2)

In contrast, Article 5 of the draft Thai law inserts a number of abstract criteria. Namely, the intangible cultural heritage "must reflect academic, historical, artistic and spiritual values worthy of preservation" (Department of Cultural Promotion 2013, p. 4). Moreover, whereas the UNESCO ICH Convention asserts that the primary objective of the international agreement is to provide support, recognition and respect for cultural diversity, the Thai draft law mentions this aim, but ultimately emphasizes the selection and conservation of "good" cultural heritage (watthanatham thi di ngam) that contributes to national unity, prosperity, morality and progress. It articulates this conservative and nationalistic conception of cultural heritage in Article 23, which states that selected elements of intangible cultural heritage must not threaten public order, morality, or national security, and in Article 40, which penalizes the use of intangible cultural heritage in a manner that would slander the institution of the monarchy, affect religion, threaten national security or result in the degradation of the intangible cultural heritage (Department of Cultural Promotion 2013, p. 14).

The bureaucratic structure and process of nominating the intangible cultural heritage for inclusion on the Thai national registry also vividly reflects the persistence of the centralized, hierarchical heritage regime. The draft ICH bill calls for the establishment of a number of advisory committees at the national and provincial levels, comprised of state officials and experts drawn from the fields of folk culture, religion, law, journalism, health or sports and recreation. These committees are to work in tandem with the Department of Cultural Promotion of the Ministry of Culture to oversee the selection of intangible cultural heritage for the national list. At the bottom of this administrative hierarchy are the communities of culture bearers, mentioned in Article 21, who are eligible to nominate their intangible cultural practices for consideration by provincial committees, but whose rights or roles in the safeguarding of their heritage the draft bill otherwise rarely mentions. The absence of articles explicitly affirming the role of communities and the rights of culture bearers represents a stark divergence from the participatory principles of the UNESCO ICH Convention.

The disjuncture between the democratic, participatory principles expressed in the UNESCO Convention and the Thai ICH bill are neither surprising nor unique to Thailand. Heritage scholars such as Askew (2010, p. 21) and Bendix et al. (2012, p. 14) have observed the tendency for international heritage instruments to get "lost in translation" as their universal, humanistic abstractions about the value of cultural diversity are localized by state authorities and brought into conformity with existing "heritage regimes" and discourses (ibid.). The Thai heritage regime values performances of cultural difference that reinforce rather than challenge established national narratives, geopolitical boundaries, and symbolic and social hierarchies. In other words, the "good" heritage--awarded national recognition and funding--is heritage that conforms to hegemonic constructions of Thai national culture.

Listing Kantrum as "Good Culture"

The case of the ethnic Khmer folk music genre of kantrum and its listing on the national register of intangible heritage offers an illustration of the Thai state's approach to heritage management. Comprised of the reed oboe, fiddle, drums, cymbals and wooden clappers, the kantrum ensemble shares many traits with the ensemble associated with a musical genre found across the border in

neighbouring Cambodia, phleng arak. As in the case of phleng arak, kantrum in Thailand was traditionally performed as the musical accompaniment for spirit mediumship rites (called chol maemot in Khmer) still practised among Thailand's Northern Khmer. Traditional kantrum (called kantrum dangdoem (9) in Thai) is also performed for community rituals and ceremonies such as weddings, ordinations and house-raising rites. Kantrum features vocalists who sing in the Khmer language. The genre has hence been a vital cultural space and medium for the intergenerational transmission of Khmer and associated cultural knowledge in the Thai context, where the bureaucracy and educational system have endorsed assimilationist cultural and linguistic policies (Vail 2007, pp. 123-24).

