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CAMBODIA IN THE MILL CITY: THE PLACE-MAKING INFLUENCE OF AN URBAN ENCLAVE

by

PAUL FOSTER

Under the Direction of Dr. Katherine B. Hankins

ABSTRACT

In Lowell, Massachusetts, a city with a long history of serving as a magnet for immigrants, the Cambodian community is both the most recent and most populous immigrant group that has helped transformed this postindustrial city into one of the most ethnically diverse in New England. This research seeks to explore the ways in which the development and growth of an ethnic community can influence the place-making process and built environment of cities. Specifically, this thesis conducts a case study of the Cambodian community in Lowell, Massachusetts, and examines the ways in which the development of this specific urban ethnic community has helped to shape the post-industrial city in which it is found, and how Lowell has influenced Cambodian-American ethnic identity.

INDEX WORDS: Place, Place-making, Urban ethnic communities, Transnationalism, Refugees, Cambodia, Lowell, Massachusetts

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PAUL FOSTER

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1 INTRODUCTION

Lowell, Massachusetts, a city of just over 100,000 residents located thirty miles northwest of Boston, is most commonly known for being “the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution” (Lowell National Historic Park 1992). In more recent history, Lowell has become home to the second largest Cambodian community in the United States. Beginning in the early 1980’s, thousands of Cambodians, from largely agrarian backgrounds, fled a communist regime and auto-genocide in their homeland and resettled in the post-industrial city of Lowell. While it is hard to imagine two places more dissimilar from each other than the rural Cambodian countryside and the industrial urban landscape of Lowell, the Cambodian community has flourished in the city and has had a clear influence on the place-making process there.

The process of ethnic place-making is present at various scales in Lowell. Cambodian families plant gardens to grow their own native produce, construct Buddhist shrines in their homes and businesses to maintain their religion, and fly the Cambodian flag on flag poles directly underneath the flag of the United States. The community transforms the Merrimack River from a symbol of the city’s industrial past into a cultural symbol of life and renewal by hosting the Southeast Asian Water Festival each August. The City of Lowell has engaged itself in the place-making process by recently developing Cambodia Town, an urban ethnic community home to a large percentage of Lowell’s Cambodian population.

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which the Cambodian community has influenced the place-making process in the City of Lowell. Specifically, this thesis will

illustrate the place-making process through the development of an urban ethnic community, through the conflict over the revitalization of a public park, and finally through the institution of the Southeast Asian Water Festival celebration.

Chapter Two, the literature review of this thesis, will set the theoretical framework, and situate the following research within the larger body of knowledge, lay the foundation of the processes involved in ethnic place-making, explore the current roles of identity, belonging, and place as actors in urban ethnic place-making, and seek out which questions may still remain unanswered. Chapter Three discusses the methodology employed in the study, highlights the research question, situates the positionality of the researcher, and illustrates the methods used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter Four sets the foundation for the case study of Lowell by examining the history of the city, immigrant movement to Lowell over time, and by examining the history of Cambodia which set in motion the mass movement of Cambodian refugees and immigrants to the city. Chapter 5 is comprised of the empirical analysis of this research. Organized by relevant discourses which emerged, this chapter highlights the development of the Cambodian community in Lowell, illustrates the place-making process present in the conflict over Pailin Park and the development of Cambodia Town, examines the institution of the Southeast Asian Water Festival and compares it to similar ethnic public rituals which have been utilized by previous minority communities' in the city, and finally discusses aspects of transnationalism and transnational citizenship that exist within the Cambodian community. Ultimately, this research explores the ways in which the development and growth of an ethnic community influences a city's place-making process and its urban built environment.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing from a wide body of critical literature, this literature review seeks to situate the following thesis research within the larger body of knowledge, specifically that on place and place-making and the geographies of ethnic identity, in order to lay the foundation of the processes involved in ethnic place-making in a city like Lowell.

2.1 Place

Central to all disciplines of geography is the study of place. It is not a concept with a singular definition, but a dynamic, multidimensional concept which concurrently carries both “common sense” and nuanced meanings (Cresswell 2004). For example, place represents both an object, a physical location that can be researched and written about, and a way of seeing, knowing, and defining the world (Cresswell 2004). Geographers have considered place as the unique focus distinguishing geography from other disciplines and as such have produced a large body of literature that addresses the contours of what place means.

Beginning in the early 1970s, geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1974), Edward Relph (1976), and Anne Buttner (1976), among others, became increasingly dissatisfied with what they viewed as a lack of philosophical sophistication given to the study of place, as it had largely been used to specify the difference between areas or regions of the earth (Cresswell 2004). This distinctly theoretical approach to understanding place became known as humanistic geography (Cresswell 2004). The humanistic approach sought to look beyond the spatial relationships of place, and sought to incorporate both humanistic and scientific views of inquiry to examine, analyze, and explain the relationship between place and human experience

(Buttimer 1976). Relph (1976), noting that little had been done to define place and separate it from the related concepts of region and area, emphasized the phenomenology of place, meaning the interpretive study of human experience in place. This philosophical approach to understanding place looked beyond the simple definition as a location, and found that “the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existences” (Relph 1976, p. 43).

This human identification with place, the feeling of attachment, involvement, and concern individuals develop in relation to particular places is a result of that psychological link between humans and place (Relph 1976). It is through these strong emotional experiences and human perceptions of place that our view of the world is shaped (Tuan 1974). The scales of place which we develop relationships with vary, from our personal dwellings, the towns we live in, and the nations of which we are citizens (Tuan 1974).

Yi-Fu Tuan (1976) coined the term “topophilia” to describe the human love for a place, and the positive attachments we develop to places. While these bonds vary greatly in intensity from one individual to another, and cultural variations can impact how this attachment is expressed, the bonds we as humans created between ourselves and place is not only a response to those places in which we live and experience, but it actively shaping and producing place (Tuan 1976). A thorough understanding of place through the meaningful human experience which occurs there and the psychological attachments which we develop with places can in turn lead to the restoration and maintenance of existing places and the making of new places.

While the humanistic approach advanced our knowledge and understanding of place and served as a lens to analyze the relationships between human nature, behavior, emotion, and interactions in relation to place, recent trends in critical human geography have seen an ideological shift in the role of place in social life (Cresswell 2004). The dominant approach to place in contemporary critical human geography is that of the importance of talking about and viewing place as a social construct (Agnew 1987; Cresswell 1996; Harvey 1996). Critical cultural geographers have approached the concept of place as one which is best understood through the lens of social and cultural conflict, which reveals the complicated connections between place, meaning, and power (Cresswell 2004). Conflicts stemming from issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social relations are at the center of this method of critical analysis (Massey 2005).

The place which this thesis seeks to focus on is the urban ethnic enclave. In prior academic research, ethnic enclaves have primarily referred to concentrated population of ethnic minorities living in economically self-contained ghettos (Wilson and Martin 1982). The presence of ethnic businesses and social services which focus on the need of these ethnic communities adds to the distinct ethnic feel and unique sense of place within these enclaves. Building upon this basic definition, enclave studies have expanded and have grown to include concentrations of residents who may not have the same ethnic or minority status in the traditional sense, yet who share a commonality based on wealth, such as the social elite enclave in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood, and life-style, such as the gay-friendly Castro district in San Francisco (Abrahamson 1996). While ethnic enclaves develop in part due to prejudice and racism (Abrahamson 1996, Anderson 1991), they can be a sustaining force as

communities choose to congregate for greater visibility, political influence, security, and empowerment (Clark 2002, Kaplan and Holloway 2001).

In *Place and Politics* (1987), political geographer John Agnew defines three fundamental characteristics which constitute place and the meaning ascribed to it. The first characteristic of place is that it has a specific location, which allows us to answer the question of “Where?” and frames each place in relation to everywhere else. In addition, place has a locale, the actual shape of the space, which in turn opens the possibility for place to serve as a setting for activity and social interaction (Agnew 1987). Finally, Agnew (1987) conceptualizes a sense of place, being the subjective and emotional attachments which individuals have to a place, and how those attachments can construct individual, group, and place identities.

This understanding of what constitutes place allows us to critically view the role place itself plays in human geography. Understanding the constructs of place allows us to look past it as simply a location, and identify the coming together of the various actors and practices, to examine the processes which develop through that interaction (Massey 2005). The coming together of these multiple trajectories results in place being open, continually constructed and transformed, and internally multiple (Massey 2005). It is this interaction between external forces, local histories, cultural constructs, and individual human agency which create the uniqueness of place (Harner 2001). Reconceptualizing place in this manner eliminates the assumption that places have a prescribed coherence or collective identity, and demonstrates that the “throwntogetherness” of place demands negotiation and invention (Massey 2005). Place-making, “the set of social political and material processes by which people iteratively

create and recreate experienced geographies in which they live” is the outcome of this negation and invention (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011, p.54).

Making and remaking of place becomes inevitable as the multiple trajectories of the various actors involved intersect (Massey 2005). As these multiple trajectories intersect, conflicting ideas as to what places should be emerge (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011). Pierce, Martin, and Murphy (2011) argue that the interrelationships between place-making, networking, and politics are necessary to understand the place-making process, and resolve the conflicts which emerge between the existing place-frames of actors involved. Furthermore, they argue that place-making is “an inherently networked process, constituted by the socio-spatial relationships that link individuals together through a common place-frame” (2011, p.54). The place-frames create nodes of commonality in their spaces of intersection, thus providing opportunity for the actors involved in the place-making process to focus on and develop commonalities as a way to resolve conflict (Pierce, Martin and Murphy 2011).

In the ethnic place-making process, commonalities and networks are multifaceted, as ethnic groups share common place-frames based on specific ties to their homeland, religion, and culture. These commonalities, when expressed and acted upon by immigrants and refugees in a host culture, result in the reconstruction of familiar ethnic places in an unfamiliar urban environment. Geographer Doreen Massey argues “what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated, together at a particular locus” (Massey 1994, p. 66). It is through this “constellation of relations” that the ethnic place-making process occurs.

2.2 Geography and Ethnic Identity

The analysis of identity through a geographical lens enhances our understanding of how place and space construct, recreate, and reconceptualize human identities. Underlying the theme that place is influential in the formation identity is the understanding that race and ethnicity are socially constructed (Godfrey 2007). Thus, it is through social conditioning that we have come to recognize certain inscribed traits of race and ethnicity¹, such as skin color and the origin of one's family. Geography plays an important role in the social construction of race and ethnicity, as these identities are created both by the labels which are produced, and through the places in which they exist (Keith and Pile 1993).

There are multiple frameworks through which ethnic identity has been studied. As the nature of ethnic identity is contested, these theories can often be overlapping, complimentary, or contradictory to one another. Social identity theory argues that ethnic identity is a subjective self-concept influenced by internal factors such as one's emotional attachment to ethnic ties, cognitive awareness of one's group well-being, belief in common fate or group cohesion, concern with group interest over self-interest, and assessment of intergroup relations. By contrast, racial formation theory argues that ethnic identity is both an involuntary, externally imposed identity and a strategic response to institutionalized categorization and to prejudice and discrimination against an ethnic group (Jackson and Smith 1999). To further complicate matters, acculturation theory contends that the strength and direction of ethnic identity can be influenced by indicators of social and cultural integration

¹ While race and ethnicity are mentioned here together, this thesis recognizes differences between them. Ethnicity connotes shared cultural traits and group history, which ethnic groups use to define themselves and are defined by stereotypes of dominant groups, while race presumes shared biological and genetic traits.

such as language use, media preference, friendship patterns, and organizational membership (Gordon 1964). However, proponents of segmented assimilation argue that this relationship may be affected by an individual's immigration generation, social class status, experience of racial and ethnic discrimination, and racial and ethnic makeup of the neighborhood context (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Finally, proponents of transnationalism tell us that we cannot fully understand ethnic identity without taking account of ties to and involvement in home country society and politics (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 2000).

Both race and ethnicity are social classifications which are unsupported by science (Marks 1994). Much of the recent research on race and ethnicity has continually proven these "scientific and biological truths" of race distinction as unfounded and inaccurate (Bashad and Olson 2003, Graves 2004). Expanding upon race and ethnicity's social construction, Graves (2004) argues that the social construction of the African-American race was rooted in the ideology of a separate classification from "whiteness" for the purpose of social domination by the majority, and that this process of social domination has continued to further progress inequality. His analysis supports the argument that the reason race is important in America is that through our actions we have made race a significant issue at all levels of society, and that there is a long and continued history of racial classification in the United States (Graves 2004).

A review of the existing literature on ethnic identity confirms that there is little agreement as to what constitutes ethnic identity, and that there is a large amount of confusion and many differing opinions over conceptual and operational definitions and the inconsistency of findings across multidisciplinary studies of ethnic identity (Phinney 1990). Additionally, a review of the literature shows that more emphasis has been placed on the theoretical

refinement of the concept of ethnic identity than on empirical research into how ethnic identity is constituted through specific places. While there are multiple frameworks through which ethnic identity can be conceptualized, one fact remains consistent through each; identities are not fixed. Ethnic identity is a flexible, contextual, and layered concept.

The topic of race and ethnicity is one which remains an uncomfortable topic of discussion, as it requires us to take responsibility for racist actions and processes which have occurred in the past. Due to our nation's unique history, primarily major historical events like slavery and the civil rights movement, black-white racial issues have been the main focus of our study of the social construction of race (Graves 2004). It has been the creation of negative images of minority cultures and the accompanying denial of access to equal education, employment, and housing opportunities by white society that has contributed to the continuing perception of the inferiority vs. superiority of cultures. The characterization of Asian-American cultures as non-white "races" with negative characteristics has largely been ignored until recently, a gap in knowledge which leads to the impressions that the playing field in America has been level for all racial/ethnic groups (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). However, there are numerous examples of the racial construction of these groups.

