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HIV/AIDS PREVENTION PROGRAMME

ETHNOGRAPHY  
OF MALE TO MALE SEXUALITY  
IN CAMBODIA

UNESCO  
Phnom Penh  
2008



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# ETHNOGRAPHY OF MALE TO MALE SEXUALITY IN CAMBODIA

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2008

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## About the Author

Phong Tan is a French-trained Cambodian anthropologist with extensive field experience, who taught Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Archaeology, Royal University of Fine Arts under a UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust Project, of which she was also a Faculty Coordinator from 1997 to 2002. Then she carried out the Junior Fellowship Program in 2003-2004, a Toyota Foundation sponsored pilot program that has been set up to introduce a select group of young Cambodians to research methodologies, extended field work, and the task of writing up their findings for publication.

After the completion of her research on Ethnography of Male to Male Sexuality in Cambodia for UNESCO-Phnom Penh in 2005, she has been focusing on research on sexuality in Cambodia.

## Foreword

Social and sexual relationships and behaviors among youths in Cambodia have been transforming in line with rapid economic development and related societal change. With more liberal ideas about sex among youth, sexual networking may becoming more extensive and diverse.

Men having sex with men (MSM) in Cambodia appear to have ceased the opportunity of more liberty and freedom that have been part and parcel of changes in (urban) society, and have become increasingly visible in Cambodia - especially in urban areas.

Recent HIV surveillance data (2005) found that the HIV prevalence among MSM is 8.7% in Phnom Penh and 0.8% in the provinces of Battambang and Siem Reap. This is significantly higher than the prevalence in the general population in Cambodia. The prevalence of sexually transmitted infections among MSM was 9.7% in Phnom Penh and 7.4% in the provinces. Behavioral data showed that consistent condom use is low and that many MSM have multiple sexual partners - including females. Other studies have suggested that due to stigma and discrimination, many MSM are unable or unwilling to access health services, including VCT and prevention services.

The HIV epidemic among MSM is a great concern to public health workers, policy makers and political leaders alike, and requires a rapid and thorough response - which should be based on a deeper understanding of the contexts in which male to male sex occurs, and the risks and vulnerabilities in their lives.

This is why UNESCO supported Ms Phong Tan, the author of this ethnographic study, to shed light on ideas and concepts in terms of homosexual relationships and the contexts in which they occur in Cambodia. This was done taking a life history approach. By putting a 'human face' on the epidemiological acronym 'MSM', this study provides invaluable information to programmers of interventions that will help shape directions for future research and improve the quality of HIV prevention and care projects for MSM in Cambodia.

I hope you will find this study useful and that it will serve as a contribution towards curbing the spread of HIV and STI among MSM in Cambodia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teruo Jinnai', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

**Teruo Jinnai,**  
UNESCO Representative in Cambodia

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I thank the experts and representatives of the organizations that assisted me for my survey, in the bibliographic area as well as in my quest for inside sources: Dr. Song Ngak of Family Health International (FHI), Ms. Tun Samphy of the Urban Sector Group (USG), Ms. Nou Vannary of the Khmer HIV/AIDS NGO Alliance (KHANA), Mr. Heng Sopheab from the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology & STDs (NCHADS), Mr. Sou Sotheavy of the Women's Network for Unity Sex Workers Collective in Cambodia, Mr. Mao Kim Run and Mr. Horn Seila of Men's Health Cambodia (MHC). A special word of thanks goes to Dr. Guy Morineau from FHI with whom I enjoyed discussions that were both fruitful and motivating.

I thank Prof. Michael Vickery who kindly consented to read the historical part of my research work and share his insight with me.

My deepest gratitude is extended to those whom I interviewed and who related to me significant segments of their lives. I am particularly indebted to those who shared with me passionately and straightforwardly the most intimate episodes of their life story.

# INTRODUCTION

Since it has been demonstrated that men having sex with other men occupy a prominent place in the history of the AIDS epidemic, efforts have been put forth in every country to become acquainted or better familiarized with this population. For a long time now, many studies have been made in an attempt to determine the scope of this group considered to be most vulnerable. For this reason UNESCO Phnom Penh wished to share in enhancing the knowledge base on this subject by undertaking anthropological research in order to gather an in-depth body of information that could be used to develop strategies to reduce the epidemic risks and helped establish with a genuine disease prevention policy.