In addition to traditional kantrum, today there is a popular genre of kantrum known as kantrum prayuk, which incorporates modern instruments such as the electric guitar and keyboard and features Lao and Thai as well as Khmer lyrics. Performed at temple fairs and other events, the upbeat tempo of kantrum prayuk has gained popularity among younger audiences both in Thailand and Cambodia. It has become an important source of livelihood for a new generation of performers. The rise of kantrum prayuk has provoked debates among local people, heritage authorities and traditional performers, some of whom feel that its popularity has led to the marginalization of traditional kantrum and a separation of the music from its historical, ritual function within the community. On the other hand, many kantrum prayuk performers maintain that the popular genre is a way to keep the music alive and relevant in the contemporary era. Aspiring kantrum musicians traditionally sought an apprenticeship with a kantrum master, who taught not only music but also ritual elements and the construction of and care for instruments. By this means, intergenerational transmission of the genre was ensured. Today, however, kantrum is taught primarily through the local schools that have incorporated kantrum instruction into their extracurricular activities. (10) Few of the students who learn kantrum in school continue to perform professionally after graduation, and older performers express concerns that the genre--particularly traditional kantrum--will disappear in the near future, as master performers pass away. (11) Another major challenge to transmission of the genre is that the kantrum taught in schools today is not being performed for mediumship rites or other community rituals, but rather for events showcasing folklorized local cultural heritage, such as provincial cultural festivals, school performances and contests featuring stylized folk dances. Thus removed from the local context, the meaning of traditional kantrum has changed, from a ritual genre that links the ethnic Khmer to their ancestral spirits and communities to a performance genre that symbolizes Khmer ethnicity within the Thai nation-state.

A brief vignette from a state-sponsored kantrum performance at the annual Silk, Silver and Kantrum Festival held in Khwao Sinarin District of Surin Province in February 2014 illustrates this point. On a large stage erected in front of the local government administrative offices, high school students wearing stylized ethnic Khmer silk costumes and silver jewellery performed a repertoire of choreographed kantrum songs and dances. Rather than singing completely in Khmer, the vocalists alternated between Thai and Khmer, using Thai to translate the lyrics for a largely imagined Thai audience, since most of the festival-goers were local residents. Moreover, the Thai lyrics referred specifically to Khwao Sinarin's "good cultural heritage" (moradok watthanatham thi di ngam) of dance, music and handicrafts, and made a plea to the audience to value their traditions and conserve them for future generations. As Butler's conception of performativity suggests, in being divorced from its ritual context, this folklorized "citation" (Butler 1993, p. 15) reiterates the trope of the Northern Khmer as an ethnic minority that offers its "good culture" as symbolic tribute to a national imaginary.

In principle, the UNESCO ICH Convention serves as a framework that encourages state heritage agencies, NGOs, academics and communities to engage in critical dialogue about the complexities of culture and its appropriation. However, as I learned from my interviews with kantrum musicians in Khwao Sinarin between July and August 2013 and in February 2014, the Department of Cultural Promotion did not seek community participation prior to listing kantrum on the Thai registry of intangible cultural heritage in December 2012. (12) The brief, two-page description of kantrum included in the glossy annual registry is celebratory, revealing little about the transformations of or challenges facing this genre. It lists the instruments and clothing worn during performances, and states generally that kantrum is the traditional musical accompaniment for auspicious events and ceremonies, such as weddings, top-knot cutting rites and ordinations. Ceremonies associated with spirit mediumship are not included in the list of auspicious occasions. While the description states that kantrum is sung in the Northern Khmer dialect, it refers to the ethnic Khmer as the population of lower northeastern Thailand (Isan tai). It makes no mention of links with folk musical traditions in neighbouring Cambodia, thereby reifying a territorialized representation of this genre (Department of Cultural Promotion 2012, pp. 16-17).

The description focuses on the modernization of the genre in kantrum prayuk, which has adopted Western instruments and popular musical styles, leading to the abandonment of traditional kantrum and representing a threat to the genre. Not surprisingly, it includes no discussion of the impact of the state-led folklorization of kantrum via the school system, which has decontextualized traditional kantrum by supporting the stylized performance of kantrum for state-sponsored heritage events, instead of seeking to understand and support the role of this musical genre in the ritual and social fabric of local communities. This blindness to the impact of state intervention is exemplified in the images chosen for the description in the listing, which are mostly staged kantrum performances, with the exception of one photograph of kantrum in an unidentified community ritual setting (ibid.).