A relevant example of this process is found in Kay Anderson's influential work on the construction of Chinatown, an ethnic urban enclave, in Vancouver, British Columbia (Anderson 1991). While Chinatown communities are typically conceptualized as launching points for Chinese assimilation, as ghettoized minority communities, and as connections between Chinese culture and the places in which the Chinese diaspora settle around the world, Anderson argues that these places cannot be read simply as an expression of Chineseness. Instead, they are

places which have explicitly and ideologically been made as places of difference (Anderson 1991).

The development of Chinatown in Vancouver, and similar urban ethnic enclaves, was not a natural reflection of Chinese culture, but the end result of negotiation with those with the power to define place (Anderson 1991). The Chinese were deliberately stereotyped as immoral, peculiar, and backward by Western leaders. These stereotypes became the foundation for characterizing Chinese immigrants as undesirable outsiders and a threat to local culture. The development of Chinatown as a place was not the natural result of social processes, but served as a tool in the creation, maintenance, and transformation of relations of domination, oppression and exploitation over the Chinese and Chinese culture by those holding power in the host society (Anderson 1991).

Following existing research on the flexible nature of racial identity, this thesis acknowledges that ethnic identity is subject to continual contestation and reinterpretation, and that the contours of ethnic identity are greatly affected by events, experiences, and interactions among people (Winnat 1994 , Harmon 1998). Furthermore, the intersections between spatial congregation and ethnic enclaves and the related questions as to how space, place, and racial identity are mutually constituted are necessary for place based studies of race (Liu 2000). As such, the purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the “uniqueness” and multifaceted nature of place affects the construction of ethnic identities, and how individuals and groups acting on their ethnic identities have, in turn, created spatial patterns and ethnic landscapes within that place. In order to accomplish this, I examine the ways in which Lowell, Massachusetts has affected the development of a new ethnic identity, that of Cambodian

Americans, and how the Cambodian community has in turn created spatial patterns and a distinctly Cambodian landscape within the City of Lowell.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Question

Broadly, this research seeks to explore the ways in which the development and growth of an ethnic community can influence the place-making process and built environment of cities. Specifically, this thesis conducts a case study of the Cambodian community in Lowell, Massachusetts, and illustrates the influence of the Cambodian community on the place-making process through the development of an urban ethnic community, the conflict over the revitalization of a public park, and through the institution of the Southeast Asian Water Festival celebration.

In addition, this thesis hopes to uncover the ways, both intentional and unintentional, in which urban ethnic place-making occurs and analyze how this process can lead to tensions both within the ethnic community itself, as well as the larger community. The goal of this thesis is to contribute to a broader discussion of urban ethnic geographies and how they shape the built environment of cities. The case study in Lowell will provide a strong backdrop for the broader topics and themes of the research.

3.2 Positionality

Prior to outlining the different methods of research used in the completion of this thesis, I should make note of my positionality in regards to the Cambodian community in Lowell. I would be remiss to discuss issues of Khmer identity and culture without

acknowledging the experiences which initially drew me to this topic and the social standing which allowed me to gain access and insight into the community, as it has framed the analysis and presentation of the discourses found within this research.

From 2004 to 2006 I was engaged in a full-time voluntary community service program, living and working within the Cambodian communities in Tacoma, Washington, and Lowell, Massachusetts. In order to work more effectively alongside members of these communities, I spent three months in a full-time language immersion program taught by native Khmer speakers. This language training, coupled with speaking Khmer on a daily basis over the course of two years, allowed me to become fluent. My familiarity with the language, daily interaction with community members, and the personal relationships developed with individuals of all ages resulted in an understanding and appreciation for the Cambodian communities in these cities, for Khmer culture, and for the individuals I worked alongside.

The question of who can and should conduct academic research with and about communities of color has been frequently discussed and debated (Banks 1998; Schuerich and Young 1997; Tillman 2002). Following Tillman (2002), I do not believe that one must come from the ethnic or cultural community in order to conduct research on that community. It is more important that researchers possess or are pursuing a deeper racial and cultural understanding of both themselves and the community being studied (Tillman 2002). In their discussion of the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry, Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the “theoretical sensitivity” of the researcher as a personal quality which indicates a personal awareness of the subtleties of the meaning of data. They believe that theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional and personal experiences.

While I do not highlight my personal experiences in order to promote myself as one who can speak definitively on the issues discussed within this research as pertaining to the Cambodian community in Lowell, I must acknowledge that my personal experiences over the course of those two years have granted me access and insight that is not commonly gained. As Tillman (2002) states, my positionalilty and cultural knowledge allows me to better interpret and validate the experiences of those within this study. The credibility of qualitative research relies largely on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to provide accurate analysis (Patton 1990).

3.3 Significance of the Research

In comparison to other refugee movements, relatively little has been published on the topic of Cambodian resettlement in the United States. The most predominantly studied group of Southeast Asian refugees has been the Vietnamese, whereas the Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong populations have been systematically ignored (Indra 1987). Studies of Southeast Asian refugees have generally focused on the economic and psychosocial adjustment to the refugee experience, and have paid less attention to the cultural adjustment and accompanying identity shifts (Ong 2003).

Much of the literature on the Cambodian community is in the form of ethnographies focused on the refugee experience and subsequent initial settlement in and adaptation to a receiving community (Chan 2004, Hein 1995, Hopkins 1996, Shaw 2008, Streed 2002). Sociological studies of Cambodian communities in the United States and Canada have focused on specific issues such as identity and religion among Cambodians in Ontario (McLellan 2009), and identity and moral and cultural education among Cambodian in Boston (Smith-Hefner

1999). Among the academic contributions to our knowledge on Cambodian communities, geographers are notably absent. This absence allows for the opportunity for geographers to build upon the existing body of knowledge done by other disciplines by examining the spatial aspects of urban ethnic enclaves and the process of place-making occurring there.

3.4 Methods and Data

The methodological approach of this research is a qualitative analysis of the Cambodian community in Lowell, Massachusetts. Qualitative research methods are utilized to describe the ways in which Lowell has influenced ethnic identities, and how individuals and groups acting on their identities have influenced the place-making process and local landscapes. It is the opinion of the researcher that the use of a qualitative approach, specifically interviews with community members, to analyze and describe the interactions between external forces, local histories, cultural constructs, and individuals present in the creation and continual development of this unique place, will provide insight which other approaches may not uncover.

Data for the research was collected over the course of an intense three week study of the Cambodian community in Lowell, Massachusetts. During August 2011, I conducted interviews with twenty individuals. As the scope of the research sought to explore the process of ethnic place-making the Cambodian community has had on Lowell since the time of the first refugee's arrival, participants were representative of various ages and sexes, ranging from the elderly who came to Lowell after having lived a large portion of their lives in Cambodia, the middle aged who were either born in Cambodia and fled at a young age, or were born in refugee camps in Thailand or the Philippines, and finally young adults born in the United States, who offer a unique perspective of navigating Cambodian culture while growing up in an

American urban environment. Additionally, respondents represented a wide range of professional and socio-economic backgrounds, and included small business owners, civic leaders, religious leaders, university students, and others. The names of all individuals interviewed have been changed to guarantee anonymity, in accordance with IRB Human Subjects guidelines. Due to time and distance constraints of the research, non-Cambodian residents of Lowell were omitted from the participants of this research. While interviews with non-Cambodian members of the community, especially those actively involved in local government or ongoing community outreach programs, could have benefitted the research, I do not feel as if their omission diminished the validity of the findings.

Participants in the research were initially selected through personal connections and relationships, and individuals were contacted prior to my arrival in Lowell. As I had preexisting relationships with people of interest to the study, this was the most appropriate and effective method to recruit initial respondents. Further recruitment of participants was conducted using the snowball method, in which primary contacts, upon completion of their interview, were asked to recommend additional parties which may provide insight to the research. This method resulted in new connections being made with several influential community leaders and individuals with unique roles within the community, and community members themselves after being introduced to the scope of the research, were asked to recommend individuals whom they thought could provide valuable and meaningful insight into their own community. Several of these second-source interviews were made possible due to my positionality, through the personal recommendations I received from individuals I interviewed, my familiarity with the

culture and language, and my prior experience of living and working with individuals and organizations within the Cambodian community.

Table 1. Cambodian Community Members Interviewed

Pseudonym	Age (+/- 5 years)	Perceived Gender	Occupation
P.C.	45	Female	Court Reporter
Y.D.	45	Female	Board Member
K.H.	30	Male	Construction
N.J.	20	Female	Waitress
T.K.	50	Male	Probate Officer
K.S.	35	Female	Businesswoman
S.L.	75	Female	Grandmother
V.M.	40	Male	Small Business Owner
N.N.	60	Female	Grandmother
H.N.	55	Male	Wat Representative
O.R.	25	Male	Student
G.S.	60	Female	Grandmother
M.S.	60	Male	Lawyer
S.S.	35	Male	Community Activist
V.S.	35	Male	I.T. Professional
P.S.	20	Male	Student
O.S.	40	Male	Consulate
N.V.	50	Male	Community Leader
Y.Y.	60	Female	Grandmother
L.P.	25	Male	Student

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, following a predefined set of questions, yet allowing for open-ended responses and follow up. This flexibility of the interviewing process allowed the direction of the interview to be dictated by the individual's responses and allowed me to explore topics of interest which emerged through the individual interviews. Consent forms were provided in both English and Khmer describing the study, guaranteeing confidentiality, and granting permission to digitally record and transcribe the

interviews. To ensure the accuracy and clarity of the consent form, a professional translation service was hired to translate the English consent form into Khmer. To further ensure the accuracy of certain interviews, the use of a translator was utilized. Peng Se Lim, a Cambodian-American and native Khmer speaker participated in three interviews. It was expected that interviews with certain members of the community would be conducted primarily in Khmer. While I possess the ability to speak and comprehend the language, measures were taken to ensure that I would be able to effectively communicate some of the more theoretical themes of the research. When utilized, the translator assisted in framing the question in a way which the respondent could understand. His advanced knowledge of the language and vocabulary made it possible to explain topics and questions that, when asked by myself, needed clarification. During interviews in which I knew the respondent would not need translation, the translator did not accompany me to the interview, as to not influence the dialogue. Data collected from these interviews provides narrative insight into the Cambodian experience in Lowell.

Furthermore, photographs are used to illustrate the post-industrial history, ethnic landscapes, and places of contestation found within the city. Photographs are able to clearly demonstrate the ways in which the use of signage written in Khmer, the colors of the Cambodian flag, and notable Cambodian names and symbols, such as Angkor Wat, are used to deliberately create ethnic places and mark boundaries. The transformation of place in Lowell over time is visible in photographs from various decades, and visibly demonstrates the place-making process over time.

Finally, additional research was conducted utilizing printed materials from the City of Lowell, Lowell Historical Society, Lowell National Historic Park, and the UMASS-Lowell Center

for Lowell History, and the ensuing dialogues created by these materials. Because of the distance and time constraints related to the research, the utilization of these sources was used to assist in piecing together a richer narrative of the City of Lowell and its unique history, of the project's participants, and to further illuminate aspects of the research question.

3.5 Analytical Framework

As discussed, the purpose of this thesis research is to examine the ways in which individuals and groups acting on their identities have influenced the place-making process and physical ethnic landscapes in Lowell. Utilizing qualitative analysis methods, primarily detailed interviews, resulted in a large amount of data being collected. While the twenty interviews were all conducted following the same set of broad, predefined questions, the open-ended and free flowing nature of the interviews resulted in new themes emerging during the course of conducting research. In order to evaluate and make sense of the data, a coding process was utilized. Following Cope (2008), the main purposes of coding the data were to reduce the large amount of qualitative data down to key themes, assist in the organization of the responses, and allow for the exploration of the data.

As all interviews were conducted following a predetermined set of questions, the research had already determined several preliminary descriptive codes, those reflecting obvious themes and patterns of interest to this thesis. These descriptive codes were identified as themes which emerged through the study of relevant background literature and the completion of the thesis research proposal. However, the fluidity of the interview process and the ability for the individual to dictate the direction of the discussion resulted in the discovery of additional themes. In response, analytic codes were utilized to understand the context of

unexpected themes and phrases which were discovered during the interview process (Cope 2008).

The process used for coding data in this thesis primarily follows the methodology described by Anselm Strauss (Strauss and Corbin 1990), and the incorporation of personal methods when it proved applicable. Strauss (1990) suggests that four types of themes should be regarded: conditions, interactions among actors, strategies and tactics, and consequences. *Conditions* refer to both the physical and social conditions of the individual participants, and can include living situations and experiences which are discussed during the interview. By first coding the conditions of respondents, it is possible to learn, in detail, about the individuals whom have participated in the research (Cope 2008). Focusing on the relationships, encounters, conflicts, and other types of *interactions between actors* can reveal additional themes of the research (Cope 2008). Examining the theme of *strategies and tactics* requires a deeper understanding of the events and actions which are observed and discussed in relation to the scope of the research (Cope 2008). Cope (2008, p. 227) states that this deeper understanding “suggests a certain level of purposeful intent among the research subjects that may demand additional inquiry.” This additional inquiry into the data can shed light on the broader social, economic, and political processes and strategies which are present. Finally, the coding of *consequences* can bring to light both the tangible outcomes of interactions and events, as well as the underlying subtle and personal consequences which develop (Cope 2008).