The goal of this research work that I had the good fortune to undertake was to gather the initial elements to understand the representations and mechanisms of men having sex with men in Cambodia. The study is based on the testimonies of twenty different persons<sup>1</sup> of their life stories which were recorded in the Khmer language. The initial research report has been divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the way in which Khmers differentiate the sexes as well as the means established by society to regulate sexuality. Chapter 2 looks at the way in which Khmers define sexual identity and the correlation between this identity and sexual behavior, and then goes on to analyze the life profile of the interviewees. Chapter 3 studies the effects of changes instituted by the Khmer Rouge regime on sex life during that time and Chapter 4, in conclusion, contains the life stories of the persons whom I interviewed.

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons of confidentiality, the source persons are designated by the letter K followed by a number. They have been put in order of descending age. K 1 is 67 years old and K 20 is 19.

This book summarized all information from the four chapters that I have mentioned above in two chapters. Chapter 1 is the executive summary of findings of the study which covered the indication of sexual gender, sexual identity and the mechanism of Khteuy (Homosexual in Khmer) sexuality and conclusion with approach to the MSM population in the context of AIDS epidemic prevention. Chapter 2 contains the life history of the four selected key interviewees.

This book is written in order to provide enlightenment on the questions most frequently asked in the context of AIDS epidemic prevention.

# RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted between July and December 2004 in Phnom Penh and took place in four steps. My approach was to compile a number of individual case histories of men who have sex with men in order to lay the essential basis for my study.

## **Step 1: Searching literature**

I began by going to various organizations and individuals in a search for literature bearing more or less directly on the subject. There was no anthropological research work available on sexuality in Cambodia. Some information is to be found in various work done by May Ebihara. Additionally, a few organizations working in the area of AIDS and sexually transmitted disease prevention had undertaken pioneer studies on the sex hygiene practices of certain populations and these provided a great deal of inventory data. The study done by Chou Meng Tarr (1996) took a more in depth look at notions of sex among youth and their behavior patterns in the context of AIDS. The KHANA report (2002) concentrates on identifying the diversity of the MSM<sup>2</sup> population and its different subgroups, and goes on to examine their sex habits. The latest FHI publication (2004) delves into a new field: the numerical scope of the MSM population and the relationship between sex and money.

Additionally, I read a number of other studies on homosexuality in the West, but always looked at in the light of the AIDS issue.

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<sup>2</sup> The initials MSM stand for Men Who Have Sex with Men and this acronym has been adopted by organizations focusing on this population in the context of the AIDS epidemic.

After the reading, I gave my attention to drafting the questionnaire. Since my purpose was to gather life stories, the questions had to follow a chronological order to the extent possible. The sex and society relationship had to be highlighted in each life period. This led to the questions: How was the matter of sex handled in the family, with the outside? What impact did sex have on upbringing, education and work?

## **Step 2: Selecting the interviewees**

After acquainting myself with the documentary material mentioned above, I contacted organizations working with MSM. I first of all wanted to let them know about the research work I was doing and then ask for their advice and assistance with regard to approaching key informants. This led me to meeting and enjoying interchanges with Drs. Guy Morineau and Song Ngak at FHI, Mr. Keth Tharith of Médecine de l'Espoir, Ms. Pok Panhavichetr at KHANA, Miss Tun Samphy of the USG, Mr. Mao Kim Run of Men's Health Cambodia, and Dr. Heng Sopheab of NCHADS. I then had a chance meeting with Mr. Sou Sotheavy of Women's Network for Unity Sex Workers while attending a seminar.

Three organizations, FHI, USG and KHANA, assisted me with my interviewee recruitment process. They directed me to key persons who in turn introduced me to potential interviewees who acknowledged their relationships with other men and who would possibly agree to be interviewed. Initially, I took those who volunteered, without making any selection. But I very soon came to realize that those who were a little bit older provided more interesting experiences for my study. On the one hand, their maturity enabled them to express themselves meaningfully on human relationships and sex. On the other hand, due to their age, their experiences went back to earlier periods, in particular the Pol Pot regime, which was a significant contribution to my research.