When I asked kantrum performers in Khwao Sinarin whether they had been consulted or informed about the listing, I met only one musician out of dozens who was aware that the genre had already been registered. (13) Older master musicians with whom I spoke had mixed opinions about the effects of the listing of the genre as national heritage in benefitting them and helping to secure the future of the genre. Ekaphap Phadphano, known as Grandfather Mani, is a sixty-one-year-old master kantrum musician from Tabaek Yai village in Khwao Sinarin. A boxer in his youth, he began his career as a musician at the age of fourteen, after losing his eyesight as a result of black magic. In addition to performing regularly, he has taught younger generations of musicians in the local elementary school as well as in his home for decades. After learning from me that kantrum had been listed on the Thai registry of intangible cultural heritage, Mani said he was proud that the genre was listed as national heritage and hoped that the listing would bring kantrum more international recognition. However, he quickly added that listing was not enough. Mani asked whether the government would provide funding for sustenance of the genre, like raw materials to make instruments, food for students and performance venues. He also said that he would want to teach popular kantrum in addition to traditional kantrum, in order to attract younger students, as kantrum prayuk was the only way to make a living as a musician. If you looked at the circumstances of the musicians who only performed kantrum dangdoem for community rituals, they were all very poor. Mani emphasized that, even though he was known best as a kantrum prayuk performer and composer, he always practised the ritual traditions of paying respects to the ancestral lineage of teachers before taking new students and before every performance. He expected his students to do the same. Mani said that to conserve kantrum, it was necessary for a new generation to learn traditional kantrum, not just kantrum prayuk, and he hoped that the Ministry of Culture would provide resources to support his efforts, now that the genre had been listed. When I asked whether Mani felt that learning the Khmer language was important to the future of kantrum, he strongly

agreed. He said that youth today could not read or write Khmer script anymore, and that this inability affected their pronunciation as well as their depth of knowledge of the song lyrics. Responding to the question of whether to collaborate with Cambodia in safeguarding kantruem, he said he had already been invited to teach in the nearby province of Oddar Meanchey in Cambodia, in a programme facilitated by a local language-rights activist based in Surin, but the monthly remuneration was too low. Moreover, he was sceptical of the motivations of some of the organizers of cross-border kantruem initiatives, although he did not elaborate. A last point was that Mani did not want kantruem to be listed as world heritage, as he thought this listing would mean that other countries would be free to use it without acknowledging the source. He noted his experience of performers in Surin and elsewhere stealing his songs without acknowledging him as the composer. (14)

Another musician who expressed a sense of pride mixed with scepticism was Sarot Jaransetthino. A former principal of the Natang Tabaek elementary school who had spearheaded the establishment of a kantruem club, Sarot said that, while it was good for kantruem to be listed as national heritage, he doubted that the listing would do much to improve the situation of traditional kantruem musicians. Provincial cultural officers were not very active, and officials such as the district head did not always know how to support and manage local cultural practices. He gave the example of the 2014 Silk, Silver and Kantruem Festival, funded and organized by the district office. He did not understand why the organizers had only invited two kantruem groups to perform on the first night, when the festival lasted a full three days and had an adequate budget to support performances by all the kantruem musicians in the district. The organizers had spent most of the budget on Thai boxing and a popular Thai country-music band. Sarot complained that this kind of poor planning and use of funds was unfortunately typical of the local government. It did not know how to implement activities to support the transmission of traditional skills and knowledge. Instead, it tended to use too many resources for costly, high profile events in a way that did not encourage transmission of local cultural traditions. (15)

Lon Ngamrahong, a master kantruem boran musician from Chok Village in Khwao Sinarin District, echoed Sarot's frustrations with the government, going so far as to say that traditional kantruem was disappearing because of official neglect. Lon had hopes of building a music school in front of his house, but he had never been able to gain support from the government. He contrasted the Thai state's disregard for traditional kantruem with the situation in neighbouring Cambodia, where he had gone to perform with other musicians from Khwao Sinarin on numerous occasions. Lon explained that in Cambodia this music was called arak, but it had almost disappeared completely during the Pol Pot period. When audiences there listened to his group play, they would weep from nostalgia, remembering the past. Young people there were eager to learn kantruem. When I asked Lon what he thought of organizing a joint programme with Cambodia to revive the genre, he said that he had tentatively agreed to teach students in Oddar Meanchey but that the local Cambodian government did not yet have the resources to pay him a modest monthly stipend. (16)