The qualitative data used in this thesis research was compiled, organized, and analyzed through the use of theme specific codebooks. A color-coding system was used to identify reoccurring themes, both descriptive and analytic, which were present in the transcriptions of

the twenty interviews conducted. Multiple different colored highlighters were used to indicate samples within the transcription which related to one of several reoccurring discourses. After these common themes had been isolated and color-coded, they were compiled into discourse-specific codebooks. Following the methodological analysis explained by Strauss (1990), supplemented by my own methods, the coding process provided an analytical approach which uncovered additional narratives and discourses of importance to the research question and allowed me to connect the various excerpts and samples to the themes of the research. In Chapter 5, I present an analytical discussion of those themes. Before elaborating on the themes, in the next chapter I present the historical background of Lowell, Massachusetts, to offer important details that situate my analytical findings. Furthermore, I offer a brief history of the driver of Cambodian immigration to cities like Lowell.

4 LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS: A CASE STUDY

4.1 Historical Background

Located thirty miles northwest of Boston in the Merrimack River Valley, the city of Lowell is the fourth largest city in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Founded in 1820, Lowell was the first large-scale planned industrial city in America, and was to become a manufacturing center for the production of textiles (Lowell National Historic Park 1992). The city was named after Francis Cabot Lowell, a man instrumental in bringing the Industrial Revolution to the United States through his development of technologies which facilitated the conversion of raw cotton to finished textiles in one factory, his pioneering of the “Lowell System” of factory production which primarily relied on a female workforce paid less than

minimum wages in exchange for attractive benefits in the form of boarding houses, cash wages, and educational and religious activities, and his development of the practice of raising capital through public stock offerings (Chandler 1977). While Francis Cabot Lowell died prior to the founding of the city, his influence and leadership in developing the area as a center of textile manufacturing resulted in the city of Lowell becoming the largest industrial complex in the United States.

As the textile industry grew, Lowell began incorporating land from surrounding towns, and during the 1830s - 1840s the city developed into a fully-fledged urban center. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the American Civil War, Lowell established itself as the leader in American textile production. The cotton-textile mills were built along the rapids of the Merrimack River, which guided by a complex system of canals running through the city, produced 10,000 horsepower as the water powered the turbines and wheels of the factories (Chandler 1977). Equally influential in the economic growth seen in Lowell was the city's access to national and international textile markets, through its connection with Boston via the Middlesex Canal, opened in 1803 when Lowell was just a small farming village, and then later by the Boston & Lowell Railroad, completed in 1835 (Lowell National Historic Park 1992). By 1860, there were more cotton spindles found in the cotton-textile factories in the city of Lowell than combined in all of the eleven states that would succeed to form the Confederacy (Goldfarb 1982).

By the early 20th century, Lowell had reached its economic and population peak. Technological advances which replaced water energy with electrical and steam-driven motors reduced the attractiveness of Lowell's location on the Merrimack River and the city's canal

system. Coupled with shifts in the textile industry, both changes signaled the looming decline of what was formerly the nation's largest industrial center. Accompanying unrest among the labor force, which included strikes demanding better working conditions and wages for factory workers, resulted in many mill owners in Lowell relocating their businesses to the South, where production costs and employee wages were significantly lower (Lowell National Historic Park 1992). Between 1924 and 1932, manufacturing employment in the city fell almost 50 percent (Gittell and Flynn 1995). This period of economic decline can be partially attributed to the Great Depression, however unlike many industrial areas nationwide, the economy in Lowell did not revive after the Depression, and instead experienced several more decades of economic stagnation. Despite the loss of 50 percent of its manufacturing base leading up to the 1960s, in both absolute and relative terms, Lowell retained a concentration of employment in manufacturing 50 percent above the national average, although these remaining jobs were found mostly in declining industries paying low wages (Gittell and Flynn 1995). The economic depression of the area would continue through the 1970s, evidenced by Lowell leading the country in unemployment during this time (Gershon 2005).

The trend of economic decline would continue until the 1980s, when Lowell, and the greater Merrimack River Valley area, experienced a revival in the manufacturing field which reversed the decades long trends of deindustrialization and unemployment in the area. Deemed the "Massachusetts Miracle," the Commonwealth experienced an influx of high-tech and electronic manufacturing along Route 128, running from Boston to Gloucester, comparable, on a smaller scale, to the economic growth seen in the Silicon Valley in Northern California (Stanton 2001). Lowell emerged as a center of high-tech manufacturing as Wang

Laboratories, a major computer production company, located its headquarters in the city. This revitalization of the city garnered national attention, and at the time, Lowell was heralded as “the model for reindustrialization” for older cities (Butterfield 1982).

However, Lowell did not maintain the title “model for reindustrialization” for long. From 1982 to 1994, Lowell experienced a boom in high-tech manufacturing jobs, yet economic and industrial changes would once again result in the dominant economic source in Lowell experiencing a period of sharp decline and eventual relocation. For the second time in the city’s history, Lowell had become an example of how boom and bust cycles and uncontrollable dynamics of industrial change can disrupt a local economy. Widespread layoffs and the closure of plants in the high-tech industrial sector, and in particular the collapse of Wang Laboratories, devastated the local economy as unemployment and economic depression again became synonymous with Lowell, Massachusetts.

4.2 Lowell’s Immigrant History

Throughout its history, the city of Lowell has had a rich tradition of immigration. As it developed into one of the nation’s largest and most successful industrial centers, the cotton-textile mills and factories of Lowell attracted a labor force largely constituted of immigrants and migrant workers. From 1826 to 1850, the population of Lowell expanded from 2,500 to over 33,000, and more than tripled to 112,000 by 1920 (Gittell and Flynn 1995). The first wave of immigrant labor, largely credited with the construction of the canal system and factories, occurred in the 1830s and 1840s, when Irish immigrants came to Lowell seeking to escape famine and poverty. The economic growth and development propelled by the cotton-textile mills brought many other immigrant groups to the city in search of employment over the latter

half on the 19th century. Significant numbers of Catholic German, French Canadian, Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish, Lithuanian, and Eastern European Jewish immigrants chose to settle in Lowell (Eno 1976).

As often was the case in industrial urban centers, these immigrant groups formed ethnic enclaves within the city, including areas known as Little Canada, populated by the Quebec labor force, and Acre-Acropolis, the term given to the Greek enclave living in The Acre, a neighborhood in the city (Stanton 2006). By the early twentieth century, over forty different nationalities were represented within the population of Lowell, and three quarters of the city's population was comprised of immigrants and their children (Lowell National Historic Park 1992). The percentage of foreign-born residents was one of the highest in the United States. Demographic records indicate 41% of residents were foreign-born in 1910 as compared to the national average of 15%, and the Massachusetts average of 32% (Yukari 2008). By 1920, Lowell had reached its population peak, with 112,759 residents (Stanton 2006). The Great Depression, the sharp decline of the cotton-textile industry, and more restrictive national immigration policies resulted in Lowell no longer being a magnet for immigration. By 1970, amid decades of local economic depression, the city's population had dropped to 92,418 (Stanton 2006).

Interestingly, as large numbers of residents left Lowell, the diversity of the immigrant communities grew and the city experienced small pockets of rapid ethnic growth. In the 1960s, an increase was seen in Latino immigration from countries like Puerto Rico and Columbia, which reflected the easing of quotas on non-European immigrants with the Immigration Act of 1965 (Stanton 2006). Latinos in Lowell numbered approximately 8,000 by 1970, and by 2000, as they were joined by immigrants from the Dominican Republic, the Latino population had

grown to nearly 15,000 (Stanton 2006). Over the last decade, immigrant and refugee growth has continued, as Iraqi, Sudanese, Liberian, and other West African refugees and immigrants now call Lowell home (Farrant and Strobel 2011). While Lowell residents have emigrated from a wide variety of places, the most substantial and significant immigrant movement to Lowell has been the migration of Cambodians.

4.3 Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, and the Cambodian Genocide

Cambodia is a small country located in mainland Southeast Asia, bordering Thailand to the west, Vietnam to the east, and Laos to the north. Cambodia is what remains of what once was a powerful kingdom named Angkor (802-1431), which spread over much of Southeast Asia, and is home to the Khmer people who have inhabited the area for thousands of years (Chandler 2007). Both the language of Cambodia, also called Khmer, and the culture have been heavily influenced by Indian and Hinduism, and most Cambodians today still practice Theravada Buddhism, which originated in India (Chan 2004). The Angkor kings built hundreds of stone temples for the practice and worship of Theravada Buddhism, the most famous of which is Angkor Wat (see Figure 1). This ancient temple remains a symbol of the power and influence the Khmer people and Angkor Kingdom once held across Southeast Asia.



Figure 1. Angkor Wat

The temples of Angkor Wat stand in stark contrast to the conflicts that marked the next five centuries of Cambodian history. The Angkor Kingdom battled Thailand to the west and north and Vietnam to the east for territory. Several provinces of Cambodia were lost to Thailand and Vietnam, and the temples in those provinces either sacked or claimed by the victorious side (Chandler 2007). These conflicts saw the Angkor Kingdom lose a vast amount of territory, and, over the hundreds of years since, have resulted in perpetual conflict between Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam regarding borders and territorial encroachment. Centuries of conflict resulted in the once powerful Angkor Kingdom found in Cambodia becoming a vassal state to Thailand and Siam, until the mid-nineteenth century when the French colonized Southeast Asia, creating French Indochina from territory in Cambodia and Vietnam (Chan 2004). While they allowed the Cambodian monarch to remain on the throne, the French ruled all

aspect of Cambodian life from the time it was annexed in 1863, until it gained its independence from France in 1953 (Chandler 2007).

The years after gaining independence from French rule were characterized by severe political instability in Cambodia that ultimately resulted in civil war. After independence, the country was led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a member of the royal family who abdicated his throne in order to participate more fully in the country's politics (Chan 2004). Sihanouk did little to industrialize Cambodia, and instead focused the majority of the nation's resources on constructing roads, rail lines, and a seaport (Canniff 2001). These investments in infrastructure were intended to improve the economic stability of the nation, however ultimately had little impact. As a result, in the 1960s, approximately 75% of Cambodia's citizens still lived in rural villages (Canniff 2001). As the Vietnam War spilled over that country's borders into Cambodia, Sihanouk attempted to maintain a policy of neutrality between the international powers involved in the conflict, choosing to non-align with the Americans and the communist Vietnamese, despite great pressure from both sides (Chandler 2007).

The economic, political, and cultural instability experienced in Cambodia saw the election of numerous opposition party officials during the 1966 national elections (Chan 2004). In 1970, Sihanouk was ousted by General Lon Nol, in a military coup supported by the United States, after which Lon Nol established the Khmer Republic. Shortly after the overthrow of the Sihanouk government and the establishment of the Khmer Republic, Cambodia slid into a civil war between the Lon Nol regime, which received military support from the United States in the form of military hardware, training, and aerial bombardments of opposition held areas, and a communist guerilla group called the Khmer Rouge (Chan 2004). In April of 1975, after five years

of civil war, the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, was finally successful in overthrowing the Lon Nol government, and took control of the Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital. During the brutal civil war between the Khmer Republic and Khmer Rouge, approximately half a million people died, a large number of casualties which was quickly overshadowed as the Khmer Rouge engaged in the auto-genocide, the extermination of a country's citizens by internal forces, of the Cambodian people.

After the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh in April 1975, all residents of the capital were forcefully evacuated and relocated to re-education and forced labor camps in the countryside. The immediate forced evacuation reduced the city's population from just over 2 million residents to approximately 10,000 in a single day (Chan 2004). Ultimately, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were attempting to rebuild what they believed was an agricultural, utopian society in the model of the ancient Khmers, free of Western influence (Canniff 2001). In the attempt to create a classless society, the Khmer Rouge systematically targeted intellectuals, political leaders, Buddhist monks, artists and musicians, as well as any who resisted the regime, and even many former Khmer Rouge who were suspected to be traitors. From the takeover of the Khmer Rouge in 1975 until they were overthrown by the Vietnamese in 1979, 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians, roughly twenty percent of the total population of Cambodia, died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, either through execution, forced starvation, or overwork (Juskalian 2011).

The 1979 invasion of Cambodia by the Vietnamese, and the installment of a new Vietnamese backed government, forced the remaining Khmer Rouge forces to flee into Laos. Vietnam's military interference also led to approximately 600,000 Cambodians who had

survived to flee northward to the Thailand border. Thailand, already overwhelmed by prior generations of migrants from China, Laos, and Vietnam was overburdened by the massive influx of incoming Cambodian refugees (Chan 2004). Unlike Cambodia and Vietnam, Thailand had never been colonized. Additionally, Thailand had been able to avoid the widespread destabilizing effects associated with the Vietnam War, and, as such, retained a fair amount of power and stability in Southeast Asia. Refugee camps were constructed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) with cooperation from the Thai government in order to facilitate the large surge of refugees coming in (Chan and Kim 2003). Since Thailand had no accountability to UN designated refugee laws, they enacted harsh and strict measures towards the large groups of incoming refugees, and the conditions found in the camps themselves were often poor (Chan 2004). Cambodian refugees faced threats of rape and abuse by Thai soldiers, as well as fellow refugees who monopolized the aid and community leadership they were given. As the Cambodian genocide gained international attention from foreign governments and relief organizations, and the conditions within the refugee camps normalized, some refugees began to be sponsored for resettlement in the United States, including the city of Lowell, by private individuals, churches, and relief organizations.

