BURYING BOEUNG TOMPUN:
LIVING IN THE WAY OF DEVELOPMENT

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A Project
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
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by
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DEDICATION

This photographic work is dedicated for those who are living in uncertainty along the shores of Boeung Tompun as forces outside of their control shift and shape their lives. I am forever grateful for the willingness to share their life and experiences with me. I hope this body of work provides new visual narratives to help explain the lives of those who generally are not heard from on major platforms.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair Professor Jackie Bell, Doctor Cynthia Frisby, and Professor Brian Kratzer for their support and guidance throughout this master’s project. I have learned so much from these three as I went through this process and am so thankful for their constructive and supportive feedback throughout my years on campus. I am grateful for how they have helped me grow as a photojournalist and person.
Story Summary

Burining Boeung Tompun is a photographic essay that examines daily life of residents at Boeung Tompun, a freshwater lake in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Boeung Tompun is currently being filled in with sand and those who live around the lake are uncertain about their future. Since the 2000s, economic growth in Cambodia has continued to elevate each year. As Cambodia continues to develop economically, the way of life within the capital city of Phnom Penh is shifting. These photographs are visual references aims to be a way of understanding what is lost as urban development reshapes the capital city of Cambodia.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2012, I arrived in Cambodia to work for the United States Peace Corps. For the next two years, I worked as an English teacher in a small village in rural Cambodia and developed many relationships with the place and people. I also gained intimate insight into daily life in Cambodia and became passionate about visual storytelling. As a Peace Corps volunteer I was exposed to the themes that permeate the majority of images of Cambodia that wider audiences see. I started to realize that the visual narratives of the country were limited and that more nuance was needed in photography of Cambodia. I saw my graduate project as an opportunity to contribute a differing visual narrative.

For my graduate professional project, I photographed the development at Boeung Tompun and those impacted by this transformation. The signs of the development in the area are the recently completed Hun Sen Boulevard, the Mercedes Benz Dealership, the International School of Phnom Penh, and sand being pumped into the lake. The large-scale development is the first phase of the ING satellite city, which is set to be built upon the area that Boeung Tompun currently inhabits. The present situation at Boeung Tompun offers an opportunity to create a visual reference of daily life at a location that will be lost to development and to reconnect with a country that inspired me to be a photojournalist.

In the past, when freshwater lakes have been filled in, foreign journalists tend to photograph the peak moments of evictions, relocation, and protests. These images are evocative and essential, but they leave a lot of context out. Arriving at
Boeung Tompun ahead of the displacement allowed me to create images that widen the narrative about the impact of development and produce visuals that speak to the daily life of those who have to wait in uncertainty as development nears.

Photographing at Boeung Tompun fits my career goals as a photojournalist. I am interested in cross-cultural photography, reconstructing narratives, and the impact of location on communities and individuals. Through my time in Phnom Penh during this project, I gained first-hand experience of all of these interest areas and document a community and location that will be changed (or completely lost) in the near future.

After completing my master’s project, the importance of quality research and planning was apparent. Also, I now personally understand the amount of dedication a long-term project takes. This project also educated me on the intensity of working internationally as a photojournalist, the sensitivity needed in order to achieve trust within a community that is not your own, and the importance of patience. As I look over my finished photographic work, I am encouraged to continue documenting life at Boeung Tompun. I believe that the time between now and inevitable transition offers ample amount of room to photographic the daily stories that take place at the lake.
CHAPTER TWO: FIELD NOTES

Field Notes #1 – August 14, 2017

Hello all,

I hope everyone is having a great summer and ready for another academic year. My summer has been filled with some twists. I ended up working for National Geographic Student Expeditions throughout all of July. I was a trip leader and helped educate high schoolers and drive around a few large vans to all sorts of places. This filled my entire July with work, but it also delayed a portion of my MA project. I’ve wrapped up these summer expeditions a week and a half ago and have been getting back into project mode.

During this summer, there are also developments from Cambodia. The White Building is currently being torn down. Eviction has taken place already, which has shifted the focus of project location...

After doing research, I’ve shifted my focus to Boeung (Lake) Tompun. Boeung Tompun is one of the largest freshwater lakes (2600 hectares in size) in Phnom Penh. The lake is located in the southern part of the city. Like the White Building, the area is an affordable place to live and is still close to the city center. Boeung Tompun is also a natural water filtration system and also helps mitigate floodwaters during the monsoon season.

The lake has been under development for the past 5 years, but this has not moved too quickly. The finished product (once the lake is completely filled) is supposed to be the ING City development. A portion of the lake has been filled in
with sand, but there is still a large area filled with water and water based plants (morning glory and others) that are essential for many of the families’ livelihood. Some of the homes are built next to the water and some of the homes are built above the water (on stilts). The communities around the have dwindled some as development moves forward and the water gets ever more polluted (the area operates as one of the water filtration “systems” in the city).

Sangkeum Teang Tnaut (NGO) published a document on the 13 communities that have faced eviction or are fearful of eviction. This document provides names of the communities, estimated amounts of families and the current eviction status. This document will provide a starting point. Also, I’ve contacted this NGO and will be meeting with one of their project directors when I arrive.

The communities at Boeung Tompun are in danger of losing their homes and also will lose their livelihoods, which are based around the lake. Since many of the residents do not have formal land registration documents, there is a smaller chance that they will be compensated fairly. There has been a push in the recent years to mobilize these communities to get their documents in order.

In addition to reading the local news, I’ve talked with some journalists who operate in Phnom Penh and the basic consensus from the articles and the emails with local journalists is that there is still limited information on the development. The new construction of a large road (Hun Sen Blvd) is slated to increase the rate of development. Also, they think that the development of this lake may be similar to the development of another freshwater lake, Boeung Kak. This lake was filled in 10 years ago and nothing really has happened yet.
I know I just put out a bunch of new information, but the core of the project remains the same. I am focusing on a community that is being pushed out due to development. The scene is quite different and there is a bit more ground to cover (the lake area is rather vast), but the project holds onto the same focus as before and obtains a vein of environmental photography.

As for the research, I have spoken with Mary Beth Meehan, Charles Fox, Peter DiCampo, and Erika Larsen about doing interviews.

Mary Beth and I have been emailing for months, but we were both busy at different times. We emailed on Friday about a possible time to do the interview. Charles is based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and we will do ours in person when I arrive. Peter and I are looking to doing our interview sometime this weekend or early next week. Erika is currently in Peru on vacation and tentative on if we will have time to chat. I only planned to have three interviews, but I figured it would be best to have four possible options. I am hopeful to have two of the interviews done before I land in Cambodia, but that is up in the air as of this moment. Because the interviews are going to be conducted over Skype, I may finalize this component while in Cambodia.

I know that this was a long Field Notes, but the future Field Notes will be coming in the below format...

1.) Weekly highlights: what important events occurred? How did I progress?
2.) Work issues: Was there anything that stood out? Anything tough to discuss?
3.) Research progress
4.) Goals for the next week.

Current timeline:

August 21 - Leave for Cambodia - Field Notes #2
August 22 - Land in Cambodia
August 28 - Field Notes #3
Sept. 4 - Field Notes #4
Sept. 11 - Field Notes #5
Sept. 18 - Field Notes #6
Sept. 24 - Field Notes #7/Begin trip back to U.S.

Field Notes #2 – August 22, 2017

Hello all,

I hope all is well with the new school year kicking off. Nice work with the eclipse. I appreciate the feedback on how to narrow down the topic. I do agree that finding a family that fits the theme of the pressing eviction and the process of this is the best avenue to explain their experience and tell the story in a more cohesive way.

Also, I think an equally thorough addendum makes a lot of sense and I will be working on that too.

Weekly Highlights

I conducted my interview with Mary Beth and it went very well. She offered a ton of great input on how to best operate as I delve into this project and sent some articles that she thought would be helpful.
I am meeting Charles Fox (another interviewee) in the next couple of days in Phnom Penh and I am trying to schedule the interview with Peter DiCampo by the 26th.

Issues

Nothing yet. I am a bit tired from the long flights (one more 3.5 hour flight till I land in Phnom Penh).

Research Progress

I have started working on some transcribing of “highlights” from my conversation with Mary Beth.

Goals for next week:

- Conducted Peter and Charles’ interviews
- Met with the director of the NGO that works in Boeung Tompun
- Visited Boeung a few times at different times of day to photograph the scene
- Met with local leaders near the lake and worked to establish a working relationship in various communities

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Field Notes #3 – August 29, 2017

Hello all,

Well, it has been nearly a week in Cambodia and I am finally beginning to feel settled in. I’ve spent a bit of time just navigating the place and becoming more comfortable in the city again. Phnom Penh has drastically changed (size wise) and I
am relearning the location again.