Few kantruem musicians in Khwao Sinarin shared Lon's openness to cross-border collaboration, however. Net Nang, a kantruem and bruen singer from Bo Un Village, repeatedly expressed grave concern that Cambodia was laying claim to Surin's musical genres. On several occasions she told me that her mother--a master bruen singer named Suphot Misati--had already been listed as a bearer of national heritage in Cambodia, and she was famous there, with her picture hanging on the wall of a government office, even though she had never been there to perform. The Thai state, however, had yet to recognize her mother as a national artist, and official accolades were reserved for another well-known kantruem artist--Nam Phueng Mueang Surin. (17) Although I was unable to substantiate Net Nang's assertions about her mother's fame in Cambodia, the important point about her narrative is that she described Cambodia's apparent claims on Surin's folk music genres as a threat and as a misappropriation of an art form that rightly belonged to Thailand. Regarding the listing of kantruem as national heritage, her desire was to see herself and her mother acknowledged as the bearers of Thai--not Cambodian --national heritage and given support for transmitting it. But so far, the Thai state had recognized only a few kantruem performers, who were always invited to perform at important state-sponsored events.

Several other artists whom I interviewed shared Net Nang's misgivings about collaboration with Cambodia. For instance, Ping Ching Chai, a seventy-nine-year-old kantruem musician known for his mastery of the pir, or reed oboe, had performed in Phnom Penh once many years ago. He told me that he had no desire to go there again, as he did not feel safe because of the communists, who would have no qualms killing him. (18) Similarly, the fifty-six-year-old performer Phon Isan was emphatic about not wanting to collaborate with Cambodia in the safeguarding of kantruem. Like the other musicians I interviewed, Phon Isan had no idea that the genre had been officially listed as Thai intangible cultural heritage; he expressed scepticism that listing would help to support the genre anyway. He explained that it was very difficult to get kantruem performers to cooperate, because there was so much competition and jealousy. While he acknowledged that popular kantruem was overtaking kantruem dangdoem, he also remarked upon the resurgence of traditional rituals in which the kantruem dangdoem genre was performed, such as ordinations, maemot (spirit mediumship) rites and weddings. He attributed this resurgence to villagers' longing to hear their traditional music. (19)

Taken together, these interviews demonstrate that the listing of kantruem as part of Thailand's intangible cultural heritage has been a top-down process, conducted with little if any regard for local practitioners' understanding of the genre. While in general terms musicians were proud to learn of the listing of the genre, they asserted that the listing was meaningless in the absence of tangible support, effective management and a more equitable distribution of resources and recognition among performers. Moreover, these interviews illustrate that, without a participatory process to encourage critical reflection on the ways in which folklorization has transformed this genre, the listing of kantruem as national heritage only reinforces territorialized representations of Northern Khmer identity. It does nothing to diminish the entrenched disavowals of and ambivalence towards neighbouring Cambodia on the part of ethnic Khmer in southern Isan. In other words, rather than presenting an opportunity to explore the multifaceted histories of kantruem and its meanings as a body of practice shared with Cambodia, the top-down process of listing kantruem as Thai cultural heritage has re-inscribed the border and reasserted nationalist claims to the "good culture" of this ethnic periphery. As the case of Net Nang illustrates, heritage discourses and "lists" are understood to be inherently nationalistic. They are seen, too, to make claims. Only a rigorously reflexive and critical participatory process can undermine or counter this perception. I discovered some openness to de-territorialization through cross-border collaboration and performance, as in the comments of Lon Ngamrahong, but this case is the exception. Such openness will only flourish with support. The next section delves more deeply into the spaces of kantruem performance outside the folklorized forms that enjoy state sponsorship in order to suggest possibilities for the recognition of kantruem as a genre of embodied memory and alterity.

Kantruem and Spaces of Embodied Memory

As Butler has argued, performances that constitute subjectivity through embodied subordination to power are never totalizing; there are always "unassimilable remainders" (Butler 2000, p. 24) that reflect the limits of symbolic containment by the state. Similarly, scholars of folklorization such as McDowell have called for more nuanced attention to the ways in which folklorized, mediatized performances of culture paradoxically foster spaces of agency and multivocality (McDowell 2010, p. 184). Indeed, in the case of

kantruem, the discrete, highly stylized performances of the genre as heritage contrast starkly with the unpredictability and emotional intensity of kantruem as performed both in ritual and popular contexts outside the official spaces of state-sponsored heritage.