Initially, I was seeking to come up with a somewhat representative sample that would include a broad spectrum of social classes, from the lowest to the highest. The first class was the easiest to recruit, while the second was virtually unreachable within the time frame imposed upon me.

I did not encounter any noteworthy problems during this step. The interviewees unhesitatingly agreed to be interviewed. I gave ample time to those who enjoyed revealing the smallest details of their lives and I refrained from pressuring those who were rather timid or not very inclined to talk, which explains the disparity of the accounts in quantity and quality. Given the time limit, I was unable to conduct further interviews in order to replace the ones that were lean on information.

### **Step 3: The interviews**

I would like to point out that I am Cambodian and the Khmer language is my mother tongue. I was therefore able to conduct the interviews in Khmer, from September 6 to November 4, 2004. I met the interviewees at the location and time of their convenience. Most of the interviews were held indoors, while some had to take place outdoors sitting on the ground on the terraces of Wat Phnom or nearby, on the banks of the Tonle Sap, sometimes on the streets of Olympic Market. All of the interviews were recorded on cassette tape with the agreement of the interviewees and were conducted in Phnom Penh. The interviews varied from two to nine hours in length, depending on the richness of the accounts and the interviewee's propensity to express himself.

In addition to the actual interviews, I often had discussions with the interviewees on more general subjects relating to sex. Sometimes these took place with a group of several interviewees present. Some of these conversations were also recorded. Although I did not transcribe them, the information was taken into account

and included in the analysis material. I also interviewed a few other persons, men and women, regarding sex during the Khmer Rouge regime.

#### **Step 4: Transcription of the interviews and data analysis**

This was a tremendously tedious process. The interviews lasted from two to nine hours, and it often took four or five times as long to get the transcription into hardcopy form. I firstly made a verbatim transcription of the questions and answers, as I felt it to be of primary importance to have the life stories down exactly as they were told, the reason being that they could provide good material from the standpoint of anthropology teaching. Nevertheless, such material was a drudgery to read for non-anthropologists who were not necessarily inclined to study the interview mechanism. I therefore decided to present the interviews in the form of a narrative with only the answers to make the accounts readable and understandable. I stress that I took the utmost care to capture the manner in which the interviewees spoke and formulated their thoughts. The only work I did was to put the account in chronological order, which required repositioning some events so that they would appear in proper sequence.

Additionally, I endeavored to adopt a simple writing style, close to the oral expression, in order correctly to get across the "life story" aspect. Above all, I tried to render in French the specificities of the Khmer language as I heard it spoken by my interviewees, in particular its rhythms and cadences.

I also decided to line up the interviews according to the descending age of the interviewees, as I felt that this provided a more logical view than simply leaving them in a jumble or in the order in which their place came in my series of interviews. Each account includes several chapters that are essentially the same and start with information concerning the interviewee's family background, his

educational path and subsequent undertaking of a professional career. The concluding chapter focuses specifically on the individual's sexual background, although this is never detached from the rest of his life.

In order to assure anonymity, the interviewees are designated by the letter K followed by a number, and are put in order according to age, from oldest to youngest. The other names encountered in the stories are fictive. Nevertheless, I did not change the geographic place names, as they are significant for a proper understanding of the stories.

### **Transcription of Khmer words**

To facilitate the reading, the Khmer words have been loosely transliterated.

### **Limits of the study**

This study suffered from the constraints put upon it by the time factor. I was thus prevented from consulting a broader range of references unavailable in the field and widening out or diversifying the sample, which might have resulted in a fuller perspective and conspectus on the subject.