5 DISCOURSES

5.1 The Development of a Cambodian Ethnic Enclave in Lowell

Early Cambodian immigration to the United States can typically be separated into three distinct periods. The first period of immigration consisted of those who emigrated from Cambodia prior to the reign of the Khmer Rouge and coup of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970

(Chandler 2007). Records of these Cambodian immigrants to the United States are scarce, in part because actual immigrants were few in numbers (Chan and Kim 79). It is estimated that less than one thousand Cambodians lived in the United States at that time (Chan 2004). However, it is known that many of those who did enter the United States during this period were primarily students here for short-term educational stays, many of which studied in California, a population which would later serve as an important foundation for the refugee community which would develop in Long Beach (Needham and Quintilliani 2008). The second period of Cambodian immigration occurred from 1975 to 1977. This wave of immigrants was primarily composed of those who were immediately available to flee Cambodia as civil war broke out between the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Republic. This group consisted of those who were very well educated, bilingual in both English and French, had lived in urban areas, and were of upper and upper-middle class status who possessed the financial means to escape the country during the civil war, thus avoiding the genocide.

The third and most substantial period of Cambodian immigration consisted of those who came as refugees following the Cambodian genocide and the ousting of the Khmer Rouge by the Vietnamese in 1979, continuing until 1994 when the policy of Cambodian immigration under "refugee status" was ended (Chandler 2007). This much larger group consisted of refugees with rural backgrounds, of lower class status, who generally were much less educated, and who were forced to endure the horrors of the genocide. As the Khmer Rouge regime was being forced out of power by the Vietnamese, and survivors were fleeing the forced labor camps in Cambodia for refugee camps along the border, the groundwork was being laid in the United States which would allow for this third wave of Cambodian immigration.

In 1980, the United States Congress passed the first comprehensive refugee law in U.S. history, the 1980 Refugee Act. This federally funded program focused on assisting with the effective resettlement of refugees in the United States, with the goal to helping refugees assimilate and achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after arrival. The passing of this Act, and the international attention the Cambodian genocide was receiving at the time, resulted in a substantial increase of Cambodian refugee resettlement to the United States. Between 1980 and 1985 the United States accepted an average of 20,000 Cambodian refugees per year for resettlement (Chan 2004).

The pattern of Cambodian refugee settlement which occurred within the United States was initially determined by the federal government's policy of dispersing refugees throughout the country. It was believed that this approach would prevent host communities from becoming financially overburdened by an influx of new residents, and that the dispersing of refugees in multiple communities nationwide would best facilitate the refugees' quick assimilation into American society, a goal set by the 1980 Refugee Act. Cities including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dallas, Houston, Jacksonville, New York, Phoenix, Richmond, and Rochester were chosen (Smith-Hefner 1999). After initial settlement, secondary internal migration resulted in that many refugees decided to move to cities where they knew that friends and relatives had been resettled, to areas with a higher possibility of more suitable jobs, and to areas which offered places for religious worship.

5.1.1 Settlement in Lowell

In her book Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States, the first comprehensive work on the Cambodian refugee experience, Sucheng Chan (2004) outlines the

ways in which well-established, flourishing Cambodian refugee communities like the ones found in Long Beach and Stockton California, Tacoma, Washington and Lowell, Massachusetts, developed in the United States. Chan identifies three additional pull factors which help account for the development of these communities through secondary internal migration: the initiatives taken by particular individuals, the location of Theravada Buddhist temples and monks, and the degree of “refugee-friendliness” in various states. While this thesis will ultimately argue that the desire to reunite with surviving friends and family, the initial widespread availability of low-skill manufacturing jobs, and the desire for a Cambodian specific community have been the major reasons for the development and continued existence of the vibrant Cambodian community in Lowell, each of these three pull factors as outlined by Chan can also be seen.

The 65th and 67th Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was Michael Dukakis, the son of Greek immigrants who had settled in Lowell. Governor Dukakis’ wife, Kitty Dukakis, played an important role in the process of Cambodian immigration to Lowell, and demonstrated the influence that an individual and their actions have had in the development and growth of a Cambodian community. Kitty Dukakis had been involved in human rights issues, and prior to the events in Cambodia had worked extensively on issues relating to the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. As the genocide in Cambodia and accompanying refugee movement came to light in the United States, Dukakis dedicated much of her time to bringing awareness to the genocide which had occurred there. In 1981, Kitty Dukakis personally led a mission to the refugee camps in Thailand, seeking the release of 250 unaccompanied orphaned Cambodian children, most of whom settled in Massachusetts (Toner 1988).

Her interest in the plight of Cambodian refugees was so well known that in 1985, a Cambodian refugee living in Lynnfield, Massachusetts, Sarom Taing, wrote Mrs. Dukakis a letter explaining that while she had initially believed to have lost all of her 8 brothers and sister during the genocide, she had been notified that a younger brother had survived and was stuck in a camp on the Thai border. In a later interview, Taing stated that she knew that Kitty Dukakis had helped other Cambodian refugees, and she had stopped a car that bore a Dukakis bumper sticker in order to ask the person how could she reach Mrs. Dukakis, and was told to write to the State House (Smith 2009). Upon receiving the letter and meeting with Sarom Taing, Kitty Dukakis took it upon herself to travel to the camp in Thailand and locate this individual. Upon arrival at the refugee camp, a Thai colonel refused to allow Mrs. Dukakis in, and in a move now well known to many, she dropped to her knees and begged (Toner 1988). The colonel eventually relented, and Mrs. Dukakis, walking through the camp with only an outdated picture of the boy, found Taing's younger brother and brought him home to reunite with surviving family Massachusetts (Romano 1987).

Inspired by these very personal experiences in the refugee camps, Kitty Dukakis successfully worked with the state government to organize support agencies, provide public assistance programs, and create an environment friendly to Cambodian refugees in Massachusetts. In 1983, Governor Dukakis signed Executive Order Number 229, establishing a Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees, and appointed Kitty Dukakis the first chairperson (Pho 1991). In 1985, Executive Order Number 257 was passed, effectively making all state agency services available and accessible to Massachusetts' growing refugee population (Pho 1991).

The first group of Cambodian refugees to be resettled in Lowell arrived in October 1979, and consisted of 160 families (Pho 2007). This initial group of refugees was sponsored by the Boston branch of the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees, an organization which due to its own history was focused on assisting with the resettlement of refugees (Anderson 1980). The experience of these first 160 refugees arriving in Lowell was markedly different from the rest, as there was not yet an established Cambodian community. In an interview with one of the initial 160 refugees, he stated:

I thought at the time I came to Massachusetts that my family and I would be the only Cambodians here. For a month we didn't know anyone but our sponsors. But, one day I went to the store and I saw a few Cambodians. It was amazing! I felt like an angel from heaven had allowed me to see my people here. Before I got here there were only about 25 Cambodian families, most of them lived outside of Lowell, in Billerica, Chelmsford, or Grayhead because that is where their sponsors lived. In the beginning everyone only saw each other on Saturday or Sunday when we came to buy food in Lowell, after that we went back to our own place. We had no cars, no phones to stay in touch, nothing. We just were quiet in our homes. But once we realized there were more families, and once we were able to, many of us were settled in Lowell to be close to each other (H.N. 2011).

This first small wave would form the foundation for a second, more significant influx of Cambodian refugees to Lowell.

This research found that the most commonly cited reasons for migration to Lowell can be classified into the three following categories: the desire to reunite with surviving friends and family, the initial widespread availability of low-skill manufacturing jobs, and the desire for a Cambodian specific community. When Cambodians first arrived to the United States most lacked both the education and language skills necessary to survive. Fortunately, many of the early individuals who came to the United States were sponsored by organizations which

provided the refugees with means to operate in a foreign culture. However, the amount of support given to and infrastructure supporting subsequently arriving refugees varied. As has been discussed, the actions of Kitty Dukakis and other individuals resulted in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts being a good environment for incoming refugees. The experiences of refugees settled elsewhere varied greatly from those who were settled in Massachusetts, or similar refugee friendly states. Y.D., whose family members had such different experiences recalls:

My husband and his mother were originally settled in Tallahassee, Florida. She told me how when she came to Lowell she was blown away. In Florida, they were there for a week before they had to start working in the fields. They lived in a house with eight people living in one room. In Lowell, people were on state assistance. There were people here speaking your language, helping you fit in, helping you find a job. There were organizations like the CMAA [Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association] whose only focus was helping you get used to life in America. It was not like that in Florida. She knew a family in Florida who went to the store and was buying canned cat food to eat. They didn't know. There wasn't anyone there to help them (Y.D. 2011).

After the initial transition period, the need for Khmer specific community support, especially in light of having endured the horrors of the genocide, and the desire to preserve Khmer culture and traditions led to widespread secondary internal migration.

As time progressed, the support of governmental agencies and refugee organizations allowed for the initial 160 families to gain enough independence and stability to move to and settle within Lowell city limits, thus forming the foundation of the large community which would develop. The way in which news about Lowell was spread through these social networks was illustrated in the following example:

We were first settled in Chicago, in what was called the Argyle community. It was only one street, a very small Khmer community. As I was growing up I began

to realize there were more a few more small communities in Chicago itself, but the city is so big we were all too spread out. In 1984, some people from our community visited Lowell. My brother in-law's friend's neighbor told us about all the opportunities for work and the Khmer stores. It's the type of thing where the community hears about the city and it spreads pretty quickly through those channels. When we heard about Lowell it was October or November, and we packed everything into a station wagon and drove there in January. Our whole block from Chicago came afterward. I don't know how many years it took, but after we moved, each year we kept seeing more and more families from the little neighborhood in Chicago. People kept coming, and telling people that everything we were told about Lowell was true. I would say almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the entire neighborhood ended up moving here (Y.D. 2011).

This narrative of Lowell as a destination of secondary internal migration for Cambodian immigrants who had originally been settled across the nation was a common one. Interviews were conducted with people who had migrated to Lowell from Chicago, Brooklyn, Atlanta, Stockton, Tacoma, and Minneapolis.

Many interview participants stated that the development of a Cambodian community was a major factor in the decision to relocate to Lowell. While describing the draw of living in a Cambodian community, one individual stated:

The reason everyone one wanted to come to Lowell was to be around other Khmer people. You could meet people in the street from the same country, the same culture, speaking the same language. We could go to the shops and buy our food. We were rebuilding a little of what we lost, in Lowell (M.S. 2011).

The prevalence of Cambodian-owned grocery stores, auto repair shops, video rental stores, restaurants, and community organizations, such as the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, attracted secondary migration. In addition, the establishment of the Triratanaram Temple in Chelmsford further increased the attractiveness of Lowell.

The availability of jobs was another primary draw of secondary internal migration. Many interviewees cited the availability of manufacturing jobs in the Merrimack River Valley, and the opportunities these jobs provided for good pay and chances of promotion even with the lack of a formal education and no native English speaking ability, as a reason for moving to Lowell.

Work was a big draw for me. In California I didn't have the chance to do that. I was looking for a job but couldn't find one. A majority of Cambodian immigrants here did not have an education. They didn't get a high school diploma in the camps, or go to school in Cambodia. Once they arrived here then went straight into the workforce to try and make money to survive. When I first arrived in Lowell, in the next few days I was already being picked up for work. They used to car pool us in vans to work in a plastics factory in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. There were agencies here that would contact the company, and the company would tell them how many people they needed and for how many days. We'd work and get paid really well under the table for a few months. Once I got here I had a job after only a few days, so after a month of working I was able to buy a car (T.K. 2011).

The economic boom which Lowell and the surrounding area experienced in the eighties, in the high-tech and manufacturing sector, provided an opportunity for newly arriving Cambodian immigrants to fill the gap in the labor pool. While the economic recession of the early nineties resulted in a loss of many of the manufacturing jobs found in and around Lowell, the community had developed to a state where Lowell would continue to serve as an attractive location for secondary internal migration. As I demonstrate below, these layers of migration resulted in a changed Lowell.

5.2 Place-Making

As discussed, the process of ethnic place-making occurs as the transnational and cultural commonalities and networks shared by members of an ethnic community are expressed and acted upon in a host society, thus resulting in the reconstruction of familiar ethnic places in an unfamiliar urban environment. In examining the place-making process and specifically how an ethnic community can leave its imprint on the built environment of a city, the clearest examples of this process in Lowell is located in the Lower Highlands neighborhood. At the fork of Middlesex Street and Broad Street lays a small park officially known as Clemente Park, but for which the more common name is Pailin Park. On any given day, one can find between eighty and one hundred Cambodians utilizing this public green space. Men play chess, volleyball, and sey (a traditional game similar to hacky sack), women sell egg rolls and similar Cambodian street food, and children play on the playgrounds. The park hosts an annual volleyball tournament between the Cambodian community in Lowell and the Cambodian community in Long Beach, California. While conducting research, I attended both a volleyball game, observed a political rally for a Cambodian community member seeking a seat on the Lowell City Council, and appreciated firsthand the ways in which the Cambodian community had transformed the neglected park into a place of their own.

5.2.1 *Roberto Clemente vs. Pailin Park*

Originally known as Washington Square Park, located on Middlesex Street in the Lower Highlands neighborhood, this 3.2 acre park was renamed in the 1970s for Puerto Rican baseball legend and humanitarian Roberto Clemente (Myers 2009). Clemente died in a plane crash in

1972, at the height of his popularity as a professional athlete, while helping bring relief supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua. The park, named in his honor, was seen as “a source of pride to the large Latino community in Lowell”, many of whom lived in the Lower Highlands neighborhood, and in the adjacent neighborhood of The Acre (V.M. 2011).