I've also been working a lot on gaining contacts for fixers, translators, transportation, and NGOs. This has gone fairly well, but it has taken some time to sort everything out and meet everyone.

I met with Saran, STT’s executive director this past Friday and things went well. They thought that they would know families that would be open and also fit many of the themes that seem to be jumping out for this story. I am meeting with one of STT’s staff tomorrow morning and going out to the lake with them. I’ll be posting the selects to the first week gallery of images from this experience.

I’ve finished up Mary Beth’s transcript and I’ll attach that to this email. I met with Charles Fox and we were going to do the interview on Sunday, but some work came up for him. We are meeting on the 3rd of September. Some notes on Charles - he has been working/living in Cambodia on and off for the last 13 years. He has mainly operated out of Phnom Penh. He works with many Cambodian journalists in the area. He teaches part time at a University in London (can't remember which at the moment). He started this project called Found Cambodia, which is creating an archive of family photographs and other photographs that were taken before the Khmer Rouge and after. It is examining sociocultural changes, etc. Interesting stuff and it has received quite a bit of funding from his university.

I have been in contact with my third interviewee, Peter, but we just haven’t found a good time (due to the time difference).

**Cambodia is in a bit of an odd state for journalism at the moment. One of the English papers is being shut down because of back taxes that were never collected**
by the government and a load of radio stations are being shut down too. Also, some of the NGOs that are focused on democracy, free speech, etc are being hindered by government actions.

Field Notes

*There are some images of the construction on Boeung Kak, which was the largest freshwater lake in Phnom Penh, but was filled in a few years ago and has since been a major site of development.

Weekly Highlights:

Seeing the lake. Boeung Tompun is an interesting site. The lake is vast and has a lot of farming still going on in it, but the impact of development is clear to see. It is just on the edge of Phnom Penh and this provides a nice backdrop of the city paired with the foreground of the lake. Visiting with STT was also helpful for meeting community members that are open to discussing their lives and were willing to listen to my proposed idea.

Some of the images you will see in the selects are from the dunes that run along Hun Sen Blvd, which is a recently (nearly) finished road that runs 10 km. This road has a ton of action during the evening, when families and friends come out to have dinner and drinks by the lake. It was a complete surprise to see this dynamic.

Meeting with STT. Saran provided a wealth of information and more articles for me to read. He helped set up a trip out to the lake, which will take place tomorrow morning.
Contacts - I’ve been able to meet both foreign and Cambodian journalists, which have offered a lot of insight into working in Cambodia as a photographer and some tips for staying safe and creating good work. The STT staff that I worked with were really helpful and offered more help if needed. I think that I will pursue an independent translator/journalist for a bit, but if I run into issues I know I have help from STT.

Getting comfortable - I honestly didn’t think it would take this long, but there was a moment yesterday that I finally felt more comfortable and "with it". I’ve felt a bit overwhelmed, but am finally feeling ready to take things on.

Issues:

Starting out slow. I’ve really been working on patience and letting things develop naturally. Spending time in the area of the lake is really exciting, but I still haven’t felt connected to it yet. I think that will come within the next week or so.

Research Progress:

Mary Beth’s interview highlights have been transcribed. Meeting with Charles on the 3rd.

Goals for next week

- Meet with journalist/translator and discuss project and about working together
- Conducted Peter and Charles’ interviews
- Vist Boeung Tompun communities again and spend more time with the families that I met.
-Focus on identifying possible subjects for more in-depth work

Field Notes #4 – Sept. 4, 2017

Hello all,

I hope everyone is doing well. I am heading out to village that I used to live in while in Peace Corps for a couple days. I think it will be a good “space” to sort of mull over these past weeks and when I return I’ll hit the ground running for the second half of my time in Phnom Penh.

Update:

I returned to the dunes, but there were far less people. I approached one younger couple and we were talking for a bit, but they were a bit shy when I asked to take some photos. However, I do like the sunset images of the pump station (where they are pumping the sand into the lake) and also the wide/overalls of the
water/sand mixture draining into the lake. I did bring out the 70-200 the second time I went to the dunes. I am carrying a flash (2).

Things with STT went well. They provided a couple good contacts. I have been drawn to one family in particular. I’ve already made some portraits of two of the ladies that I have spent the majority of my time with. There is a third generation of women that are just kids at the moment, but I think I’ll make a portrait of those two gals too.

Srey Whin is the younger daughter of Phal. Phal lived in the village before the Khmer Rouge and returned to the village afterwards. Srey Whin has lived in the village her whole life. They both have been interviewed/recorded (I will have them translated soon) and I will continue to work with their family when I return to Phnom Penh at the middle of next week. One very interesting thing was Phal said that there wasn’t too much wrong with the village and she didn’t want to leave it, but she also wouldn’t say that she wanted development to stop. Srey Whin, more candidly, said that there were issues with domestic violence, the use of crystal meth, and students not attending school regularly. I discussed this with Soumy (the translator) and he thought that this different viewpoint could be from education differences between the mother and daughter and also that the mother lived through genocide and how could those things compare.

One thing that has jumped out to me as I spend time in the village is the micro development that is taking place. People are adding to their houses, others are adding more space for parking cars, etc. In addition, the entire village (with the help of organizations) is building a small road from old construction debris. This
jumped out at me as a possible link between the macro development, which is very clear on the other side of the lake. I think what draws me to this is that there is this narrative of bad development, bad development, which I understand. However, there is also the natural process of development, which is needed for any country to move forward and elevate itself. I think it is interesting to have the three-generation of gals as sort of these human markers on this development and all that. Just an idea that has sort of been bouncing around in my head.

Weekly Highlights

Returning to the village on my own. It was great to go with STT (and they definitely helped locate people and give me the lay of the land), but everyone who is affiliated with an organization/newspaper/gov. has a reputation and it was nice to come without anyone else representing me but myself. Also, I think everyone became more comfortable as we talked in Khmer.

Putting together a wider edit of images that begin to show what “I have” for the story and what gaps are in the themes that I’ve found from reading news articles/research and talking to the residents. I am planning to make prints after the next time I shoot to show to the family to talk about what I have been seeing. (I’ve attached a screenshot of some images that I have liked for one reason or another).

Soumy - He worked with me the other day as a translator. He is currently working for the Cambodia Daily, but that is the newspaper that is being shutdown on Monday. His grandparents actually hosted a Peace Corps volunteer, so he has been extremely welcoming and his journalistic instincts are solid. I think he is also
personally interested in the topic, which definitely comes across in how he interviews.

Issues

Access into the house. I am optimistic this will come and I will have a few photographs of the family during a meal, but this just hasn't happened yet, which doesn't surprise me since Cambodians spend a lot of time on their front porch/areas.

Confining the complexities of the story. I’ve continued to learn more and more as I spend time in the community and find more research on the topics that relate to the community, which in turn expands the story. Also, I find myself photographing in this sort of story/essay hybrid, where I bridge the two in order to tell a more macro story of what is happening at the lake(near the development) and then I am working to get closer to the family to gain a more intimate perspective on the daily life.

I don’t know if this qualifies as an issue, but I saw a drowned kid the last time I was at the village. The child was about 5 years old I found out and his family had only been near the lake for 1 year (and many Cambodians do not know how to swim). The family has since returned to Takeo Province for the funeral and I am guessing they will stay there for sometime. I made a couple images of the gathering (there was a crowd surrounding the boy as his father tried to revive him) which you can see in the selects for week 2. I didn’t know this was what they were gathering around, but when I saw the boy, I just couldn’t photograph anything. I was so
shocked and it just felt... off. I had read that this was an issue in the village, but then it was right there. I am still trying to grapple with how this alters my view of the story, because I am working to find a way to acknowledge the risk of the water/location/etc.

Research Progress

I met with Charles and that went really well. Peter and I’ve scheduled a Skype session on the 7th. I’ll create a reference of these interviews after they are conducted and post them to the next field notes.

Goals for next week

- I am working to get on one of the small boats in the lake, when a person is working.
- Photograph a few more portraits of the family members and interview one of the youngest family members to get that perspective.
- Going later in the evening/early in the morning.
- Have Soumy transcribe the situations.
Hello All,

I apologize for the slight delay on this. I have recovered from a significant head cold.

Some updates from Cambodia. The opposition party leader, Kem Sohka, was imprisoned a week or so ago. His arrest and the closing of the Cambodia Daily are steps in a more authoritative control by the government. There still is free press in Cambodia, but it is being constrained. The US embassy just came out with an announcement saying Sohka should be freed and that the US gov. has not been here to stir up any political trouble.
That being said, I haven’t felt or experienced any sort of pressure as of yet. It does seem that the community and individuals I have been working with are a bit weary at times.