# ETHNOGRAPHY OF MALE TO MALE SEXUALITY IN CAMBODIA

## CHAPTER I: Executive Summary

### I. KHMER WORDS INDICATING SEXUAL GENDER<sup>3</sup>

In modern Khmer, there are five words-two pairs plus a single word-that have to do with the sexual gender. First, there are ញី *gni* / ឈ្មោល *chhmol*, which are Mon-Khmer words meaning "female / male<sup>4</sup>." Then there are ស្រី *srei* / ប្រុស *pros* that are from Sanskrit origin and mean "a human being of the female sex / human being of the male sex". The first pair of words ញី *gni* / ឈ្មោល *chhmol* is generally applied to animals and plants, but it is also used to designate humans in some contexts when referring to the biological sex of the human being. (1) When talking about physical strength, one would say naturally, "That's a household made up only of women; there's no ឈ្មោល *chhmol* 'male' to do the heavy work." (2) If one wanted to allude to sex, one would say, "We have to watch out that that husband doesn't go out looking for ញី *gni* 'females.'" (The word ឈ្មោល *chhmol* is also used in another context as shown below.) As for ស្រី *srei* / ប្រុស *pros*, they are only used for human beings. These two pairs of words are totally antinomic. The fifth word used to refer to the sexual gender is ភ្នំ *khteuy*. ភ្នំ *Khteuy* is a Khmer word that appears in the Buddhist Institute dictionary, published by Chuon Nat and is defined as a human being with sex organs, half male, half female. Unfortunately, the dictionary does not elaborate.

<sup>3</sup> The Khmer words have been freely transliterated.[In some instances, the English translation of this paper adds an "s" to the transliterated word to reflect the plural number.]

<sup>4</sup> *Chhmol* comes almost unchanged from old Khmer, 7th century; *jmol* / *gni* is probably just as old if it comes from the old Khmer ye, cf. S. Lewitz, 1976.

The word ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is commonly understood in many different ways depending on the age and social background of the speaker. For some older people from the countryside, a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is a sexually deficient individual. It refers to a man who appears normal on the outside, but whose sex organ is very small, implying his inability to perform sexually. One of my interviewees, K 11, confirms that he saw such a thing in his village.

A few people say that a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is a person who has both sex organs, but of reduced size, which is in keeping with Samdech Thioun Nat's dictionary definition. For others, a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is an individual who can be a man or a woman and who has a normal organ, but whose personality is opposite to his or her sex. In this case, a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* man is possessed of a female soul, while a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* woman has a male soul. ၁၅၅၁ *Khteuy* men are said to be gentle and like doing female activities. As for ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* women, they are perceived as fearsome males who dress as men and in some cases in the countryside, they tend to bare their breasts if they had impeded their development during adolescence<sup>5</sup>. They have the reputation of liking to pair up and of being very jealous emotionally.

Many people feel that a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is a man who likes to dress as a woman. In rural communities, ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy*s are frequently seen attending public or private ceremonies that take place in a monastery. For young people living in cities nowadays, a ၁၅၅၁ *khteuy* is definitely a cross-dresser. This idea is due to the influence of television that often features shows with male characters dressed as women and playing a comical role. Television is also increasingly featuring programs in which the only singing and dancing performers are

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<sup>5</sup> It has been observed that some of these types wrap their breasts tightly with a cloth to keep them from developing, a practice similar to that of binding the feet.

cross-dressers. Formerly, when stage productions called for an aggressive or loose women to be portrayed in a negative light, the parts would be played by male actors because no female actor wanted to act the part of a bad woman, fearing that such performances done professionally could affect their image in real life.

Although everyone has a certain way of defining ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy*, it is noteworthy that the perception is diverse and that people do not know precisely what it is. It is also noted that although people speak about the ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy* personality or sexual attributes, no one uses the term to make any allusion to sexual behavior.

The word ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy* is used by some individuals to point to themselves. For them, ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy* defines a normal person of male sex who has a feminine personality and has a sexual preference for people of his own sex, but of a character opposite to his, i.e. manly rather than feminine<sup>6</sup>. The word ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy* is viewed as very derogatory by those who identify themselves as such and who take this term as an insult when it is uttered by a non-၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy*. On the other hand, it is used by themselves unhesitatingly in a restricted circle or when the audience is made up of ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuys* or their associates.

I point out here that I am going to use the word ၀ံ့၀ံ့ *khteuy* when speaking of those who voluntarily refer to themselves as such, or those who could be identified as such, because it is the only word that is recognized by the persons involved despite its derogatory connotation and because it corresponds to a reality. I stress that my use of this word does not convey any negative connotation.

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<sup>6</sup> I am limiting myself to the cases that I am familiar with, that is, those of men who call themselves *khteuy*, making no attempt to generalize for women, given that I did not survey this group.