In the years since the park’s renaming, the surrounding Lower Highlands neighborhood has undergone an extreme demographic shift, transitioning into the heart of the Cambodian community in Lowell. Directly across the street from Clemente Park is Pailin Plaza, a shopping center built in the early 1990s as Lowell’s original all Cambodian shopping center. Pailin is a province in Western Cambodia known for being the center of the Cambodian diamond industry, and, as such, the name is associated with good luck and prosperity. The plaza was even developed with traditional Cambodian architectural touches, with a red pagoda style roof and hand painted signs written in both English and Khmer script (see Figures 2 and 3). As the Cambodian community continued to establish businesses and make their homes in the neighborhood, the community began to refer to Clemente Park as Pailin Park. “You ask anyone who is Khmer and they only know it as Pailin Park. Anyone else knows it by both Pailin and Clemente, but still probably would say “meet me at Pailin Park” instead of Clemente” (O.R. 2011).



Figure 2. Pailin Plaza



Figure 3. Signage at Pailin Plaza

As the Lower Highlands changed, Clemente Park began to be used for different purposes than originally planned. While very popular within the Latino community, baseball was an unfamiliar and foreign sport to the recent Cambodian refugees. As O.R. recalls, “growing up I never saw anyone playing baseball there, even when the field was still up. If anyone was in the park it was mostly just kids running around or teenagers hanging out.”

An analysis of aerial imagery of Clemente Park shows that the baseball diamond existed in Clemente Park until sometime between 1998 and 2000, when the baseball fields gave way to several makeshift volleyball courts. These early courts were crudely constructed. “We (Cambodians) love volleyball, so when we saw no one was using the park we just went out and set up our own nets and drew lines in the dirt. We could have 7 or 8 games going on at once. A lot of people could come to play and watch, so it (the park) was actually getting used” (V.S. 2011). As the baseball diamond gave way to the volleyball courts (see Figure 4), the park saw an increase in use, predominantly by members of the Cambodian community. “Every day, starting at 4:30 or 5:00, you will see people there, playing volleyball, chess, selling things. It is the most utilized compact park in the city of Lowell” (N.V. 2011).

The increased usage of the park by the Cambodian community, and the increased visibility of large numbers of Cambodians utilizing a public space, resulted in Clemente Park developing a negative reputation in the eyes of a portion of the larger community of Lowell. “Dangerous”, “rough”, and “scary” are all words I have heard used by non-Cambodians in Lowell to describe the park and the surrounding neighborhood. V.S. recalls, “only Khmer people ever came into the park. We didn’t put up signs saying “keep out” or anything, but people were scared. You’d hear other kids at school saying they’d never go there. You get that

many people in one place, 90% younger males, all speaking Khmer, and I think it just was intimidating. It was our park, you know, even if we didn't set out to make it our park." As park usage increased, late night activity and large groups of youth brought with it the concern of increased gang violence and illegal activity in the vicinity of the park. In reaction to the concern about a large number of Cambodian youth congregating in the park at later hours of the night, the city decided to turn off the lights in the park, effectively rendering the park useless after dark during the summer.



Figure 4. Volleyball at Clemente Park

The importance of Clemente Park to the Cambodian community has been recognized by community leaders for several years. Local business owners and community leaders, two of

whom were interviewed for this thesis, established a council to restore the park, build official volleyball courts, turn on the lights, and build public restrooms and a concession stand. In an interview with the community member who established the committee to restore the park, and who has been working on the issue with the city for 8 years, he shared:

Before we started playing volleyball there, there were lights for the ball fields. The lights stayed on too, very late. Yet we have been fighting for years to get the city to turn the lights back on. The reason the city gave for shutting them off was that kids were hanging out there and playing volleyball and basketball too late, and that these kids were then leaving the park and getting involved in gang activities or drugs, so they cut the lights to try and fight that. Since then, they have never turned the lights back on. Even if that was true, which it wasn't, tell me how turning off the lights so no one can be in a park is going to keep kids out of trouble. If my son is playing volleyball at the park at 10:00 on a Friday, I am ok with that. I know where he is. But, then the lights were shut off, and now all those kids have to find something else to do, something other than playing sports. It made no sense. But, what could we do. The city didn't listen to us (N.V. 2011)

Additionally, according to this same individual, throughout the process, the city has been unclear as to the reasons why the lights were initially turned off, and why turning the lights back on has taken so long:

At one point during this period they (the City of Lowell) told us that they were doing some work in the park and accidentally cut the wires to the lights, and that was the reason the lights were turned off. We were told that in order to turn the lights back on they will have to rewire the entire park. I don't believe it, maybe they cut them on purpose to give them an excuse to clear out the park at night. Also, now because it is utilized as a basketball and volleyball park more or less, not a baseball park, we have asked that they install proper lighting. And they did, they put up some new pole lights last year, and they said they were going to turn it on last year but they have yet to do so. This year the summer is almost over now and they still haven't turned the lights on. They installed new lights but they have never been turned on. Now, if any other community in the city was using the park I guarantee it would not be this difficult, but we have to fight so hard to get it taken care of (N.V. 2011).

The turning point in the struggle to restore the park and get the lights turned back on came when the committee was able to partner and work with a member of the city council.

As has been previously discussed, political representation for Cambodians within the city has been remarkably minimal, and as such, the community feels its views and interests often take a back seat. In discussions about the efforts to restore Clemente Park, many people felt that it was only once they found an ally on the city council that they were able to make any progress. One member of the park committee stated:

Last year we finally made progress, and it happened after we partnered with, a good friend, very dear friend of the community, Patrick Murphy, who is now on the city council. He promised the community that he would bring the issues of the park and the lights up to the city council, and he did. We had been trying to tell the city the same thing, but once we got Patrick on our side they finally listened. We packed the city council chamber with 80 or 90 people for the meeting, it was completely packed. When Patrick Murphy brought up that motion and we got another city councilmember to second it, the plans we had proposed finally started moving. We were going nowhere, and it took one person who saw our struggle and promised to help to actually get the project off the ground (N.V. 2011).

With the support of Patrick Murphy, and a voice on the city council, the plans which the community had been pushing for began to gain traction within the city.

The restoration of Clemente Park, and the plan to change the unused baseball field to multiple volleyball courts, has faced some criticism from the community. A member of the park committee stated:

Now, the latest setback is that Hispanic community has gone to the City and said “how come we are not involved” because the park is named after their hero. Now, after all these years, when we are almost done they are asking why they weren’t involved. I don’t know why the sudden interest. In the last 20 years not one Hispanic has come to use the park. It was a shit hole when we got here and nobody cared, but now that we have fought for it to be redone, and the plans have been approved, they are asking why they weren’t involved. They say it’s too Cambodian because the committee proposed for the concession stand to be

designed using Cambodian architecture. They don't think the new Clemente Park represents the community it is named for enough, so now they are delaying the project (V.M. 2011).

The interest of the Latino community in Clemente Park, despite its lack of presence in the park or neighborhood for many years, illustrates the often overlapping immigrant geographies which are present in Lowell and demonstrates the intersections in which the emotional and subjective place frames of groups and individuals can result in conflicting ideas as to what should constitute a place.

In the time since these interviews were conducted over the summer of 2011, the City of Lowell has announced it will invest \$150,000 in park improvements, including the construction of a new multipurpose building designed with traditional Cambodian architectural touches where community members will be able to sell goods and hold small gatherings, restroom facilities, and new park lighting (Shaugnessey 2011). Lastly, the restored park has been renamed the Pailin Volleyball Complex at Roberto Clemente Park. This name resolved the conflict between the Cambodian and Latino community by retaining the original name of the park, but incorporating the Cambodian title for the volleyball complex.

The restoration of Clemente Park was a cause for which leaders and community members had fought for several years. Despite the delays and frustrations with the process, the City of Lowell listened to the Cambodian community, took its plans and wishes for the park into consideration, and ultimately followed through on the promises to restore the park, which proved to the Cambodian community that the City recognized its contributions as a community. The park restoration laid the foundation for the next stage of City investment and development in the Lower Highlands neighborhood.

5.2.2 *Cambodia Town*

The Lower Highlands is the center of the Cambodian community in Lowell. Walking down Middlesex Street, it is easy to see the defining factors of both the city's past and present (see Appendix). The red brick facades and smoke stacks of old factories and sawmills stand as a reminder of the city's industrial past. One such factory now houses the Kun Khmer Kickboxing Federation, an organization which is officially sanctioned by the Royal Government of Cambodia to teach and promote the practice of Cambodian martial arts in the United States. In 2010, the Kun Khmer Federation hosted a screening with the actors and directors of the Academy Award nominated film, *The Fighter*, a movie about Irish American boxer Mickey Ward, one of Lowell's most famous residents (O.R. 2011). The Cambodian community has firmly established itself into the historical narrative and the physical landscape of Lowell.

There is no better example of the influence the Cambodian community has had on the built environment than the Lower Highlands neighborhood. Along Middlesex Street, which could be considered the heart of the Cambodian community in Lowell, one can see several ethnic grocery stores, Cambodian restaurants, video stores specializing in Cambodian karaoke and dubbed Chinese films, and numerous small businesses that cater specifically to the Cambodian community (see Figure 5). For this reason, the City of Lowell has designated this part of the city "Cambodia Town," and has proceeded to create a demarcated ethnic neighborhood within the City.



Figure 5. Streetscape along Middlesex Street

The development of Cambodia Town in Lowell highlights the recent renewal of interest in urban ethnic communities as places of cultural heritage, which stands in stark contrast to the policies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which saw urban ethnic communities subjected to slum clearances and removal (Lin 2011). During the industrial period of American urban growth, urban ethnic communities were often subject to clearance and demolition by city managers and the federal government in the urban renewal process, as they were deemed eyesores and obstacles to modernization and cultural assimilation (Lin 2011). However, as globalization has led to the deindustrialization and urban decline of many postindustrial regions of the United States, ethnic communities have rejuvenated industrial areas, retail districts, and residential areas of the urban core. The development and growth of these urban ethnic communities has revitalized neighborhoods afflicted by the decentralization of jobs and people

to the urban periphery (Lin 2011). These new urban ethnic places have thus become both centers of cultural heritage and transnational commerce and are driving the redevelopment and revitalization of decentralized urban areas.

In addition, the designation of a physically defined Cambodia Town serves as a gesture of local cultural diplomacy between the Cambodian community and the City, promotes shared economic community interests, and further creates public goodwill between the City of Lowell and the Cambodian government. Cambodia Town is already seen as a symbol of pride to the community in Lowell, with members of the community stating that it made them feel more connected, appreciated, and recognized by the City (Moran 2011). Located on the border of Cambodia Town is the Royal Honorary Consulate General of Cambodia to the United States, established in 2009. During an interview the Honorary Consul General stated that the Consulate was “established to protect the interests of Cambodian people and Cambodian businesses in Lowell” and to “work with state and local agencies in order to promote tourism, trade, education and culture” (O.S. 2011). The Consul General went on to state:

I was appointed the Honorary Consul for the government of Cambodia to establish connections between the Cambodian government and the city of Lowell. The government works through me, and is very interested and aware of what is occurring in Lowell. I focus on trade and tourism, and work to bring more tourism from Lowell to Cambodia. We have been very interested in the development of Cambodia Town because it would make the area an attraction, and would benefit the local businesses (O.S. 2011).

This is further evidence that these new urban ethnic places act as centers of transnational commerce in our increasingly connected world.



Figure 6. Cambodian Grocery Store in the Lower Highlands

City leaders in the City of Lowell have made it clear that they hope that by designating this area as Cambodia Town will promote ethnic tourism to the city. At a festival held in Clemente Park celebrating the opening of Cambodia Town, attended by over 3,000 people, Lowell Mayor Patrick Murphy stated that this “was only the start of the city’s commitment to invest and reinvest in this (Lower Highlands) neighborhood and community as an economic center” (Collins 2012). As of early 2012, the City of Lowell had created official “gateways” demarcating the boundaries of Cambodia Town. Through the “Sign and Façade Improvement Program,” over 17 local Cambodian American owned businesses, including Pailin Plaza and the Pailin City building, had received upgrades and updates. The City has worked with the community and a Cambodian American graphic designer to create banners with traditional Khmer imagery which will be installed on utility poles and light poles throughout the

neighborhood, further physically defining the area which has been designated as Cambodia Town (see Figures 7 and 8). In addition, several local Cambodian-American owned businesses have participated in the “Best Retail Practices” program, a program run by the City of Lowell which focuses on improving local businesses and offers an 80% matching grant of up to \$2,500 to help store owners improve their businesses (Moran 2011). Among others, these businesses include multiple ethnic grocery stores, a Cambodian-American owned insurance company, and a Khmer clothing and book store (see Figure 6). Future plans are being made to incorporate benches and trash cans throughout the neighborhood, allowing the public to vote on styles they felt would best fit into the Cambodia Town aesthetic, installing unique Khmer themed murals and public art, and promoting more cultural festivals and events.

The development of Cambodia Town has physical altered the built environment of the Lower Highlands neighborhood. The Cambodian community and City of Lowell have worked together to create a new urban ethnic place, with both parties being actively involved in the place-making process.