In the spirit mediumship rites called chol maemot, kantruem music calls on the spirits to make an appearance through the medium. Choi maemot mediumship rites are organized annually between February and March so that participants may pay respects to a diverse pantheon of deities and spirits. This pantheon includes protective Hindu-Brahmin deities, tutelary spirits of places (thep arak), ancestral spirits (neak ta), personal protective spirits (khru kamnuet), founders' spirits, (20) and on occasion angry or neglected spirits believed to be causing illness. The musical accompaniment of kantruem performers is an indispensable component of the ritual process, as the music rouses the spirits and invites them to possess the medium's body. It also soothes and comforts them. While it can be argued that spirit mediumship rites are intimate spaces in which cosmological hierarchies and patron-client relations are enacted and re-inscribed, I maintain that the fluidity and unpredictability of the spirit world defies totalizing encompassment. In chol maemot spirit mediumship rites, the territorializing logic of nationalism can be questioned, and Khmer ancestors embodied and remembered. I witnessed such defiance of political boundaries in 2003 in the possession of a Northern Khmer transgendered spirit medium as an ancient Khmer princess. (21) In 2011, I was present when an ancient Khmer spirit who was compelled to dance upon hearing the evocative kantruem music possessed a local woman attending a Brahmin ritual at a Hindu temple in Buriram. (22) Such appearances conjure pre-national pasts. They unsettle the givenness of contemporary political borders.

Informants in fact frequently offered the ability to evoke powerful emotions as an important criterion for judging the skill of a kantruem musician. On numerous occasions, I was told that a particular kantruem dangdoem musician was so good that everyone in the audience cried and reflected nostalgically about the past when he played. Wanchana Duangsi, the nephew of Net Nang, articulated this notion that kantruem dangdoem evoked a space of memory and catharsis. (23) As a younger-generation musician, Wanchana was acutely aware of the challenges of safeguarding kantruem dangdoem in the face of cultural and technological change, and his decision to establish a recording studio was motivated in part by the desire to document the traditions of that genre. In describing the value of kantruem dangdoem, Wanchana emphasized the power of the music to inspire awareness and a kind of emotional catharsis, both for the performers and for the audience. He gave the example of a monastic ordination at which he had recently performed, involving a young novice who had been a rebellious and difficult youth. The kantruem music accompanying the soul-tying rites (riak khwan) was so evocative that the novice began to cry uncontrollably in realization of the hardship that he had given his parents, and soon almost everyone at the ritual was crying. Wanchana and his wife described this experience as the moment of one's tutelary spirit (khru) entering one's body, and they regarded this experience as one of authentic realization. Using a more formal, state-authorized term, "local wisdom" (phumpanya), Wanchana expressed his view that kantruem dangdoem would have tremendous potential to convey knowledge and trigger catharses that could help to heal Thai society, if only there were more opportunities to perform in such ritual settings.

While he saw the listing of kantruem as national cultural heritage as positive, Wanchana expressed concerns about the possibility that the law might penalize infringements. He also criticized the lack of consultation with culture bearers and the absence of any formal announcement prior to the listing process. Moreover, unlike some of the musicians mentioned above, Wanchana did not see kantruem as belonging exclusively to Thailand, and he suggested a joint listing of the genre as heritage with Cambodia. (24)

Kantruem prayuk represents another space outside the realm of state-sponsored kantruem performances. State heritage authorities and some kantruem dangdoem musicians dismiss kantruem prayuk as a commercialized, contemporary genre with crude aesthetic qualities compared to those of traditional kantruem. I found, however that this genre transcended the state-sponsored, territorialized representations of kantruem as "good culture" in a number of ways. First, kantruem prayuk performances are for local audiences, not for an imagined national audience. As such, they have an improvisational, and frequently bawdy and sexualized, character--with rousing rhythms and scantily clad female dancers--never found at official, state-sponsored events. Critics of kantruem prayuk have often derided these attributes as indicative of the genre's derivative mimicry of the dominant popular music genre of Lao speakers in the Northeast, called luk thung. (25) Indeed, kantruem prayuk's extensive borrowing from luk thung speaks not only to the reality of cultural hybridity in the region, but also to the weakness of the state's project of rigid ethnic classification, which cannot neatly contain the cultures of the ethnic periphery. A second feature of kantruem prayuk that transcends territorialization is the extensive corpus of video compact discs (VCDs), mostly produced by a Surin studio called Phairot Sound. The sale and circulation of these VCDs in neighbouring Cambodia, as well as in immigrant Khmer communities in the United States, has led to a surge in popularity of this genre among Cambodians. This popularity recently culminated in the tours of several Northern Khmer kantruem prayuk groups to perform in these countries. (26) In this sense, popular kantruem has demonstrated the capacity to erode antipathies dating from the Cold War.