## II. SEXUAL IDENTITY

In the Khmer language, there is no vocabulary referring to a particular sexual behavior, which is no doubt true of most other languages<sup>7</sup>. For Khmers, the sexual identity of a man is not based on his sexual behavior but rather on his ចរិត *charek* "character, personality" traits that are believed to be innate and fundamental. Among persons of male sex, there are two types of ចរិត *charek* that furthermore form a pair of antinomic qualities :

ចរិតស្រី *charek srei*, feminine character ≠ ចរិតប្រុស *charek pros*, masculine character

These characters are also translated by adjectives referring to consistency. The feminine is expressed ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon*, gentle, docile and the masculine រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng*, firm, tough

ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* ≠ រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng*  
gentle, docile ≠ firm, tough

---

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the term "homosexual" was forged in Europe in 1891 by Karl Maria Kertbeny. Cf. Jean-Yves Le Talec. "Genre et militantisme homosexuel : l'importance des folles et du camp". Toulouse, 2003.

1) ទន់ភ្លន់ *Tuon phluon* and រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng*, "gentle, docile / firm, tough"

According to my interviewees, men are born ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* or រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng*. As for sexual gender, the ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* categorizes himself (voluntarily) as a ខ្មើយ *khteuy* rather than a ប្រុស *pros* "man." Those who are ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* possess a personality akin to that of women. They are quite mild and reserved. If they are of normal masculine strength, they nevertheless tend to shy away from violence and to avoid heavy work. In the division of work according to sexes, the ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* categorizes himself as a woman and has a preference for light, domestic work.

2) The ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* can be ទឹកដក់ *ngok ngok*

My interviewees stated furthermore that this personality can also express itself in the movements of the body as seen in an easy flow in the gestures of the hands and arms, the bearing of the head and swaying of the whole body. This "body technique,"<sup>8</sup> often referred to as ទឹកដក់ *ngok ngok*, is similar to that acquired by women, although it is displayed in a manner that is both more accentuated and more rigid. It may be more or less conspicuous depending on the individual. This expression of the body portrays movements that are duly Khmer in the sense that they have a specific cultural character. But it must immediately be added that this ទឹកដក់ *ngok ngok* technique is merely a possible and not an absolute sign of the ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* character. Although it represents the fundamental way certain *tuon*

<sup>8</sup> Expression introduced by Marcel Mauss in "Les techniques du corps," in *Journal de Psychologie*, vol. 32, Paris, 1936. Body techniques are a set of processes incidental to each society that are observed and acquired by the child in its infancy and that teach it to become familiar with and use its body according to cultural norms.

*phluon* express their identity, it is probable that most of them are not ទឹកកក *ngek ngok* for different reasons such as it is not felt to be an essential element of their identity, because their environment does not allow them to express themselves in this way, etc.

### 3) The ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* may feminize his physical appearance

The ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* personality may express itself in another form, that of a feminization of the outside appearance. Indeed, some use clothing and even makeup to affirm the social gender in contrast to the biological sex. And this form of expression is not uniform or consistent. There is nothing certain about it and it seems to depend on the life environment and circumstances of the individuals in question. It is often temporary. Feminization does not mean, contrary to appearances, that the individual has a more feminine personality than others do. It is an aspect of identification that is difficult to grasp and apply.

### 4) Personality and society

Although this ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* personality is thought of as being "natural" and definitive, the individual generally keeps it secret in his family setting as well as out in society at large. In other words, it is extremely rare for an individual to state this reality to others.

### 5) The reng peng

According to the ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* types, the រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng* is of masculine character, ចំរើកប្រុស *charek pros*. He is firm, strong, energetic. The *rwgbwug reng peng* performs heavy tasks and is called a ប្រុស *pros*, "a human being of male sex, man" or even ឈ្មោល *chhmol* "male"

by the ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon* types. In other words, the *rwgbwug reng peng* is manly, opposite to the ទន់ភ្លន់ / ឆ្លើយ *tuon phluon / khteuy* who has a feminine personality.