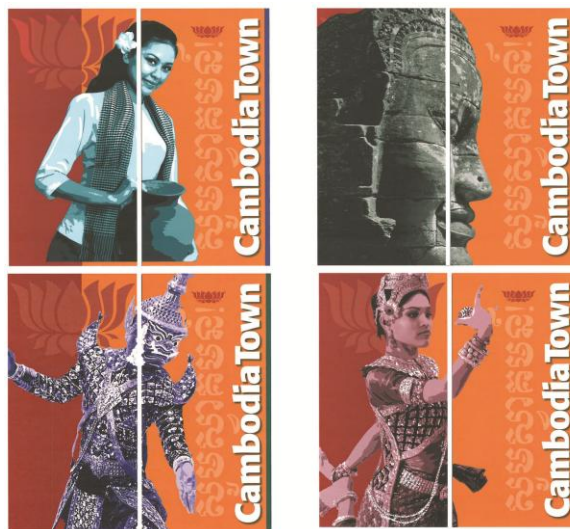


Figure 7. Banners to be Hung in Cambodia Town



Figure 8. Mockup of Future Streetscape with Banners

5.3 Water Festival

A discourse which emerged through researching the ways in which the Cambodian community in Lowell has influenced the place-making process and changed the landscape of the city was the impact of the annual Southeast Asian Water Festival. Bon Om Tuk, the traditional water festival is held in Cambodia each year when the water of the Tonle Sap River reverses its flow, signifying the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the harvest. During the water festival, the river is viewed as a life source, and the water is viewed as sacred and powerful. This sharply contrasts the image of the Merrimack River in Lowell, which powered the textile mills, and which for decades served as a dumping ground for the byproduct

of industrial production. The “repurposing” of the river as a place over the course of one week every April for this celebration is an excellent example of the Cambodian community’s influence on the place-making process in Lowell, transforming the river from a place of aversion to a place of attraction.

5.3.1 Merrimack River: Lowell’s Industrial past and a Cultural Symbol of Life

For fifty one weeks a year, the Merrimack River serves as a reminder of Lowell’s industrial past. During the early stages of Lowell’s industrialization, the 27 mile Merrimack Canal was opened, providing a direct connection between the Merrimack River in Lowell and the Charles River in Boston (Eno 1976). The direct link to Boston via the canal, and the 32 foot drop of the Merrimack River at Pawtucket Falls, just north of downtown Lowell, which allowed for the harnessing of adequate water power to drive turbines powering textile looms, made this the ideal location for milling and manufacturing operations. The Merrimack was a vital component of Lowell’s industrial success as it was diverted through the city via a network of locks and canals to power the mills used in the production of textiles (Eno 1976).

Today, the canals still course their way through the downtown area. These canals, as well as many of the city’s mills which line the canals have been preserved, and the National Park Service has created the Lowell National Historic Park to serve as “an artifact of the industrial process” (Weible 1991). Lowell National Historic Park offers visitors several boat tours through the canals, and focuses specifically on the importance the river and canal system played in Lowell’s industrial development. However, the same industrial revolution which has been preserved and celebrated in Lowell left behind decades of industrial contamination and

brownfields. The river which once powered the city became a dumping ground for the mill's industrial waste, and contaminated the city's main source of water. For several years the Merrimack River was ranked the seventh most polluted river in the nation (Lush 1995).

In stark contrast to this image of the Merrimack, one weekend a year, the river is transformed from the once polluted reminder of Lowell's industrial past to a cultural and religious symbol of life, renewal, and blessing for the city's many Cambodian and Southeast Asian citizens. Each year, on the third Saturday in August, between 60,000 and 70,000 Southeast Asians from across the United States and Canada come to Lowell for the water festival, a celebration based on Buddhist scripture and Cambodian tradition, and to celebrate, preserve, and share Southeast Asian culture. The importance of the water festival celebration to the Cambodian community was summed up by one interviewee as follows:

Any time a Cambodian from Cambodia or somewhere else in the United States comes to Lowell they don't want to leave. They think "I want to be here." They feel at home. For example, next week is water festival. 70,000 people from all over the United States, France, Canada, they will come here to celebrate. If you are not from Lowell and you come to visit for the first time, you can't believe it. You can't believe how many of us come together in one place. Where else can you see 70,000 people like you? It is important because people come to see each other. People don't go to water festival just to see a boat race. We come together to be one community and celebrate together. We come together to share our culture, and to invite others to experience it. The main importance is to come together as one community, as one people (H.N. 2011).

Walking along the half mile stretch of the river where the festival is held, Cambodian Americans can be seen purchasing transnationally produced Khmer-language pop CDs and karaoke DVDs sold alongside increasing popular Cambodian American hip-hop CDs. Dragon boat races along the Merrimack River draw teams from around the world, and gather large groups of spectators (see Figure 9). On the main stage, a local Cambodian American hip-hop

group is followed by the nationally recognized Angkor Dance Troupe. Cambodian American youth members of the troupe are dressed in the traditional dancing clothes, preparing to demonstrate traditional dances, yet before their performance several are wearing backwards facing Boston Red Sox caps, and have brightly colored Nike shoes peeking out from underneath their traditional dress. It is through these scenes at the Southeast Asian Water Festival in Lowell that we can clearly see that moment where Cambodian tradition and transcultural assimilation intersect; where the past and the present of both the City of Lowell and the Cambodian community combine to form a new and very distinct place, one which demonstrates the resolute spirit of the Khmer culture struggling to adapt and imbue their unique history into their new home in Lowell.



Figure 9. Dragon Boat Used In Races at Water Festival

5.3.2 *Expression of Community Power/Influence*

While the stated purpose of the Southeast Asian Water Festival is to celebrate, preserve, and share Southeast Asian culture, there are underlying themes behind these public rituals. Following Sallie Marston's (1989) research on the Irish and Saint Patrick's Day parades in Lowell during the mid-Nineteenth century, I argue that the Southeast Asian Water Festival also serves as a demonstration of community pride and solidarity directed towards the non-Cambodian community in Lowell. In addition, the similarities which can be drawn between the Cambodian community and the Irish community found in Lowell over a century earlier extend beyond the use of public rituals, and add insight into the process of ethnic place-making and immigrant assimilation into the social and political order of the city.

From their arrival in 1822, until they were outnumbered by incoming French –Canadian immigrants in 1905, the Irish constituted the single largest immigrant group in the city of Lowell (Marston 1989). Many of the Irish immigrants who arrived in Lowell left behind the mass starvation and economic stagnation which afflicted their homeland, in search of a better life in the Mill City, a common theme seen among successive immigrant groups to Lowell. The size of the Irish community in Lowell grew rapidly, from the initial 30 workers who came in 1822 to over 10,000, out of a total population of 37,000, by 1855 (Mitchell 1976). As the number of Irish immigrants in Lowell grew, the community established institutions which focused on maintaining Irish identity (Marston 1989). These organizations were essential in helping the community maintain an Irish identity which was distinct from the "Yankee" identity of the majority (Marston 1989). Organizations such as the Lowell Irish Benevolent Society would play an important role in the political and social adaptation of the Irish community in Lowell, the

same role which the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association would play for the Cambodian community over a hundred years later.

Additionally, neighborhood and ethnic identity was developed and strengthened as Irish Catholic churches were built in Lowell. In 1828, the first Irish Catholic church was built in Lowell, which quickly became an important gathering place for the community (Mitchell 1976). The site was located equidistant between two “paddy camps,” with the intent to ease tensions which had developed between two factions within the community along economic class lines (Mitchell 1988). Inter-Irish rivalries developed as the community established itself and began to assimilate into the political and social structure of the city. Economic disparity among the Irish was the largest point of division within the community, as a small group of middle class Irish assumed a leadership position on behalf of the community (Mitchell 1988). These positions of power were afforded through connections individuals maintained with Yankees businessmen and city leaders (Marston 1989). Ultimately, it was the Irish Catholic church and religious leaders, specifically Fathers John and Timothy O’Brien, who were able to unite the community (Mitchell 1988). As Marston states:

The O’Brien’s successfully accomplished the creation of an Irish Catholic identity that both superseded and encompassed all classes of the Irish population from the newly arrived peasants to the first generation Irish-American (1989, p. 259).

The parades and public ceremonies conducted by the Irish community in Lowell would further strengthen the group’s identity and cohesion among the community and offer insight into the ways in which subordinate groups were able to articulate their reactions to living and working in a non-inclusive Yankee dominated society.

Marston (1989) argues that Saint Patrick's Day parades held by Irish immigrants in Lowell served as an expression of "contested terrain." The Irish community utilized public rituals as a way to address the larger population of Lowell about their discontent with the extent of community participation in the local political, economic, and social life (Marston 1989). Marston (1989) states that the parades must be viewed as such, as they were utilized to address the wider society in Lowell with the community's demands for political and social inclusion. Not only did the parade display the strength and unity of the Irish community, but the route itself served to make that community and its numbers visible to those in positions of power; the routes deliberately passing corporate boarding houses, City Hall, the mills, and the edges of Yankee residential areas (Marston 1989). The Saint Patrick's Day parade served to unite the fragmented Irish community, a minority population struggling to place itself within the existing social and political structure, through the public display of community strength, and allowed them to define a place for themselves within the social order of the city.

Although separated by more than a century, the arrival of Irish immigrants and development of the Irish community shares many similarities with the arrival of Cambodian refugees and the ongoing development of the Cambodian community in Lowell. Both the Irish and Cambodian communities constituted the single largest immigrant groups in the city, both communities faced similar struggles for involvement and inclusion into the political and social life of the city, and both utilized public rituals as a show of community power and to maintain group specific cultural identities. However, while the Irish community was successful in overcoming the inter-community division which developed, the Cambodian community is struggling to do so. The Irish Catholic church played a central role in unifying the Irish

community in 19th century Lowell, a role which, as previously discussed, the Cambodian Buddhist temples are failing to fulfill. In addition, historical and transnational rivalries between other Southeast Asian people are hindering the ability of the Southeast Asian Water Festival to act as a powerful unifying public ritual for the community, in the way the Saint Patrick's Day parades were able to for the Irish.

While Cambodians constitute 95% of Lowell's Southeast Asian population, there are still significant numbers of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Thai immigrants living in the city (Higgins and Ross 1986). When the Southeast Asian Water Festival was created in 1997, there was a conscious effort by the founders to include other Southeast Asian communities in the festival (S.S. 2011). Bon Om Tuk is a Cambodian celebration, but similar celebrations are held throughout Southeast Asia signifying the end of the rainy season. The deliberate decision to name the festival "Southeast Asian" as opposed to "Cambodian", and the inclusion of other communities is one which still is contested by a certain segment of the community. A community member who previously served as head of the festival stated:

When the water festival was created, in 1997, it wasn't for Cambodian's only. The intention was to get all the Southeast Asian community together to celebrate this wonderful tradition called Bon Om Tuk. I would say 95% still think that the water festival is only for Cambodians, so therefore we should not allow Vietnamese to be involved, Thai to be involved, Laotian to be involved, Burmese to be involved. They think "we own this, this is our festival, so don't let those people get involved". That is not the case. This has gone on for years. We have been criticized for it. Sometimes the community calls us traitors, saying "Why are you siding with the Thai people when we are at war with them over our borders? Why are you siding with the Vietnamese when we have decades of civil war together? They hate us and we hate them. They should have no part in the festival (S.S. 2011).

These feelings of anger over including other Southeast Asian communities, specifically the Thai and Vietnamese, was confirmed in several additional interviews, primarily with older members of the community who identified themselves as being actively engaged in homeland politics.

The former member head of the festival demonstrated how the younger generation of Cambodians in Lowell typically views these issues when he stated:

This is a different world now! This is a different country now! We are not in Cambodia. That is why the name is Southeast Asian, so everyone can be included. A lot of people don't understand that. They call all the organizers traitors. They don't like to have the Vietnamese there because they have feelings dating back to the war, and of course when they have these feelings of hate, all the elders continue to educate their kids and grandkids in that way. They continue to build on that hate, and it just builds and builds and builds. That hatred will never end. You shouldn't tell your kids to hate. You should tell your kids that the history shows we don't get along, and we have done really bad things to each other in the past. But it's a new world. You don't have to like them, but you have to work together with them to make your community a better place to live (S.S. 2011).

These ties to homeland politics are not enough to influence the outward success of the water festival, as seen by the sheer number of people the events draws on a year to year basis, but they further demonstrate the ways in which transnational ties are fragmenting the community. The fighting among community members over issues such as who should be included in the water festival celebration and the temples has "made the Cambodian community look bad to the rest of Lowell. The city sees us fighting for years, coming to no agreement, and it proves to them that we are a weak community, that we cannot even agree on something we all view as necessary" (M.S. 2011).

The Saint Patrick's Day parades held in 19th century Lowell helped to push for Irish participation in the political and social life of the city. Forty years after the first Saint Patrick's Day parade was held on March 17 1841, the Irish community had gained enough political and economic power, in 1881, to elect the first Irish mayor of the City of Lowell (Marston 1989). It took nearly sixty years from the time the first Irish immigrants arrived in Lowell until they had the community unity and influence to see Irish political representation at high levels in the city. Only thirty three years have transpired since the first Cambodian refugees were settled in Lowell, so while there may still be divisions and conflict within the community, it should be expected to wane as time goes on, and the younger generation of Cambodian-Americans begins to take an active role in shaping both the Cambodian community, and the City of Lowell as a whole. Through examining the history of the Irish community and the pattern of inclusion and development which occurred, it can be assumed that a key factor in determining the strength of the Cambodian community moving forward will be the resolution of the temple conflict, or another religious or cultural institution stepping forward to help the community maintain its unique Khmer identity while fostering community unity.

5.4 Lowell as a Transnational Place

The development of Cambodia Town and the existence of the Southeast Asian Water Festival have played a part in Lowell, Massachusetts establishing itself as a *transnational* place. Scholars of transnationalism argues that ties to an individual's country of origin do not fade over time, and as such, political, economic, and social links to a homeland are maintained by immigrants and refugees (McEwan 2004). These existing links to the country of origin, and the

development and cultivation of new links to the local communities often creates multiple identities for immigrants and refugees to navigate. The existence of these multiple identities, and the ways in which individuals and the ethnic group as a whole acting on them have directly influenced the local community, emerged as common discourse through interviews with community members.