Weekly Highlights:

• Finishing up the interviews and transcripts (attached).
  ◦ These two gave interesting and complimentary interviews in a lot of ways.
• Finding someone fishing near the sand pipes
• Finding a birthday party taking place near the lake
  ◦ Bonus - The fish you see is a fish from the lake, which is also cooked with vegetables from the lake. Some nice connective tissue between the two components.
• Getting out on a boat.
• More interviews with community members. This has helped learn more about the community and the impact of living there. I envision some of these interviews becoming block quotes that can be paired with images to help provide information.

Difficulties:

• Looking at Jackie's advice about people not just doing things, but who they are... this has been more difficult. I think this week has been a bit more of the “people doing things”. I think more time is the answer.
Research Progress:

• Charles and Peter both gave interesting and informative interviews. I think the three interviews offer a wide variety of cross-cultural work and an interesting discussion on portrayal and how to work as a photojournalist in cross-cultural settings.

• I am working on the addendum portion and the professional analysis bits of the project. I spent more time these past few days on them (because of the cold).

Goals for Next Week:

• More daily life shots of the village and working to pull back another layer or two.

• More revealing images of people.

• Photographs that begin to fit the story together.

  ◦ ex. The fish/vegetables served at the b-day party are from the lake and being served next to it.

  ◦ I feel like I have quite a few of the pieces in place or going in that direction.

    I think images that start to piece this essay into a digestible fashion will be important.

Just a note for some of the images: the portrait of the mother and daughter needs a bit of explanation: when the daughter was really young, she almost drowned behind their house. They took the daughter to three hospitals and they pronounced her dead, but the fourth one they attended found that she was alive and claimed it was a miracle by God (they are Christians). This fits two components, the dangers of the
water, but also the feeling the families have now that there is a road, which makes travel safer for the children.

The house under construction demonstrates how the community continues to hold on to their location and hopes to make a better case for their permanency or at least a better case for more compensation when the time comes to move. Also, the man, who is building the house, said that it may be 3-4 years until they have to move, so it is better to have a better place to live during that time.

Also, the boy who is missing one finger lost it when he was picking scrap metal from near the house, which is a common thing that many of the kids do. In my mind, this image pairs with a similar detail shot of kids actually scrapping metal now.

I have found myself thinking in diptychs as of late. Sort of pairing images for both similarities and differences (I think Brian spurred something in me when he was talking of peaceful vs high energy images together).

Jackie, I am aiming to apply for December graduation. It looks like I can start this process prior to having my whole project put together. Does that sound right?
Field Notes #6 – Sept. 20, 2017

Hello,

I can definitely get all my final parts to you in early/Mid-November. I just sent my addendum off to a friend to read through it and give it a review. I’ll be working on the article a bit more soon.

I leave Cambodia the morning of the 25th, so I have about 4 more working days out in the field, which will be spent at Prey Takong 1.

For the portrait bits, They were definitely a way of breaking the ice and it was sort of what they (the subjects) expected out of me. Portraits is the common way that photographers work here. They do portraits, pair this with the story they tell and post that in the paper or on an NGO article. I still think there are a couple portraits that I would like to include in the project. Maybe the main characters will have their portraits or something.
I’ve focused on one family, but it is a rather large family, there is the matriarch, Phal, who is the older woman (I have a portrait of her). I’ve also been working with Phal’s kids - Phearun, Sreyno & Srey Whin. Phearun and Sreyno are the two that are building the houses side by side.

I have struggled to focus completely on this family, because they really don’t move around the space of the village too much and without leaving the village the images wouldn’t be able to show the development happening just across the lake. Phal & Srey Whin left town to head back to a different province for the holiday (the last 4-5 days) and they are returning today. During that time, I focused on Sreyno and Phearun and the area near the birthday party.

I think Phal and her three kids would be my main characters and a sprinkling in of other characters/scenes. I think this can work with mindful sequencing.

Another one of my favorite scenes was the family at the lake. I just came upon them as I went to talk to the family that put on the birthday party. I photographed them and they were very open to it in this public space. This interaction of the family with the lake is important and definitely shows the impact the space has on the lives of those who live around it - it provides food and enjoyment. Honestly, this is the sort of thing that I am so interested in with this story - how a space/place impacts the well being of the people that live there and what they do to make their lives the best they can.

A component that I still don’t think I’ve photographed the best is the building of the road from rubble from Phnom Penh. I think this community driven project is a great example of how life continues onward and how the community is really
working to make the best of their situation. A nice shot of the dump-truck with the load of debris and the young boys climbing up it is something I’ve seen but haven’t made the best photograph of.

The dangers of the lake have really been hard to find visually. The drowned boy was an obvious one, but I was so in shock I really lack anything that truly displays this.

Also, a lot of the newspaper articles/NGO articles talk about how there are less and less fish in the lake, but I have asked people when they are cooking fish if it is from the lake and they tell me yes. I have also seen multiple people fishing in the lake too. Also, the flooding has really only happened twice since I’ve been here and it never was an issue in the area of the village. The city center does flood, but the area near the lake really hasn’t. Overall, the environmental impact/dangers isn’t something that I have been able to see visually.

One danger that seems to be present, but I haven’t come across is the use of drugs. This is not an issue that is just in this area, but the use of meth and heroin is running rampant in Phnom Penh and Cambodia as a whole. Many Cambodians (in the village and outside of it) will talk about the use and how it is impacting the city, but they talk about it as if they are outside it and it is limited to a certain sort of person.

I think I’ve covered the questions and am happy to answer any others that may come up.
Field Notes #7 – Sept. 27, 2017

Hello everyone,

This is coming a couple days late. I started writing it when I was packing up my things in Phnom Penh, but my brain space was just not there. I do appreciate all the feedback throughout my time in Cambodia and I am looking forward to bringing this all together.

First, I’ve attached the addendum piece for the project. Let me know if there are other changes or additional information that should be added.

Second, the project wrapped up in a very positive manner. I went to Prey Takong 1 the day before I left with Soumy. I brought images of the family and a few of the other community members that worked with me throughout the month. Soumy basically reexplained everything about the project and the reason why I was there. The family didn’t have to many questions, but it really felt like having Soumy explain everything again helped clarify everything. I felt that the family and I left on good terms (they offered to join me when I depart the airport) and they were understanding of my work and their portrayal within it.

Third, I’ve begun to the process of whittling down into a larger edit that I look forward to creating contact sheets and printing out. I will be going through a wide edit today, creating a separate gallery of the images and I'll pass the link on after that.

Fourth, I still haven’t finished the professional analysis yet, but I am hoping to make more progress on that today/tomorrow.
Jackie, I would definitely appreciate a Skype session sometime soon(ish). I know CPOY is already in gear, but maybe there will be a good time to chat for a bit after I put a wider edit together. Thoughts?
CHAPTER THREE: EVALUATION

I am proud of the photographic work that came from my time in Cambodia. I believe that these images are a visual reference of daily life that will be lost to urban development at Boeung Tompun. I also believe that my research can offer insight to anyone interested in bettering their cross-cultural photography. I do hope this work is able to educate others as much as this project has educated me.

From the fieldwork, I learned about what it takes to plan and execute a large project. I had to manage the logistics, research the topic, contact possible fixers and translators, look for funding, balance my expenses, and perform my photojournalistic work. After navigating all of the logistical and planning portions of this work, this project taught me to listen more intently and to channel the information I was receiving from those who live at Boeung Tompun into images that depicted their personal experience. This pushed me to be self-reflective on what I was seeing and work to remove my own visual preconceptions.

This project also reminded me that many things are out of our control. During the third week I was in Cambodia, there was a major Cambodian holiday, which significantly slowed the project for a few days. The family I was working with traveled to a neighboring province to visit their relatives and only a couple family members remained behind to look after the houses. This lesson demonstrates that the story is only ours to document if we are at the right place at the right time and our subjects allow it.
There were also societal and political changes that impacted the project. *The Cambodian Daily*, a newspaper that has operated in Cambodia since 1993, was closed under financial pressure from the government. Other radio stations and nongovernmental organizations also received pressure to stop their work. These signs demonstrated that the government was actively restricting free speech and voices critical of the current government throughout Cambodia. Operating as a journalist during this time called for more caution than I had expected initially. However, as the project advanced, I realized that this restriction of free speech and criticism demonstrates the importance of journalists working in Cambodia.