Conclusions

Like those in multi-ethnic nations the world over, Siam's rulers employed folklorization as a strategy for containing ethnic diversity within the national imaginary. Their successors in the Thai state have continued the practice. In this article, I have argued that kantruem performed as cultural heritage constitutes a "bordering practice" and a "performative event" which produces territorialized subjectivities and effects symbolic inclusion in the Thai nation-state, while at the same time attenuating historical and social connections with neighbouring Cambodia. For the Northern Khmer on the nation's periphery, the performance of "good" Thai folk culture as a form of symbolic tribute remains preferable to identification with the highly stigmatized neighbouring nation of Cambodia. As is so often the case with state-sponsored cultural heritage, these folklorized performances of ethnicity have elided histories of cross-border trade, as well as memories and practices deemed to threaten national security.

Cognizant that state-driven agendas had shaped the meaning and uses of heritage, the drafters of the 2003 UNESCO ICH Convention created an international instrument that was supposed to redress the problems of folklorization by underscoring the roles and rights of culture bearers. However, as we have seen in the case of Thailand, there are myriad obstacles to the goal of decentralizing heritage management. The most significant of these obstacles is the deeply entrenched official "heritage regime" (Bendix et al. 2012, p. 14), which has functioned systematically to contain difference in Thailand since the 1940s. Rather than reflect on the challenges posed by the participatory language of the UNESCO ICH Convention, with its grounding in the rights of culture bearers, Thai cultural heritage authorities have re-inscribed a conservative, nationalist conception of culture through their selective interpretation of the convention and of the process of listing practices as intangible cultural heritage. The Thai case illustrates that, in spite of UNESCO's intention to promote participatory approaches through the 2003 ICH Convention, these ideals are structurally constrained by the fact that, as an intergovernmental organization, UNESCO is obliged to work with state authorities who may be ill-equipped or reluctant to acknowledge the complexity of heritage or the conflict inherent in cultural dynamics.

Grappling with the contested meanings of heritage through field research and community dialogue is not part of the agenda of Thailand's Department of Cultural Promotion. Its mandate is to make "good culture" by selecting aspects of local cultural practice that fit neatly within the established national heritage regime. In the case of kantrum, this mandate has led to the selection of aesthetic elements of the music and stylized folk dances and the exclusion of other aspects of the genre that have shaped its history and evolving meaning, including spirit mediumship, Khmer ethnic identity, cultural memory and linkages with other regional genres in Thailand and in neighbouring Cambodia. For the Thai heritage authorities to lead a participatory research project aimed at understanding these diverse and complex aspects of kantrum would require a radical reform of the official definition of culture, and a transformation of the Thai state's role as arbiter and judge of "good culture".

The improbability of such a conversion among Thai heritage authorities means that any hope for a project that would bring together kantrum musicians, community members, schools, and other local stakeholders to learn about the historical significance of the genre, its cross-border linkages to the pleng arak genre in Cambodia, and its transformations as a tool of ethnic containment and nation-building in the modern era will have to lie elsewhere.

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NOTES

(1.) While Thailand's ethnic Khmer refer to the Khmer of Cambodia as khmer krom, this is not to be confused with the ethnic Khmer of Vietnam, who are also referred to using this term.

(2.) "Lost territories" refer to the territories that were surrendered to Siam's historical enemies, including the Burmese and the European colonial powers. Thongchai argues that maps of the "lost territories" were instrumental in constructing the idea of Siam (and later, Thailand) as a bounded geo-body that needed to be protected from external threats (Thongchai 1994, pp. 151-52).

(3.) A description of the Fine Arts Department's role in formalizing and refining the costumes and choreography of the roam anre folk dance in 1941 during the Phibun period can be found on the Surin National Museum's website, at the following link: <[http://www.finearts.go.th/surinmuseum/parameters/km/item/\[TEXT NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII\].html](http://www.finearts.go.th/surinmuseum/parameters/km/item/[TEXT NOT REPRODUCIBLE IN ASCII].html)>.

(4.) Author's interview, Phongsai Thonglo, Muang Municipality, Surin Province, 23 June 2003.