5.4.1 Transnational Citizenship/Identity

While conducting research on the Cambodian community, the extent to which second and even third generation Cambodian Americans felt connected to Cambodia, both through the culture and to the actual country itself, was a topic that came up frequently. The questions of how and if second generation Cambodian Americans in Lowell maintained ties to their parents' homeland, the role of language and cultural retention or loss in transnational engagement, and expressions of second generation transnational identities among Cambodian Americans became common discourses in the interviews. As these transnational ties have impacted the development of the community in Lowell and the place-making process, they deserve attention in the empirical analysis of the research.

It is generally assumed that as immigrants become more and more incorporated into the host society, ethnic identities become less prominent (McEwan 2004), yet there seems to be a lack of empirical research on second and third generation racial minority immigrants who have incorporated into society. This analysis seeks to explore the ways in which Cambodian American immigrants have constructed and expressed their transnational identities, and the influence Lowell has had on these transnational identities.

Research on generational transnationalism has drawn much less attention than research concerning first generation immigrants and their ties to their homeland (Somerville 2008). Empirical research that has been conducted on second and third generation immigrants has left researchers divided on the extent to which these second and third generation immigrants maintain transnational ties. On one side of the debate are researchers who predict that transnational ties are a one-generational phenomenon, but that the level of transnational involvement of the first generation can greatly influence the second generation (Portes 2001). Furthermore, other research has determined that despite varying levels of transnational ties among first generation immigrant groups, the level of transnational attachment among the second generation is very small (Rumbaut 2002).

On the other side of the debate are researchers who have argued that second generation immigrants overwhelmingly maintains transnational ties through cultural knowledge, speaking their parent's native language, visiting their parent's homeland (Smith 2002). Following this belief, not only do the transnational ties exist, but second generation immigrants often depend on these transnational ties to develop their own unique cultural heritage, in an attempt to redefine their personal identities and social locations (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 2000). In her study on Indo-Canadian youth, Somerville (2008) argues that second generation youth are engaged in what she calls "transnational struggles" at an emotional level. Somerville (2008) determined that second generation youth maintaining transnational ties through cross border communication via internet and visits, and in turn, this sustained communication shapes the self-identification process, allowing for the development

of identities which are “fluid and malleable, taking on new forms depending on the location of the migrants and their social network” (p. 31).

The second and third generation Cambodian immigrants in Lowell have developed what I would argue is a hybrid² form of transnational identity. In interviews conducted with second and third generation immigrants, each identified themselves as feeling fully “Americanized,” yet their Khmer culture and the shared Cambodia immigrant and refugee experience was cited as being a source of pride. It was clear that these individuals still self-identify as Cambodian on an emotional level. However, their identity as Cambodian has not been strengthened through speaking Khmer and visiting Cambodia. In fact, many individuals stated that visiting their parents’ homeland had an opposite effect on the depth of their transnational identities. In an interview with a twenty year old female, she stated:

I went to Cambodia for the first time in 2005. I was excited to finally go, to reconnect with my culture, to see where my parents were born, but the trip was weird. When we got there I realized I wasn’t in touch with the culture. I was scared. I didn’t even talk to anyone. I speak Khmer fluently, but I was too scared to speak it there. I felt like an outsider, an outcast. The people there even viewed me differently. They called me a “bad girl” and assumed I didn’t work and partied hard and just lived off my parents. I was being viewed differently just because I was American. It wasn’t based on anything I actually did, just that I was American and I had lighter skin, I was taller, I was bigger (N.J. 2011).

She continues, describing the way visiting Cambodia influenced her self-identification:

Going to Cambodia was a really difficult experience for me. I thought I would reconnect with my culture or have some great experience, but all I wanted to do once I got there was leave. I won’t ever go back. I didn’t feel any connection; it was all unfamiliar to me. I thought I would fit in fine, but I have never felt so out of place. Now I feel like I’m more my own individual. My parents were born and raised in Cambodia, my brothers and sisters were born in Cambodia, but I was

² For the purpose of this research, the term “hybrid” refers to the unique transnational identity, composed of mixed, or multiple components and connections which exists on the emotional and physical level

born here. I can't forget where I actually came from, about my roots, the language, or the food we eat. I balance feeling Cambodian and feeling American. I'm Asian-American. I'm from Lowell. That's how I feel now (N.J. 2011).

Despite acknowledging maintaining ties through speaking the language at home, eating Cambodian food, living and actively participating in a Cambodian ethnic enclave, and self-identifying as Cambodian, the youngest individuals interviewed for this study all shared similar feelings. These experiences seem to be common among young adult Cambodian Americans who visit Cambodia for the first time. When asked if he would ever like to visit Cambodia, a twenty five year old male said:

I have a desire to go, but I'm a little reluctant. One thing everyone tells me is that if I go over there they will be able to tell I'm from America from a mile away. They will feel like I'm not one of them, even though I speak the language and eat the food, and my ethnic makeup is more or less the same as theirs. We are just as Khmer as the people in Cambodia, but I can't tell you how many friends who have gone back were shocked how out of place they felt. I guess it is one of those things where subconsciously, or even a little consciously, I worry about maybe not being accepted by Cambodians. I have had friends who came back and hated it. I don't know if I want to feel that way (O.R. 2011).

When asked the extent to which he identified as Cambodian, the youngest individual interviewed, a second generation immigrant who was born and raised in Lowell and who had never been to Cambodia, stated:

I am Khmer by birth, but I don't associate myself as being Cambodian at all. I really want to distance myself from it actually. I am American. I don't relate to Cambodia at all. I have never been, I dislike the Cambodian music, I don't really eat Cambodian food either, especially not vegetables, and that's all Cambodians eat, vegetables. I love Italian food, lasagna, spaghetti, ravioli, I love Greek food, American food. Since I grew up here in Lowell I ate that food just as much as I ate Cambodian food (P.S. 2011).

While it was extremely clear that much of the older generation, those individuals who had lived a large portion of their lives in Cambodia, still maintained strong transnational ties, individuals interviewed who were under the age of 40-50 did not express the same connection. This middle generation consists of those who spent their youth or childhood in Cambodia or refugee camps. Common themes among Cambodian-Americans of this age group were feelings of in-between citizenship and a feeling of individual placelessness. While several individuals discussed these themes, the feelings of in-between citizenship and individual placelessness were best described in the following manner by a thirty five year old community activist and public speaker:

To me, being Cambodian means I have a different culture, I speak the Khmer language, and we tend to sometimes do things differently than other groups, either Americans, or Vietnamese, or whatever it may be. Our culture is different. If you were to ask me if I was Khmer, I would like to say so. Yet, I am not accepted as Khmer when I go to Cambodia. They look at me as a complete foreigner. So, how am I Khmer when the Khmer in Cambodia don't see me as one? Am I American? If I meet a new Caucasian person, I know what they are going to ask me first. I know, they will ask "where are you from?" I'm from Lowell. I'm American, or Cambodian-American. For me personally, I think I do not have a country, so I can't really claim one or the other. I assume I am sort of more Cambodian than American, because people look at me like a foreigner, or always ask "where are you from". That's just the way life is. We don't really know what the definition of being Cambodian or being American is. I just don't know (S.S. 2011).

He continues to define his individual self-identification by saying:

I feel like I don't have any country to claim right now, I don't fit 100% in either, but I do think of Lowell as my home town. I would claim being from Lowell. When I go around people ask where I am from, I say "Lowell, Massachusetts." They say "no, I mean your original country" and then I say Cambodia. That's how I feel. I am an American, I am from Lowell. I'm just a Lowell guy (S.S. 2011).

As shown through this excerpt, embedded in the theme of in-between citizenship and individual placelessness is the role Lowell, as a place, had played in ascribing identity and sense of place to individuals within the Cambodian community.

Cutting across the dramatic generational differences among Cambodian Americans in Lowell are the solidifying effects of a common heritage, the shared refugee and immigrant experience, and a sense of pride and belonging to both the Cambodian community and the city of Lowell itself. Individuals of all ages expressed feelings of pride in both being a member of the Cambodian community and being a citizen of Lowell. Each individual interviewed was asked if they saw themselves moving away from Lowell, and while the exact responses varied, every individual stated that Lowell was their home and they would always be connected to the city. It is this sense of belonging and civic pride that has driven the place-making processes discussed in this study. However, despite this commonality, the generational differences among the Cambodian community continue to shape ethnic place-making in Lowell. The extent to which transnational ties are maintained among the different generations of Cambodians, and how those transnational ties influence place-making, can specifically be examined through the ongoing conflict over the city's religious institutions.

5.4.2 Transnationalism: Wat Conflict

Through examining the ways in which transnationalism has influenced both individual and group identities within the community, it also became clear that some of the political, social, and economic ties to Cambodia had become a source of community weakness and factionalization. The injection of transnational politics and affiliations into local affairs in Lowell

is a subject that has not yet been studied in depth. However, through the interviews conducted, research done, and observation of the community, it is clear to see that this process is occurring, and is impacting the ways in which ethnic places are made. The outcomes of transnational ties are varied, yet the most commonly referenced problem currently facing the Cambodian community in Lowell is the ongoing conflict between the local Cambodian Buddhist temples. The disagreements and differing opinions which have emerged and are propagating this conflict can be linked to the ways in which the older generation of Cambodian immigrants, drawing from place frames, networks, and histories unique to their generation, desire to recreate the temples as an ethnic place.

Within the Cambodian community, the temple, or wat, traditionally serves as the main source of religious and cultural instruction and preservation. As one member of the community explained “the wat is like the warehouse of culture. The language, the religion, the tradition, it is all found at the wat. The people must go to the wat to get educated in Cambodian culture and tradition. That is how we remember, and share what it means to be Khmer” (O.S. 2011). The sentiments expressed about the importance of the temple are a strong indication that the presence of a temple within the community is central to Cambodian-American life. As previously discussed, one of the initial pulling factors of Lowell for secondary immigration was the existence of temples and monks within the community.

To fully understand the impact the ongoing temple issues have had on the Cambodian community in Lowell, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the traditional role temples and monks have played in Cambodian culture. The dominant religion of Cambodia is Theravada Buddhism. In the time before the Khmer Rouge took power, Cambodian Buddhism did not

have an organized structure with formal administrative ties to other Buddhist bodies, but was organized at the local level, with an estimated sixty-five thousand monks in six thousand monasteries in Cambodia (Douglas 2003). Buddhist monks have traditionally held a unique place in Cambodian culture, providing both religious instruction, as well as cultural and traditional education. Often, monks were the only literate people residing in rural areas of Cambodia, and until the 1970's, most literate Cambodians males gained literacy solely through joining an order of Buddhist monkhood for a period of time (Gerson 2007).

After the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975, Buddhist monks were systematically targeted by Pol Pot, who believed Buddhism was a “decadent affection” (Shenon 1992). By the time the Khmer Rouge was ousted in 1979, an estimated twenty-five thousand monks had been killed by the regime, important sacred Buddhist texts and relics were destroyed, and countless temples and religious sites were demolished (Shenon 1992). The four-year Cambodian genocide, the mass murder of monks, and the destruction of religious sites and artifacts nearly erased centuries worth of religious and cultural knowledge. The near total destruction of the main source of Khmer religious and cultural knowledge left Cambodian refugees with a strong desire to restore and maintain the Buddhist teachings and principles. A representative of one of the temples explained:

While the communists were in power, 3 years, 8 months, 20 days, everything was destroyed. The temples were used as warehouses or torn down. They took all the precious material from the temple to build other things. They tried to erase it. Now people feel like the only thing that can bring people together as one is Buddhism. We can sit down and eat with each other without thinking “you’re poor, you’re an official, you’re a farmer.” In Buddhism it is all the same. There is only one way we can bring people together, with the temple. Without that, nothing can bring people together (H.N. 2011).

During the post-Khmer Rouge period, the Buddhist community in Cambodia was largely influenced by the Vietnamese. In 1979, the Vietnamese backed government controversially appointed a delegation from the Buddhist community in Vietnam to re-establish the religion in Cambodia (Gerson 2007). The existence of a new, Vietnamese backed, Buddhist hierarchy in Cambodia was not seen as credible by Cambodian refugees now scattered around the world. As such, in the years after the Khmer Rouge era, Cambodian monks who managed to escape the genocide sought to recreate the pre-Khmer Rouge practice of Cambodian Buddhism as they see fit, in their new communities around the world, without direction from the non-recognized religious authority in Cambodia (Gerson 2007). This independence from an existing governing religious body, and the differing schools of thought as to how Cambodian Buddhist practice should be reconstituted in new communities, is at the basis of the conflict between temples in Lowell.

Religious institutions have long played a vital role in the development and adaptation of immigrant communities. The establishment of immigrant churches and temples provides ethnic communities with a place of refuge from discrimination and hostility from outside society, as well as opportunities for social recognition and economic mobility (Hirschman 2004). Despite their importance in immigrant communities, internal struggles over who will lead key religious and cultural institutions, as well as the directions those institutions should take, are historically common among immigrant communities (Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001). The acknowledgement of the conflict's role in preventing the temples from focusing on serving as religious and cultural institutions was discussed in 17 of the 20 interviews, most commonly in

response to the question “What is the largest issue currently facing the Cambodian community in Lowell?”