The most important lesson for me from this project was learning to quell my internal thoughts and let the experience happen. Early in the project, I had a bit of self-doubt as I tried to wrap my head around the project. There were times when I would question my work before I even started photographing that day. Sometimes this slowed me down and made me not want to leave my guesthouse room. However, I continually found that once I was out on my way to the lake community I would relax and quit second-guessing myself. Being able to quiet the internal voices was an important step in putting myself in a position to start making important and effective imagery.

If I could improve my photographic work it would be to gain more access into different situations and dynamics while working at Boeung Tompun. In the final days of my fieldwork, I felt there were fewer boundaries in place and that a feeling of familiarity had developed. The images that came from my last week are also some
of the most interesting ones. To me, these images reveal more information about the situation that I was documenting and demonstrate a closer look at daily life.
CHAPTER FOUR: PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Please refer to the Media Folder and find enclosed the .PDF file Burying Boeung Tompun: Life in Line of Development. Per discussion with committee chair Jackie Bell the final book should be included as the Abundant Physical Evidence for the project.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

Throughout history, photojournalists have created iconic images while working with cultures different than their own. Even as the photo industry changes and access to photographic equipment spreads globally, many photographers still work in cross-cultural situations. In order to understand how photojournalists work cross-culturally in order to create representative imagery and not just perpetuate inaccuracies, I interviewed three photojournalists: Mary Beth Meehan, Charles Fox and Peter DiCampo. These three discussed issues with cross-cultural photography, benefits of this work and best practices to obtain the most accurate representation of their subjects.

All three of these photojournalists have photographed subjects who are outside their own culture in long-term projects and daily work. Peter DiCampo is an American documentary photographer and a co-creator of Everyday Africa, a collection of cellphone images across the African continent. This assortment of imagery aims to develop a more complete visual portrayal of life in Africa. DiCampo focuses much of his work on international issues that cross borders and impact local and international communities. DiCampo aims to deconstruct the usual narratives and offer new narratives outside the norm (DiCampo, 2017). This is important to DiCampo because “If I just went to rural Africa and photographed misery, it’s like, what’s the point? It is the already common held idea, it is like, why bother?” DiCampo’s view on deconstructing the usual visual narrative developed from a trip to the Ivory Coast. During this trip, DiCampo and his fellow journalist, Austin Merrill
were working on a story about the post-election violence and cocoa trade’s impact (DiCampo, 2017). They noticed a difference between the photographs they made on their iPhones versus the photographs made with his professional camera. This dichotomy spoke to how DiCampo’s preconceived notions of the photographs that he had to make for the story were shifting what he would photograph with the professional camera. DiCampo explained that not only were the images different, but how he was thinking was entirely different. DiCampo and the Everyday photo projects are bringing a diverse set of voices into creating the visual narratives of different places, which allows for stories to be told from different perspectives. Each contributor is allowed to put their truth forward for others to see. “Truth doesn’t actually have a capital t,” DiCampo said. “We can call it objective journalism, but what we decided that is important in each situation is very subjective and is very dependent on our cultural backgrounds that we bring to the table. So, I think we have to acknowledge that.”

For Charles Fox, a U.K. and Cambodia based British freelance photographer and educator, the process of acknowledging one’s cultural background is a common occurrence. “I work cross-culturally, which is problematic and I question it all the time, because you should,” Fox said: “It’s not just questioning as a photographer it is questioning as a person engaging in a context that is not your own.” Fox focuses on the legacy of conflict and colonialism in long-term projects. This focus led to creating FOUNDCambodia, a not-for-profit digital archive of Cambodian portraits. The aim of the project is to create a visual history of Cambodia, both before and after the Khmer Rouge regime. Even with the long-term work in Cambodia and obsession with
understanding the place and people, Fox is still wary of how close he can get to understand it. “No matter what you know about a space or a context, you have to, you always have to remember that I am foreign to this space and there are boundaries or limitations to my understanding to this space,” Fox said.

The limitations to understanding a space encourages Mary Beth Meehan, an American freelance photographer and educator, to always assume that the people on the ground are the experts of their own lives and their own situation. “We journalists used to think that we were the experts and we used to go out and use the community to make the points that we wanted to make,” Meehan said. Meehan’s way of thinking shifts the power dynamic of a photojournalist and subject and allows for the community being photographed to have more power in the way the narrative is shaped. Her goal is to create connections between people, to raise questions about divisions and to inspire curiosity and empathy. In order to create representative images, she spends much of her time with subjects talking and asking questions. This allows for a space where she can just listen and learn. “You identify your themes, you go back into the community and say this is what I am interested in and ask the community if this is what they would say the main issues are,” Meehan said (personal communication, Aug. 21, 2017), “and then ask, who could tell me about that. This is my sketch, what do you think of my sketch? They will tell you if you are pushing something. Let the community help you amend your understanding of the place and photograph what they tell you is important.” This process takes time and an ability to go back to the people that you are working with.
Time is an important thing for all three of these photographers because it allows for an opportunity to learn, to go back and be confident in what you are saying. DiCampo sees major merit in going back, “You could stay for one hour or twelve hours, but just because it is the first point of contact, it isn’t the duration of time that is going to make everything. Actually, when you leave and come back the next day or whenever it is, it actually shows you are invested in this and moves things forward leaps and bounds and allows people to let you into their life more.” Meehan agrees that time and being able to go back is a strong method when working cross-culturally. “You have to feel really good when you put something out there. Whatever you have said about it, you have to feel really good that you’ve spent enough time to stand behind it. And, sometimes that can happen quickly and sometimes, it takes a lot of visits back,” Meehan said. Fox also sees time as a way to understand the topic and examine other photographic work on the topic. “With experience, time and engagement, you understand what has been said and what hasn’t been said. You’ve seen it go on for a long period of time,” Fox said. DiCampo agrees that consuming a lot of media and reflection on what is not been shown is a good starting point.

Even before a photographer begins making pictures, there are opportunities to begin to understand the story. “What you can do is read enough,” DiCampo said. This allows for you to understand why the issue is important for the people that you will be photographing. Photojournalists can’t just look for situations that fit into their project, there has to be a reason why the community would want to be a part of the project. Meehan gets direct feedback from the communities she is
photographing to understand what issues are important and to be critiqued on her photography. “Cultivate advisors there. Let them look at your work,” Meehan said. This allows for the subjects to have a voice in the photographic process and explain their understanding of the imagery. Fox says understanding of a story comes from experience and observation. “You have to watch a culture and you have to watch a space and you have to understand and experience the country for what it is,” Fox said.

The danger in not understanding a culture is both a detriment to the people they are photographing and the photographer themselves. “It can’t be the white guy with three cameras and his seven press passes from his last seven conflicts, dropping into a space, and photographing the other,” Fox said. He believes there is a shift from this methodology and is thankful for it. Meehan recently felt her own preconceptions kicking in as she sat in all-Spanish church and realized she didn’t know what she was looking at or seeing. “I could feel all of my preconceptions, judgments, and assumptions kicking in,” Meehan said. DiCampo sees the lack of research or understanding as a sign that the photographer will just approach each assignment the same way and has a monolithic view of the world.

Although all three photographers understand the difficulty of photographing across cultures, there is a consensus that it can be done respectfully, representatively and with merit. “You go slowly. You’re careful. You learn,” said Meehan, “Let them (subjects) look at your work. Leave yourself open to critique by those who you photograph.” This process will allow for a truthful representation of
a people or community, which contributes to the greater conversation about a topic or place.

Being a part of the greater conversation is something Fox believes in as a photojournalist. “My perspective is different. Some people say if you are a foreigner you shouldn’t be there, but I am doing it from my perspective. Basically, we are talking along the same paths, but we are doing it in very different ways of communicating very different things,” Fox said. This different way of communicating brings different pieces of the story out to the viewers, which provides a more complete understanding. “I am a strong believer that stories need a marriage of insider and outsider perspectives. I think outsiders bring a critical eye that insiders might not have and, of course, insiders can contextualize things or just sort of understand the nuances in ways that an outsider cannot,” DiCampo said.