Biological sex	Male sex	Male sex
Personality	ទន់ភ្លន់ <i>tuon phluon</i> Gentle, docile	រឹងប៉ឹង <i>reng peng</i> Firm, tough
Sexual identity	ឆ្លើយ <i>khteuy</i> Feminine character	ប្រុស <i>pros</i> , Manly man

### III. THE MECHANISM OF THE ឆ្លើយ ទន់ភ្លន់ *KHTEUY TUON PHLUON* SEXUALITY

The ឆ្លើយ *khteuy* is sexually attracted to people of his own sex, but not to just any which one. Firstly there is the រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng* who would be his ideal partner. The *tuon phluon*, having a man's body but a female personality, identifies himself with the woman. And as a woman, the *tuon phluon* feels he is inevitably drawn to his opposite, i.e. the manly man.

*tuon phluon ? reng peng*  
gentle, docile ? firm, tough  
*khteuy ? non-khteuy*  
woman ? manly man

The ឆ្លើយ *khteuy* explains that, as a woman, he expects to be considered as such emotionally and sexually. He hopes that the *rwgbwug reng peng*, the manly man, will be caring and gentle toward him, act as he would act toward a woman. On the other hand, the ឆ្លើយ *khteuy*, as a woman, has the duty to serve the desire of the *reng peng* man.

1) The ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* / ប្រុស រឹងប៉ឹង *pros reng peng* relationship: the gentle man / the manly man

Although the manly man, the ប្រុស រឹងប៉ឹង *pros reng peng*, represents the ideal partner of the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy*, such does not necessarily mean that this relationship will always be possible or automatic. Indeed, the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* explains that the manly man is sexually attracted to persons of the sex opposite to his, i.e. to women. He is not naturally attracted to a ខ្ចីយ *khteuy*. Therefore, the latter must put forth a special effort to achieve his ends. To express this activity, he says that he will ទាត់ប្រុស *teak pros*, "trap the man". Expressing the idea in colloquial language, when he succeeds in "catching" him and having sex with him, the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* concludes that he ស៊ីប្រុស *si pros* "ate the man." It can be noted that there is a notion of hunting, capture and consumption in the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* / ប្រុស រឹងប៉ឹង *pros reng peng* relationship.

The ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* also states that the relationship can be marked by disappointments. Indeed, although the *reng peng* type willingly gets involved with the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy*, he may behave in a totally passive way. He remains in a state of inertia and demands that he be stimulated and served, which eventually takes all meaning out of the relationship. Indeed, the situation is one in which the conventional roles are reversed and which is opposite to what the ខ្ចីយ *khteuy* expected. Looked at another way, although a relationship may work out well, it will not necessarily be long lasting because the manly man may some day end up wanting to បន្តពូជ *banta puj* "carry on the lineage," which in concrete terms means taking a wife and having children, in keeping with the model established in society. K 1 went through this after having had a continuous relationship that lasted ten years with his companion Chan who would talk of his need to have children. Instead of going against him, K 1 helped Chan get married.



K 1's pattern seems quite common according what K 2 related, stating that frequently after a long-term relationship, the ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* "marries off" his partner before taking a wife himself.

When the ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* is not successful in establishing a relationship with a ប្រុស *pros*, he has to look for partners in his peer group, i.e. ខ្ញុំ *khteuys*. Most of the interviewees state that the ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* will carefully pick out ones whose feminine character is less pronounced than his own. This type of relationship is theoretically deemed to be an alternative solution, but admittedly one that is simpler and more clear-cut, because the roles are precisely defined.

## 2) Characteristics of the group

The ខ្ញុំ ទន់ភ្លន់ *khteuy tuon phluon* population is very heterogeneous in several ways. This diversity involves social backgrounds, expression of the identity and life options.

### a. Social heterogeneity

Actually, according to the viewpoint expressed by my interviewees, ខ្ញុំ ទន់ភ្លន់ *khteuy tuon phluon* individuals are born in Khmer society at the whim of nature. They can belong to all social strata, from the highest levels down to the lowest, with no rule or regulation governing their distribution throughout the overall population of the country. They grow up and find their place in society.

## **b. Variety in expression of identity**

The expression of identity translates the attitude of the individual in relation to the affirmation or non-affirmation of social gender. Most of the persons in the group do not feel it is necessary to express this identity by visible signs. This allows them to blend in with the rest of the population.