The Trairatanaram Temple, a two story building located on a quiet residential street in North Chelmsford, has become the center of a decade long religious conflict (see Figure 10). Once one unified temple, the same building now houses the two opposing factions, and has made the use of the terms “upstairs people” and “downstairs people” commonly used classifications within the Cambodian community in Lowell. The conflict stems back to 1999, when members of the temple's board of directors disputed a land transaction transferring the deeds to the temple property to the Community of Khmer Buddhist Monks (CKBM) for \$1 (Myers 2011). The CKBM, presided over by Venerable Sao Khon Dhamathero, now occupy the upstairs floor of the temple, and those aligning themselves with the CKBM are called “upstairs people.” It was Sao Khon who was the recipient of the deed to the property in 1999, and the “upstairs people” view his organization as the rightful owner of the Trairatanaram Temple because of Khon’s role in co-founding it in 1985 (Myers 2011). On the other side of the conflict are those who have sided with the board of directors, the “downstairs people”, and view the transfer of the deed as an illegal act that is taking the temple away from the community which established it.



Figure 10. Trairatanaram Temple

The battle between the two sides is so hotly contested that finding an accurate and unbiased opinion on the matter can be difficult. However, interviews and secondary research clearly show that initial source of the conflict was the development of the CKBM, and that organization's desire to reconstitute Cambodian Buddhism in the way they feel is correct, even though it is in direct opposition to how other members of the Cambodian community in Lowell view the matters. Sao Khon's attorney has stated that the CKBM "has been trying to create a standardized, Cambodian Buddhist religious community in the United States, thus the need to acquire temple ownership in the organization's name" (LaFleur 2006). This was further confirmed in an interview with one of the few community members I met who had decided to not choose a side in the matter:

The main reason in the beginning for the dispute was that every community outside of Cambodia has a need for a temple, and the (CKMB) wanted to be in charge of all the temples in America. Sao Khon came up with the idea for the Community of Khmer Buddhist Monks to operate temples nationwide. The members of the temple didn't agree because they understood once the temple was part of CKMB it would not belong to the community, it would belong to this organization. Obviously the community didn't want that. Our local donations built that temple since 1986. It was after part of the community boycotted the idea to turn control of the temple over the Sao Khon that the deed transfer issue happened. He (Sao Khon) had a friend on the board of directors, and that board member held a meeting without all members present so he could have the deed transferred under the Khon's name so he could gain control and go ahead with his plan. This is why they went to court. They claimed the transfer of the deed was illegal and it should be returned to the board, which represent the community, and not the monk (Sao Khon) who wants a network of temples nationwide (T.K. 2011).

While this seems to have been the initial divide between the "upstairs" and "downstairs", in the 13 years since the transfer of the deed the injection of transnational politics and affiliations to groups in Cambodia has further widened the gap between the two parties.

Since the split of the Trairatanaram Temple, accusations of ties to political parties or groups in Cambodia have been brought against both sides, further dividing the community. The "upstairs people" allege in official court documents that the "downstairs temple" has let local members of the Cambodian Funcinpec Party, which supports the Cambodia's constitutional monarchy, use the temple as a site for official fundraising activities, and that proceeds from these functions and donations to the temple are being sent back to the party in Cambodia (Rice 2004). Several community members interviewed mentioned that they believed the supporters of Sao Khun and the "upstairs people" were mostly supporters of a large opposition party in Cambodia (M.S., S.L., Y.Y. 2011). The ties to political groups in Cambodia, even if they have not

been validated, have been enough to cause much of the community to take sides in the temple debate based on both the local control of the temple, and the affiliation with the homeland:

People just take sides based on who they support, even if they are not informed on all the issues. Someone here may rather have the temple be local, but if they support the opposition party in Cambodia, they still support the upstairs temple. Who are you supposed to believe? The downstairs think they are right, the upstairs think they are right. Me, I don't get involved (T.K. 2011).

The decision to not take sides and try to remain out of the conflict is an approach many community members have chosen to take. During interviews with individuals who were actively involved in the community, it was shared that choosing a side can immediately alienate you from a portion of the population. As such, several well-respected members of the community who recognized the detrimental effect the conflict has had on the community and who wanted to act as mediators between the two sides, have found that even approaching one side will cause the other to view them differently, which in turn has prevented people from becoming involved, further dividing the community along these lines (N.V. 2011).

The ongoing conflict between the temples has been detrimental to cultural preservation efforts within the community. One community member, who has personally attempted not to align himself with either side, stated "the fighting between the temples has made it more difficult to pass on the culture, and now the community is paying the price for that. Even without the fighting it would be hard to convince most of the youth to come to the temple for instruction and to be involved, but with the fighting and the issues, it has become a totally lost cause" (T.K. 2011). Another community member who is heavily involved with the temple recognized that the in-fighting between temples was doing harm to Khmer cultural preservation in Lowell:

We are losing the younger generation. They don't like coming to the temple. They come only for big ceremonies, to see their own kind. They don't come normally for praying and meditation. It is impossible for the kids to learn the culture at home. In the family they lose it. Parents are too busy to teach their kids to write Cambodian, and they only speak very little with their grandparents. It should be the monks doing this, but the kids don't come to the temple. No one wears Cambodian clothes here, except maybe on New Year's or at the temple. Can you see how much we have lost? The temple is where people come to be Khmer, but for the kids it's still hard. They grow up here in America with American culture. American culture is very good, but it does butt heads sometimes (H.N. 2011).

The detrimental affect the temple conflict has had on cultural transmission within the community is acknowledged. As a result, numerous culturally based non-profits and community organizations have sprung up over the past decade. "Luckily now there are a lot of organizations trying to protect Khmer culture. The biggest ones are Light of Cambodian Children, Angkor Dance Troupe, and a few others. It used to be just the monks who taught and passed on culture, but it is not just them anymore. We have had to look other places" (M.S. 2011).

It seems clear that no matter one's individual affiliations, people realize the extent to which the conflict has drawn the community away from the temple, and the effect it is having on the community. When asked if he thought any Cambodian community outside of Cambodia could thrive without a temple, a representative of the "downstairs temple" stated:

I don't see a Cambodian community being able to survive without a temple. They won't die, but the community will be missing something. They should be able to come to the temple and see people come together, eat together, laugh and pray with each other, chanting together, it opens their minds. It helps them connect to being Khmer. Because of what is going on now, the whole community is suffering, but they would be suffering more if the temples closed down. It's like the father, if he has cancer. The family see's he can't work, but he can live for 20 years. It is better the father lives for 20 more years than die (H.N. 2011).

The temple conflict illustrates some of the obstacles which emerge within the community as refugees and immigrants in the assimilation process. While this conflict has left the community divided, the interviews conducted showed that no matter the individual's personal stance on certain intra-community issues, they still shared a common bond and connection to the community and city. While the complexities of class, generational differences, and personal political and religious beliefs have resulted in contestation among the community, it has ultimately been this collective hybrid identity of being both a member of the Cambodian community and a citizen of the city of Lowell that has created a common place-frame under which the community can unite. It is this intersection between the shared Khmer identity and shared identity as a Lowellian that the community has become a player in the place-making process.

6 CONCLUSION

In this research, I set out to examine the process of ethnic place-making in cities by asking how ethnic communities, undergoing the process of assimilation, and acting on their hybrid cultural identities, influence the place-making process. Through a detailed case study of the Cambodian ethnic enclave in Lowell, Massachusetts, I have sought to show how this refugee and immigrant community has engaged in ethnic place-making and has altered the built environment of the city. Lowell's history as a post-industrial city known from successive waves of immigration and ethnic settlement, coupled with the Cambodian communities past,

fueled by auto-genocide and the attempted destruction of Khmer culture, provided a unique environment to examine the various scales at which the place-making process occurs in an ethnic enclave, and what drives the desire of the community to be involved in the place-making process in Lowell.

This case study has demonstrated multiple ways in which the Cambodian community has influenced the place-making process in Lowell, both actively and passively. By repurposing a long neglected baseball diamond into multiple volleyball courts, and organizing for the redevelopment of Clemente Park, the community has demonstrated their desire for a public space within the city, one which they can take pride in and which incorporates aspects of Khmer culture. The City of Lowell choosing to designate a portion of the Lower Highlands as Cambodia Town and invest hundreds of thousands of dollars into the neighborhood, demonstrates the extent to which the community has become a powerful player in the city. The annual Southeast Asian Water Festival demonstrates the ways in which the Cambodian community has repurposed and reimagined the Merrimack River. For one weekend a year, Lowell becomes a gathering place for Southeast Asians from across North America, providing them the opportunity to showcase their culture and heritage to the host society which they have become part of.

Ultimately, both the built environment and the cultural makeup of the city of Lowell have been greatly influenced by the development of the Cambodian ethnic enclave. The intersection of local histories, cultural constructs, and individuals has resulted in conflicting ideas as to what types of places should emerge as the city of Lowell changes. It has been the node of commonality between actors which have emerged in these spaces of intersection that

has resulted in the development of uniqueness of place in the city. The hybrid transnational identity which has developed among the community has resulted in the place-making process producing places of “Lowell Cambodian-ness” into the city.

Unlike the development of traditional ethnic enclaves, such as Anderson’s (1991) discussion of the development of Chinatowns, the Cambodian community in Lowell has been able to successfully maintain traditional aspects of Khmer culture, while at the same time successfully assimilating into the city. By officially creating Cambodia Town, the city has acknowledged the extent to which the Cambodian community has become an integral player in the narrative of the city as an ethnic melting pot. While the process of the Cambodian ethnic enclave gaining acceptance and assimilation into the city at times resulted in conflict, it has been the contestation over place which has allowed the Cambodian community to establish a collective identity, and assimilate into the social, cultural, and political life of the city. While the complexities of class and generational differences exist within the Cambodian ethnic enclave, the collective hybrid identity of being both a member of the Cambodian community and a citizen of the city of Lowell has overall united the community, despite conflicts such as the ongoing dispute over the temple. As the Cambodian community has established itself into the social, political, and cultural fabric of Lowell over the past two decades, they have developed a common place-frame which bridges the gaps between generation and class, and has united the ethnic community. Clemente Park, Cambodia Town, the Southeast Asian Water Festival, and others all reflect the interconnectedness of Lowell and the Cambodian ethnic enclave found there.

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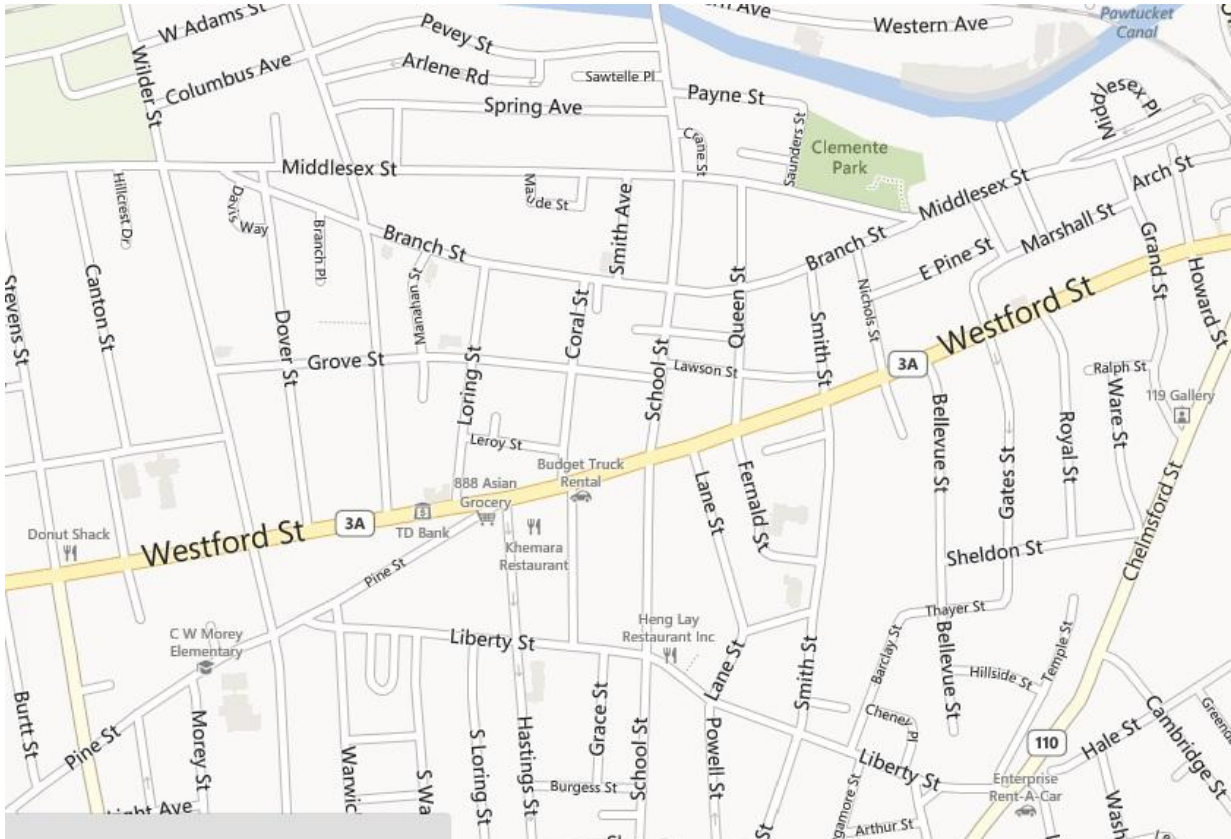
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APPENDIX

MAP OF LOWER HIGHLANDS NEIGHBORHOOD



Source: www.bing.com/maps
2012 Microsoft Corporation