For many photojournalists, working across cultures is a daily occurrence. It is important to pay attention to how cultures are represented. This means that photojournalists may have to go a bit slower, spend more time, and listen deeper, but this is what photojournalism is about and where its strength is. The connected world is now able to provide photographs from those within a culture and those who are from another. This marriage of viewpoints will contribute to a more complete visual narrative and inform to a higher degree than ever before.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Evan Cobb

Professional Project Proposal, March 2017

The White Building

Introduction:

I plan to do my graduate professional project on the community living in the White Building, a historic building offering affordable housing in the center of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The White Building will be torn down in the future, but it has been two years since the initial plans to tear it down were announced. Relocating citizens of Phnom Penh is a common practice. In 2011, Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT), an NGO in Phnom Penh, identified 77 individual sites that have had evictions (Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, 2016). These evictions are commonly justified in the name of commercial development or beautification of the city. I plan to photograph the people who inhabit the White Building over an extended period of time and document the daily occurrences that happen within this vibrant and bustling community at the heart of the capital city. I will focus on the residents of the White Building and the building’s role in the residents’ lives. I aim to show the community that resides within the building in an effort to communicate what a society loses when development and money are put ahead of citizens. The result of this documentation will be a photo essay. In addition, I will interview professional photographers for my professional analysis component of this project.
The White Building, formerly known as the Municipal Apartments, was built in response to a need for housing in Phnom Penh in the 1960s. The population of Phnom Penh tripled from 370,000 to one million between 1953 and 1970 as King Sihanouk aimed to provide low-cost apartments for the urban population. The White Building was part of the Bassac Riverfront cultural complex, which was headed by Vann Molyvann. With 468 apartments, the building was officially opened in 1963 and was the first building to offer low and middle-income classes of Cambodians an opportunity to live in multi-story urban apartments.

The apartment building was evacuated during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the White Building began to regain residents and the community grew again. As years passed, the building has been at the mercy of time and limited upkeep. Currently, the White Building holds a stigma as a place of poverty, drugs, sex work, poor construction, and poor sanitation. However, the building also holds one of the city’s most vibrant and historic communities.

On September 3, 2014, the Phnom Penh City Hall called for the White Building to be destroyed. Since the first statement, there has been local pushback to preserve the building and the history it holds. Currently, local reporting is suggesting a Japanese investment company is still planning to purchase the area that the White Building sits upon, but the purchasing of the building and land is being held up at the moment. This plan is similar to other developments in Phnom Penh, where foreign investors demolish buildings and evict local residents for new development projects. In 2014, STT reported 29,700 Cambodian families have
experienced eviction or displacement from their homes in Phnom Penh since 1990. These evictions were justified for development purposes. In the same STT report, only 35% of the sites had been fully developed to a completed state. Some of these evictions, such as Borei Keila and Boeung Kak Lake, have received media attention. However, the outcome is similar. The residents of these communities are moved after the government signs a deal to sell the land and then “development” begins.

For the White Building, the building’s future is similar, with Japanese Investment firm Arakawa planning to move forth with the 80 million dollar deal to demolish the building and buy out the current residents. Those who live in the White Building believe their offer will be either a sum of money or an opportunity to have an apartment in the new building upon completion in four years. However, in past development deals, the developers have fallen short on promises and left hundreds of families without a home. Focusing on the White Building is a method of consolidating the story of the rampant housing crisis in Cambodia. This focus also allows for personal narratives to come through, rather than simply the facts and figures of the situation.

**Qualifications:**

The past four semesters in graduate school at the University of Missouri and the independent projects I have participated in have continued to develop my skills as a visual journalist. From Professor David Rees’ Fundamentals of Photojournalism to Professor Rita Reeds Picture Story and Photographic Essay class, I have come to
understand the methods and drive that are necessary to complete a large
photojournalism endeavor.

In the summer of 2016, I filmed alongside a fellow graduate student in
Orkney, Scotland, and we developed a project that shows the history and current
situation of the islands. The experience from this overseas project taught me to push
myself to find the thread that ties a story together and to become adaptable to work
in a variety of constantly changing settings.

During my graduate studies at the University of Missouri I worked as a
teaching assistant for Professor Jackie Bell and Professor Rita Reed. Working as a
teaching assistant demonstrates my ability to be responsible for myself and others
and an ability to convey knowledge from one person to another. Jackie Bell and Rita
Reed can both tell you how my professionalism and presence in class translated into
a better experience for the professors and the students.

Lastly, Cambodia was my home for two years (2012-2014) when I worked as
a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kampot Province. My work mainly consisted of teaching
English and developing teaching methods for other teachers at my rural high school.
I fell in love with the country as I spent a good portion of my time meeting and
sitting with the Cambodians in the village where I lived. This personal connection
also brought me close to the struggles each citizen is facing. I continue to check the
news to see what is happening in Southeast Asia. My time in Cambodia led to many
personal connections and knowledge of the native language, Khmer, which
demonstrates a strength not many American photojournalists have. Although I did
not live in Phnom Penh, I know the city quite well and am confident in obtaining access to the building through my contacts.

While living in Cambodia, I began to photograph the daily lives of those around me. I focused on the details, the people, and the places where few Americans have had eyewitness. At the time I didn’t realize this, but I was learning how to be a visual journalist. I would talk to people in the tiny villages about their lives. I would photograph them as they worked around their house, connecting with these individuals with my camera present. I’ve developed greatly as a visual journalist during my time in graduate school. The lessons learned have set me up to confidently pursue a career in visuals.

After completing my professional project, my goals for employment are not at a newspaper. Looking into the short-term future, it would be great to obtain a variety of clients that allow me to freelance editorial and commercial work in the greater Salt Lake City area, where I plan to move after finishing this semester. I’ve developed some business contacts through an assignment in Professor Bell’s Business Practices class. I am optimistic about making these assignments work and developing editorial contacts at larger publications looking for freelancers. Within two years, I hope to have established myself as an international visual journalist who is creating content in a wide variety of settings for both editorial and commercial clients. I am not ruling out working for a newspaper, but at this moment I do not see myself in that sphere of photography.

Five years after graduation, I hope to continue working for myself. By that time I would like to have my own studio for portraits and commercial assignments. I
would also like to see print sales increase from my international assignments and work. It would be a bonus if the professional work begins to fall more in-line with my personal aims for photography. Although a lot of this is far off, I believe that my commitment to the people I work with and for, my visual creativity, and my personality will all contribute to being able to reach my goals.

I own the photographic equipment necessary to create the visuals for the White Building Project. I will bring two camera bodies with a variety of lenses. I also have lighting equipment, stands, remotes, and other technical equipment. I am working on obtaining scholarships and grants to help fund my time while working on the project. I have applied for scholarships through MU: the photojournalism department scholarships and the Zoe Smith Scholarship. I also plan to apply for the McIntyre grant, which is the highest postgraduate award from the School of Journalism at MU. I am also looking outside the university for funds and will continue to apply to grants and scholarships through the process of this project.

Lastly, the overhead costs for this project include airfare, food, guesthouse, transportation in country, fixer fees, and other minor expenses. Luckily, Cambodia is a country with a relatively low cost for goods and services, which will allow my limited funding to go far further. Below, I have listed the costs for components of the project.

Airfare: $900-$1400
Food: $450
Housing: 450-$600
Transportation: $100
Fixer: $200-$400

**Project Dates:**

Research and contact building are already in progress for the White Building Project. Below are possible dates that act as guidelines for the future work:

Start Date: ASAP after approval

End Date: October, 2017

**Work Schedule:**

It is unknown when the White Building will be destroyed. It is better to head to Cambodia sooner rather than later. Tentative dates for this photographic project are August 20– December 10, 2017.

August 10-August 19: Planning meetings with contacts in Cambodia. Reach out to possible fixers to make sure all are still in Phnom Penh and able to help. Establish price for time. Book guesthouse stay. Clean equipment and prepare for flight.

August 20: Fly to Cambodia (+2 days)

August 21: Meet fixers and contacts at the White Building, begin photographing

August 21-28: Work with fixer to photograph within the building and make initial contacts. Identify small businesses located within the building.

August 29-Sept. 4: Bring prints to individuals and families that I wish to focus on in the White Building. Identify possible housing locations Cambodians from recent evictions have been displaced to. Examine for possible gaps in photography thus far. Make shot list for themes that have not been visually captured yet.
Sept. 5-Sept. 11: Finalize shot list and begin to close out project. Make selects on all images thus far and work to obtain interviews from individuals in the images.

Sept. 12-Sept. 17: Wrap up project and log all contact information for residents of the building, fixers, translators, etc.

Sept 18: Return to America

Sept 25-tbd: Transcribe interviews, highlight quotes, and build the text that will be a part of the visual project.

Oct 1-Oct. 8: Develop a rough edit of the White Building project. This edit will be digitally available to all committee members. Work to identify layout sizing and possible design options.


December 5: Travel to Missouri to defend professional project

**Work Description:**

The majority of the data will be a collection of images that will be presented in PDF layout and hardcopy photo books that are physical reflections of this digital layout. There will also be text in the layout that provides historical information about the White Building and quotes from subjects. The location of the work will be in the White Building in the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. It is a large apartment complex, which means a focus on particular people or locations within the building will help contain the project. I will aim to connect with residents that demonstrate the community of the White Building. The White Building offers a unique look at community. The Bassac buildings, the White Building is one of these,
allow for far greater access to neighbors than current buildings Virak Roeun, a young Cambodian architect said in a Southeast Asia Globe article (Knox, 2017).