(5.) The compound adjective--di ngam--combines the word good (di) with the adjective for refinement or beauty (ngam). Therefore the phrase wathanatham thi di ngam implies cultural forms that are aesthetically beautiful and refined. However, as the Thai anthropologist Dr Paritta Chalermpong Koanatakool has noted, to translate wathanatham di ngam as "beautiful culture" would be to exaggerate the aesthetic value, since ngam refers more to a moral rather than physical quality (personal communication, 14 October 2014).

(6.) This topic is beyond the scope of this article, but see Denes (2006, 2012).

(7.) In 2013 I attended workshops and public forums in Bangkok about the Thai national ICH list and the ICH draft bill.

(8.) While progress on the Thai ICH bill was stalled during the period of political conflict that overtook Thailand between November 2013 and the military coup of 22 May 2014, on 9 September 2014 the Ministry of Culture held an official event to announce the sixty-eight new items that had been added to the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage. During this meeting Chai Nakhonchai, director-general of the Department of Cultural Promotion, stated that the bill would soon be submitted to the cabinet for approval, with the intention that Thailand become a signatory to the UNESCO ICH Convention soon thereafter.

(9.) The term dangdoem connotes the idea of the original or authentic version of a practice, and is used widely in asserting claims of authenticity.

(10.) Researchers found that kantrum was taught in twenty-five schools in Surin, fifteen schools in Buriram and nine schools in Srisaket, representing nine per cent of the total number of survey respondents (535 schools) (Saowapa and Anan 2011, p. 83).

(11.) Author's interview, Lon Ngamrahong, Chok Village, Surin Province, 21 February 2014.

(12.) Author's field notes, Khwao Srinarin District, Surin Province, 1-5 July 2013, 11-17 August 2013 and 20-24 February 2014. The Department of Cultural Promotion began the process of inventorying and listing ICH in 2009, several years before the announcement of work on the draft ICH law.

(13.) Author's field notes, Khwao Srinarin District, Surin Province, 20-24 February 2014. This lack of awareness could not be attributed to Khwao Srinarin's distance from Surin's provincial administrative offices, as it is only twenty kilometres from the provincial centre. Moreover, the district is recognized regionally for both its traditional and popular kantrum artists, including the deceased legendary kantrum prayuk performer Darkie and other well-known groups such as Phon Isan and Keltar (which means "heritage" in Khmer). However, I did meet one kantrum performer who knew about the listing as a result of her celebrated status as a kantrum dangdoem performer and the fact that she lived in a village officially recognized by the state as "a cultural village" because it was the birthplace of the first national kantrum artist, Khru Pin Disom. Seeking an explanation for this lack of public awareness of the listing from an officer in the Department of Cultural Promotion, I was told that the ethnomusicologist from another province in the Northeast who had been contracted to undertake participatory field research on kantrum as a follow-up to the 2012 listing was delayed by other commitments. I later learned that he had organized one half-day meeting with a handful of kantrum artists and local academics at the Surin Ratchaphat University in the provincial centre.

(14.) Author's interview, Ekaphap Phadphano, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 21 February 2014.

(15.) Author's interview, Sarot Jaransethino, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 20 February 2014.

(16.) Author's interview, Lon Ngamrahong, Chok Village, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 21 February 2014.

- (17.) Author's interview, Net Nang, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 24 February 2014.
- (18.) Author's interview, Ping Chingchai, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 22 February 2014.
- (19.) Author's interview, Phon Isan, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 24 February 2014.
- (20.) Founder's spirits refer to the original spirit owners of the land where a settlement is established. For further discussion of founder's cults in Southeast Asia, see Tannenbaum and Kammerer (2003).
- (21.) Field notes, Khao Sawai Mountain, Surin Province, 1 May 2003.
- (22.) Field notes, Phanom Rung Historical Park, Buriram Province, 2 April 2011.
- (23.) Author's interview, Wanchana Duangsi, Khwao Sinarin District, Surin Province, 24 February 2014.
- (24.) Ibid.
- (25.) Critics of kantruem prayuk I encountered included teachers and some parents of female students who were recruited as backup dancers. Another vocal critic of kantruem prayuk was an ethnic Khmer language-rights activist based in Surin.
- (26.) Author's interview, Nam Phueng Muang Surin, Surin Province, 1 July 2013.

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