Lastly, focusing on the community at this time is essential for comparison to what will inevitably come with the White Building (it will be torn down and the community will be displaced).

I will be working to cover the entirety of the space, from rooftop to the ground level and into people’s homes. I hope to find the locations where residents gather and identify how the residents share the space and what this shared space means. I plan to spend time with the residents of the White Building as they go about their daily lives and observe how the community of the White Building lives together. The external limitations of the building will be a way to control how far the story can expand outward for this portion of the work.

Developing a strategy for access to the depth that I desire is important before I arrive in country. I have already started contacting and connecting with individuals that are associated with or operate within the building. These “fixers” have been positive about my interest in the people and building and want to connect when I solidify dates and times. Also, my personal background of living in Cambodia for two years and understanding the language will also contribute to my ability to access the residents of the White Building. I do believe the fixers will be able to provide access to the building, but my greatest strength in this project is my ability to speak the language and being comfortable in this setting.

Thorough documentation of the people and what they are sharing about their community will be essential data collection for the final project design. Field notes
will help provide guidance along the way as to what is important to the residents and what is important for their representation. Although I am knowledgeable about Cambodia, I have never lived in the White Building. I do not know the intricacies of the building, but I will be able to ask about these from those who have lived there for decades. This insight will help shape how I photograph in the White Building.

Photographing is also an essential piece of data collection. I plan to focus on the community that lives within the White Building and the importance of location within the context of Phnom Penh. I will focus on the relationships between the people who operate within this building as well as the relationship the building has with their lives. Photographing within the building is essential for this understanding, as is developing a high level of trust within a short period of time to accomplish the goals of this project. Utilizing this access will begin to demonstrate a visual picture of the White Building that has not been seen in mainstream media.

To strengthen the project’s aim and feasibility, it is important to have outside input on the project development because this is the first large project that I am working on independently. First, I will be using my faculty committee for my master’s project as a check on my progress as well as an outside look at what is being created. This outside view will help me establish an idea of what is being communicated to those who are not walking around in the building and interacting with the residents. In addition, I may contact a Cambodian photographer who has worked at one of the English language newspapers to review my first edit in order to understand what they are drawing from the images.
After the completion of this photographic project in the White Building, I aim to utilize the images and stories to springboard a larger project that doesn’t just focus on the White Building community, but on the housing crisis that is taking place in Cambodia (Knox, 2017) and that is expected in the future. Having a body of work showing the people before an eviction will strengthen my applications for grants and opportunities to continue this work. Also, having the contacts in NGOs, locals, and fixers will help in future projects that bring me back to Cambodia.

**Potential Issues:**

The main challenges that I expect to encounter through the course of this project are from individuals’ motivations of the work. Utilizing fixers who also have a stake in the White Building is essential for this work, but this also means I have to be clear about my project. In addition, having a limited amount of time to work on this project in Cambodia will force me to make daily decisions on who, what, and where to cover. With feedback from my committee and self-reflection, I will aim to understand how I can best create a representative image of the community within the White Building.

Lastly, because of my location in the States, it will be a large effort to reach my destination to begin working. Being practical in the amount of time I can spend in the first few days on the project will help me avoid burning out or getting sick. However, once I am in Cambodia, the transportation situation will be greatly eased and access to subject matter should be nearly constant. Overall, I have spent a good portion of my life in Cambodia and believe the familiarization that has come with
this experience is going to be a great benefit for this project. I am confident I can overcome the project’s challenges and create an insightful and visually interesting body of photographic work.

**Dissemination of Work:**

For my analysis component, I aim to publish this in News Photographer magazine. I plan to use portions of the interviews and examples from the photographers’ work and my experience in Cambodia as the main components of the piece, and I aim to publish an article on how photographers can work most effectively across cultures. For my photographic work, I plan to self-publish the work through a photography book that highlights the history of the building, the possible future of the location, and the people who call the White Building home. I plan to leave my voice out of the majority of the project, other than the selected photographs and the quotes I draw from to compile the book.

I would also like to disseminate my photographic work to international publications. Possible outlets would be Mother Jones, the Atlantic, or CNN. It would also be wonderful to publish a photo essay and story hybrid at one of the local Cambodian newspapers.

**Provision of Abundant Physical Evidence:**

A PDF layout as a photo essay will be the first step for the physical evidence of this project. The photo essay will incorporate an estimated 25-40 images with text to explain the background of the White Building, the housing crisis in Cambodia,
and the stories of the subjects in the images. This will showcase the time invested and the scope of the work. Including the quotes and commentary from the subjects will add information that may lie outside of the images due to time constraints and also give a voice to those within the images.

Notes of edits, drafts, and interview transcripts from the photographers will be provided with the digital outakes (images that did not make the final edit). Interviews with the subjects will have direct translations done by a Khmer-English translator for important aspects of the interviews.

**Project Supervision:**

The supervision for this project will be mainly done from a distance. To communicate with the graduate committee, I will be posting a private blog as field notes. The field notes will serve as a way to include my committee on the highlights of the week, the issues that have developed, and the progress in project. Each field note post will incorporate goals for the upcoming week. The field notes will be an opportunity for my committee members to respond and add input into the process of this project in real time.

The information provided during this long-distance supervision will incorporate details of interactions, the subject photographed, the location within the building, and other information to help round out the scene and situation for the committee members. In addition, this information will help create a reference for me as I work through the project and if I need a reminder of a name or where someone lives.
The blog posts will be sent by email as a link to the committee members. The posts will be planned to come weekly. During the editing portion of the project, the blog will have selects from the edit and the reasons why particular images were chosen for certain themes, visual information, etc. Since the project will be condensed when in country, the field notes will be recorded daily but may be posted with a bit of a delay. The notes from the editing process will be created as the edit takes place and will be posted shortly after each editing session is completed.

Theoretical Framework for Professional Project

**Question: How do photojournalists construct an image of people when photographing across cultures?**

Photojournalists cover a diverse set of subject matter in their work. Often, photojournalists are making decisions on what aspects of a particular scene, topic, or person’s life to photograph. This decision comes from an understanding of the subject matter, what the story is about, and what the photojournalist is trying to say. Examining past research on framing and social identity theory will provide an answer to how photojournalists frame their coverage and how their social identities impact the photos in cross-cultural situations. This insight can begin to develop methods for emerging photographers wishing to photograph effectively, honestly, and respectfully across cultures.

Framing in the news, which aims to make some issues more important in people’s minds than others (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), takes place in each news article and image. These frames create a hierarchy of importance throughout the media if the message is consistent. Applying this understanding of framing
theory when interviewing international photographers about their work on cultures differing from their own will offer insight into the impact framing has on the visual work of photojournalists and how social identity impacts these photojournalists’ frames. In addition, these interviews may reveal how a photojournalist works to move past the obvious frames that may be presented. The interviews will be limited to photographers who have been working within different cultures for long-term projects in contemporary times. Having a variety of interviewees will allow for different perspectives on covering stories across cultures.

Due to the cross-cultural coverage in photojournalism, a review of literature on social identity theory and the effects this has on the news is essential for understanding where frames and agendas may develop when working across cultures. Social identity theory categorizes, identifies, and makes comparisons based off of the processes of stereotyping, group evaluation and social influence (Fishman & Marvin, 2003). This is a theory that operates in all our lives, but it is more important to understand when the person’s job is to portray someone outside of their in-group accurately and not misrepresent them due to the impact of social identity. Using this theory to develop questions for the interviews of the photojournalists, the answers may offer insight into actual methods or experiences the working photojournalists do in order to mitigate the impact of social identity.

Conducting these interviews and analysis will be beneficial for practicing journalists because it will offer examples of possible frames photographers have when photographing cross-culturally and how photojournalists work past these. Showing this process through the methods of proficient photojournalists that
photograph outside their cultural in-group can increase awareness to other journalists about their own frames and agendas that may be negatively affecting their cross-cultural photography. A photojournalist may encounter these theories actively or unknowingly, but the importance lies in how these theories directly impact the work created by photojournalists when photographing cultures different than their own.

**Framing Theory**

Framing theory takes place in each lens in two ways. Literally, the camera is a frame and only what is within the frame is what is captured. Figuratively, a photojournalist’s personal frame is the internal viewpoint into how a subject is seen by the photojournalist. The figurative frames of a photojournalist's worldview allow the person “to package it for efficient relay to their audiences” (Gitlin, 1980). This packaging for efficiency demonstrates how humans categorize media to make it easier to understand and easier to distribute. However, these frames are not the same for everyone. “Divergent news frames matter because they encourage distinct audience interpretations and lead to contrasting recollections of what took place (Entman, 2004). This divide then creates a different story depending on the frame of the person. The frame we use to understand the world is shaped by many things; for my research I will look at framing and how it is impacted by social identity

“The professional, cultural, and, as we suggest, national identity motivations of journalists influences their coverage of international events,” Sheets, Rowling, and Jones found in their research on the portrayal of drone strikes by the United
States in the news from US, British and Arab news sources. Sheets, Rowling, and Jones did acknowledge the findings that news reporting particularly reflects such ethnocentric biases in times of conflict (Gans, 1980). However, in less extreme conflict situations, such as the student protests on the University of Missouri-Columbia’s campus in 2015, scripted and stereotypical narratives were a potential factor that negatively impacted the visual coverage of the extended protest at Mizzou (Thomson, 2016). The scripted narratives come from a journalist’s previous understanding of the narrative of a particular story. It is our duty as journalists to not fall into our personal frames, but instead, ensure the opportunity for each subject to tell their story.

**Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory categorizes, identifies, and makes comparisons based off of the processes of stereotyping, group evaluation, and social influence (Fishman & Marvin, 2003). This takes place for each individual and impacts how they understand where they are in the world. This understanding impacts how the media portrays people. Herman and Chomsky (1988) made the argument that United States print media generally displayed incongruent messages when showing people punished by an enemy state and those punished by the U.S. The portrayals showed the U.S.’ punishment against a person without virtue and the opposite for when an enemy state punished someone. These findings begin to show how our social identity impacts how the news is framed.

In their research Jones and Sheets (2009) described the portrayal of news
surrounding Abu Ghraib. Their research explains that there is a divergence in how
the story is covered depending on the cultural context of the media outlet. This
study acknowledges there has been little attention to social identity in
communication theory until recently. However the researchers suggest journalists
are sensitive to the cultural and identity concerns posed when reporting across
cultures. Meanwhile, past research shows national identities continue to play a role
in foreign affairs reporting (Jones & Sheets, 2009).

The majority of research on the impact of social identity theory on
journalism comes from research analyzing large media organizations and not
individual journalists. For my research, it aims to understand how individual
journalists are photographing cross-culturally and working to create the most
accurate images of their subject matter. Understanding the relationship between
framing and social identity will help develop more informative questions for my
semi-structured interviews with the professional photojournalists.

Professional Project Method and Literature Review:

Methodology

I will be interviewing professional photographers about their documentary
work in cross-cultural situations to answer my research question, “How do
photojournalists construct an image of people when photographing across
cultures?”. To understand how social identity theory impacts these frames and the
resulting photographs, I will discuss and compare a variety of photographers’ work.
From these interviews a reader can eventually construct an idea about how
photographers work cross-culturally and develop their individual methods to create representative and honest photography of people who socially identify themselves different from the photographer.

The photographers I plan to interview will have published a project that incorporates a cross-cultural component not based around active conflict, which the photographer has worked on for more than a month of time. A good example would be the photography by Mary Beth Meehan or Randy Olsen.

The ability to produce rich and informative data sets (Fallon, 2008) efficiently is a key benefit for using semi-structured interviews as the research technique for this analysis. Semi-structured interviews are well suited to exploring attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives of the interviewee (Smith, 1975) and can facilitate a high degree of comparability by tailoring questions that ask the same thing to each individual participant (Barriball & While, 1994). Because I will be interviewing photographers with varying backgrounds, semi-structured interviews allows for opportunities of comparison by making sure all questions are answered (Bailey, 1987) even when respondents vocabulary may differ greatly. This ability comes from a degree of flexibility in how the questions are worded and understanding the answers through topics and themes. The interviews will be relatively informal and conducted via Skype due to logistic restraints. There will be consistent questions developed prior to the interviews, but I will be flexible during the interview to allow the interviewee to expand upon certain topics and answers. Questions are able to change and evolve as the interview takes place in order to best answer the posed questions.
Specific questions I hope to answer through the analysis of the photographers’ work are:

- What motivates the photographer to work cross-culturally?
  - How does a photographer pick a particular topic?

- How much research does the photographer conduct before starting a long-term project?
  - Where does the photographer gather the research?
  - What are the methods that the photographer uses to learn more about the topic/place/people/land/etc?

- Does the photographer acknowledge their specific point-of-view?
  - Do they acknowledge this point-of-view openly in the beginning of the project? And if so, how do they acknowledge it?

- How does the photographer find subjects in these new environments?
  - How does the photographer work to understand the subject’s story, and over what period of time?

- Does a photographer use different equipment when working on cross-cultural stories/projects?

- How much time does a photographer usually need to create representative images that are honest and revealing when photographing a social group different than their own?
  - How does a photographer decide when the story is representative?
• Are there differences in preparation for a project that is outside of one’s cultural vs. when the photographer is of the culture they are photographing?

When conducting the interviews with the photographers, it is important to frame the questions about their work in context of who the photographer is and their work’s focus. The interviews will be influenced by the past experiences and work of the photographer. Citing specific projects and images may allow for deeper conversations on the situation that these images came from and the photographer’s reaction. In addition, it will be important to understand the photographer’s background and the potential factors that could impact their work and influence their subject matter of choice. Beginning the interviews with background questions will help form an understanding on who the photographer is and where (culturally) they are coming from.

Taking into account the photographer’s background and experience will allow me to examine possible biases a photographer may have in their work. This most obviously will be in reference to social identity theory and understanding the social group the photographer comes from and the social group the photographer was covering in their project/s.

The images that were created during the photographer’s project/s will also be discussed and the methods of dissemination will be examined. Understanding where the images went after being created will provide insight into how the greater public received the work and how the photographer edited the work to best represent their aims of the project. How, when, and where the photography was
published is an important aspect to understanding the literal and conceptual frame that the work was being created in. Discussing the process of the project will provide insight into the ways a photographer works on a project with a focus on people outside of their social in-group. This will all be wrapped up by the conscience motives of a photographer for doing a specific project.

**Literature Review:**

**Framing & Social Identity**

Framing theory has been heavily researched historically and there has been rapid development in the theory since the 1960s. As mentioned earlier, framing is the process of selecting certain aspects of reality and giving these greater emphasis or importance, so that a problem can be defined, cause can be diagnosed, moral judgments are made, and actions can be proposed (Entman, 1993). Framing is located in four places in the communication process: the sender, the receiver, the information/message, and the culture (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). For this literature review, the focus is on the sender, the information/message, and the culture that it is created in. Observing these three places allows for a comparison cross-culturally of journalistic coverage of news events.

Currently, there is limited research on how media frames are impacted by social identity. Understanding the influence of social identity on a journalist and the storytelling frame is under-researched at the moment (Sheets, Rowling, & Jones, 2015). The majority of the research conducted focuses on media frames of different
publications around the world and less on how journalists are impacted when working across social identities.

Cantrell Rosas-Moreno, Harp, and Bachmann were interested in how the dominant American ideologies about identity would impact the covers of Time magazine during the U.S. war in Iraq. They found that “notions of power, gender, race religion and nationalism are framed in Time magazine covers in such a way that reinforces and circulates specific meanings and serves to define identities in narrow, hegemonic ways” (2013, pg. 15). They also found that white American males hold power, people of color fight the wars, females are mothers, and Iraqi males are radicals as well as the enemy of America (pg. 15). Finally, their findings demonstrate that identity ideologies were clearly embedded in the covers of Time magazine during the Iraq war and that the visual reality created via the cover images reinforces roles for identities.

Additional research conducted on the Iraq War (Yang, 2008) examined the framing techniques from newspapers in the U.S., China, and India during the 2003 Iraq War. This research found that the three presses studied were ethnocentric in covering the war for their respective readers. Yang highlights Schaefer’s research (2003) that suggests frames are more likely to be noticed and clear when similar news stories are compared side-by-side through different national media contexts. This demonstrates how our national identities impact the stories that are covered.

Fishman and Marvin (2003) contribute to the research on the impact of identity on the portrayals of groups. The researchers analyzed group membership of people who committed violent acts and types of violence on front-page
photographs from 21 years of The New York Times. After conducting the research, the authors confirmed their hypothesis: non-U.S. agents are seen as explicitly more violent than U.S. agents. This is consistent with the idea behind social identity theory and our tendency to support our social in-group and contribute negative information to cultural “others”. Fishman and Marvin also highlighted the importance of mass media and its ability to reach nearly all citizens all the time, which positions it in our society in a place of power to disseminate message about national identity and order (pg. 42).

A more recent study by Jones and Sheets (2009), continues to demonstrate the difference in coverage of international events depending on the cultural context (pg. 278). The result of the difference in cultures is a divergence in the narrative between the media outlets, which is dependent upon the nation that the media outlet is based within. The authors use Tajfel’s 1982 theoretical understanding of social identity theory to explain that our knowledge about how we belong to social groups impacts our identity. This past research also explains that any social identity of race, religious, ethnic, gender, and nationality all contribute to this common result of evaluating one’s in-group more positively than any out-group. The authors hypothesize that these identities impact how to report the news, because at a professional level, all journalists are creating stories within the cultural context they work in (Bennet & Edelman, 1985).

Although the majority of research has been done on large-scale issues comparing international coverage, Thomson (2016) focused on the impact of race when white photojournalists covered the 2015 protests at Mizzou. The author
performed in-depth interviews with the photojournalists, which found that collective identity played more of a role than interpersonal identity in the coverage. Thomson found that “surface-level coverage of race-related content happens when subjects are portrayed in groups, from a distance, from behind, without names, and with little context” (pg. 230). To get beyond this surface level coverage, photojournalists need to have more interaction with those they are covering and ask more questions about why the protestors were participating. Realizing that social identity and lack of exposure to different social identities hinderance on the news is essential for creating more in-depth coverage.

**Significance of Research**

Recent research demonstrates the importance of social identities on the news, but a more complete understanding of an individual’s identity impacting coverage is essential. The knowledge gained from this research will inform on methods of how to create more accurate representation of subjects in images when a photographer is working across cultures. Being able to address our own social identities impact on how we see the world is the first step in creating culturally inclusive images, rather than contributing to an otherness.

Utilizing the interviews with professional photojournalists, who have photographed long-term projects on cultures other than their own, will offer insight into best practices for photojournalists. Personally, these interviews will offer insight into how I can best photograph my project in Cambodia. This will benefit the photographs that I produce on the housing crisis in Cambodia and further my
critical thinking on identity and representation. Publishing the findings from the interviews will offer the knowledge of these professionals to impact a wider audience. Lastly, this research could inspire future research on how to create a more accurate and honest visual representation of any group of people.
Addendum to Project Proposal:

I had to shift my initial professional project, “The White Building,” to focus on a community at Boeung (Lake) Tompun because the White Building community was evicted before I could arrive in Cambodia. These lakeside communities in Boeung Tompun are facing a similar situation due to development. Below, I will explain the shift and the reason why covering daily life at Boeung Tompun is in line with my master’s project and how the deviation will impact my journalistic work.

Within Sahmakum Teang Tnaut’s (STT) research article, Promises Kept?, there were 77 locations that have faced some degree of eviction. This document is where I gained research on the White Building. Promises Kept? also provided me with exposure to Boeung Tompun, one of the largest freshwater lakes left in Phnom Penh, and the commercial development it is facing.

Similar to the White Building, Boeung Tompun is a location known for affordable housing and opportunities for work (mainly related to the lake and production of water based plants). The area is being developed for commercial use and is set to become the ING City, a satellite city that is slated to be a blending of residential, commercial, education, and healthcare spaces. Currently, the lake operates as one of the drainage sites for a large portion of the city’s floodwaters and also works as a natural filtration system. Unlike the White Building, Boeung Tompun has far greater environmental issues that will not only impact the communities that live there currently, but also have a chance to impact the city in the future.
History of Development at Boeung Tompun

In 2009, the Cambodian government granted four private companies (AZ Group, ING Holdings, Daun Penh Construction Group and SMEC International) permission to develop the area of the lake into a satellite city to Phnom Penh (Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, 2016). According to recent reporting by the Cambodia Daily (Leng, 2017) and the ING Holdings website, forty-five percent of the lake is owned by ING Holdings. ING Holdings also operates as the manager of the area and is head of the development. This ownership is completely supported by the Cambodian government.

In 2012, Boeung Tompun started to be filled in with sand, and the lake becomes smaller each day. There are still many people that hope to stay for as long as possible. Their effort to stay and to continue living is my interest for refocusing my project. I aim to show the community of people that reside near the lake and how their daily lives continue on as development nears each day. This focus is similar to what I would have focused on at the White Building, but the development at the lake is happening at a slower rate.

Although many continue to stay at their homes along the lake, the area is already noticing the consequence of this development. There are reports of flooding occurring in the area and the lake water is said to be more polluted. This is a significant problem because as the city of Phnom Penh continues to blossom with more factories, small business and people, this growth in size will contribute more waste runoff.
Of the 13 lakeside communities identified by STT, only one community has been evicted so far. However, many face the threat of eviction through informal and formal notices. Unlike the White Building, many of those that live along the lake do not have the formal ownership documents, which are often necessary to receive full benefits of sales when they are evicted. This is a concern for the residents of the area and the organizations that work in the area of land rights and development.

When I spoke with Sahmakum Teang Tnaut employees, they believe the question isn’t if the community will be moved, but a question of when. Currently, sand is being pumped into the east side of the lake. There are already dunes created from this process, and it may speed up with the completion of Hun Sen Blvd. Documenting the communities as they currently are is a unique opportunity that will most likely be lost once the sand reaches the communities.

**Work Description:**

The majority of the data will be a collection of images that will be presented in PDF layout and hardcopy photo books that are physical reflections of this digital layout. There will also be text in the layout that provides additional information about Boeung Tompun and quotes from subjects to help tell the story about their experience.

The location of the photographic work will be based around Boeung Tompun and other sites related to telling the story of development of freshwater lakes in Phnom Penh. The importance of the lake directly impacts those that live along the lake and their livelihoods. Containing this project will take some thought because the lake is over 2600 hectares in size. Utilizing Sahmakum Teang Tnaut’s defined
borders for the communities, it will be easier to focus on one community area. I aim to connect with individuals and families that display the way of life that many represent along the shores of Boeung Tompun. I also hope to demonstrate the difficulties that come with living in an area that is facing development. Lastly, focusing on the way of life for the present day communities will allow for comparison after the inevitable displacement of communities and the loss of the lake.

I will be working to cover a large swath of the lake, but to cover the entire space in a month’s time is not feasible. Rather, I will be looking for locations and situations that create storytelling and informational photographs that can encompass the situation and pair this with more personal photographs that display the community members’ lives along the lake. I plan to spend time with families and individuals to allow for a personal perspective on the development at Boeung Tompun. Focusing on a family or small group of people will allow me to put confines on this large area and topic.

In order to access the community with more depth, I have contacted NGOs that have worked in the communities. I met with STT shortly after I arrived in country. We scheduled a trip together to the lake, where they thought they would be able to introduce me to community members that would be interested in discussing the impact of the development at the lake and speak to the experience of a family at the lake.

I will also take individual trips out to the lake to gain greater insight into the lake and attempt to meet people that are living out along the lake. I plan to utilize a
translator to ask questions about what the residents near the lake are experiencing. Following the interview, I will ask the translator to transcribe the interviews and work to better understand how the people I am working alongside are viewing their lives at Boeung Tompun.

Photography is the essential piece of data collection for this project. I plan to focus on a community that lives along Boeung Tompun and work to understand how a community continues onward in the face of development. I will focus on the relationships between the people who operate near the lake and photograph the relationship between the lake, the community and individuals. Photographing along the lake is essential, but narrowing the focus into one community will help with feasibility. As I narrow down the focus, I hope to be able to spend time with a single family or a small group of individuals to focus on their daily lives. I aim to create images that show a larger variety of daily happenings and experiences for those that live along Boeung Tompun. This variety will offer new imagery of life at Boeung Tompun and provide a visual reference of what was lost when development takes place.

To strengthen the project’s aim and feasibility, it is important to have outside input on the project development because this is the first large project that I am working on independently. First, I will be using my faculty committee for my master’s project as a check on my progress as well as an outside look at what is being created. This outside view will help me establish an idea of what is being communicated to those who are not walking around in the building and interacting with the residents. In addition, I may contact a Cambodian photographer who has
worked at one of the English language newspapers to review my first edit in order to understand what they are drawing from the images.

After the completion of this photographic project on Boeung Tompun, I aim to utilize the images and stories to springboard a larger project that will focus on communities facing development and the housing crisis that is taking place in Cambodia and that is expected to continue into the future. A body of work showing the people before an eviction will strengthen my applications for grants and opportunities to continue this work. Also, having the contacts in NGOs, locals, and fixers will help in future projects that may bring me back to Cambodia.
REFERENCES