The second position involves putting aside the biological sex and assuming the social gender through feminization of one's personal appearance, essentially by wearing more or less feminine clothing. Sometimes this involves an approach that has a strictly intimate nature. In such a case, the individual dresses, for instance, quite simply in clothing that has very little sexual connotation, and only he knows that he is wearing an item of clothing designed for women. Conversely, others feel the need to wear the most sexually explicit clothing possible<sup>9</sup>.

## **c. Life options**

On this specific point, our sample is too small to enable us to come up with a genuinely indicative conclusion. Nevertheless, we will provide here a number of assumptions based on the information provided by our interviewees.

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<sup>9</sup> Individuals who express their femininity are certainly a more "identifiable" group in society. This is not something recent, and we are fortunate in having access to a very old document dating back to 1296 in which Chinese envoy Tcheou Ta-Kouan who visited Angkor reported [translated from the French] that "in this country, there are many catamites who hang around everyday in the market place in groups of ten or more. They are always trying to lure Chinese men in return for sumptuous gifts. It's shocking, disgraceful." *Mémoires sur les coutumes du Cambodge de Tcheou Ta-Kouan*, Paul PELLIoT, new version, Adrien Maisonneuve, 1951, p. 16

Most of them merge into society by getting married and having children. Meanwhile, it seems that they do not give up their orientation for men and develop strategies to continue their sexual preference. Others stay single. Among them, some have gotten married, others plan to do so and others have decided not to conform to the marriage pattern.

### 3) Boundaries of sexualities

The absence of a rigid differentiation of the sexes in Khmer culture and the great importance of the sexual identity that each one claims regarding sexual behavior result in very blurred boundaries among the different expressions of sexuality. In Cambodia, it is difficult and even erroneous to speak in terms of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and even more so of homosexual or heterosexual.

Homosexual practices concern foremostly individuals that identify themselves as ទន់ភ្លន់ *tuon phluon*, but also those who are their partners who are identified as រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng* and who admit that they are such. According to the statements made by the interviewees, many រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng* engage in homosexual practices for a time, early in their youth, without it having any impact on their initial identity of រឹងប៉ឹង *reng peng*.

### 4) Identity and society

At the time of the study, all of the interviewees maintained a relationship with their families. K 1, who was expelled from his parents' home at the age of 14, never cut off his ties with the rest of the family: his half-sisters, nephews and nieces. K 2 has always lived close to his sister and shared in raising his nephews and nieces. K 3, who lived a long time as a refugee in France, got all of his family together once he returned to Cambodia and took charge of

the children of his siblings. K 6 mentioned that he has always enjoyed a very good relationship with his family. K 11 seems to enjoy normal interchange with his mother who even helps him find customers for his occupation as a wedding makeup and wardrobe artist. Only K 19 says that his second oldest brother has never accepted his personality and used to beat him up when he was a teenager. Overall, it is noted that my interviewees have always maintained their place in their families.

According to them, their ឥន្ទ្រ tuon phluon personality has not been an obstacle to their career paths. K 2 states that his character did not hinder him from holding the jobs that he wanted to get. He started working in 1957 as a teacher of basic education and traveled throughout Takeo where he was stationed in order to teach good agricultural techniques to farmers and reading and writing to illiterate persons. In 1970, he had no problem getting a job with the Ministry of Community Development<sup>10</sup> due to his skills and experience. He was assigned to the secretariat of the ministry until 1975. In 1979, after the Pol Pot regime, he enrolled in the army where he worked in the logistics department as a depot manager until 1988. As he recalls, it was quite easy to get a job at the time, as the country lacked human resources. K 2 adds that his ឥន្ទ្រ tuon phluon character was an advantage because people liked this type of temperament, even during the Khmer Rouge period. K 1 did not mention any problem getting a job in the various fields in which he worked. He even got into the Renakse army in 1979 and worked in the art department of the 5th Military Office, where he taught up until 1990. K 3 also backs this up, stating that problems that some គ្រូ ឃ khteuyys have encountered are due to their lack of qualifications or inadequate occupational exposure. K 8 and K 12 became police officers and do not report any noteworthy manifestation of hostility.

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<sup>10</sup> Equivalent of what is now the Ministry of Rural Development.

With regard to the people around them, several interviewees mentioned that *ខ្មែរ khteuy*s are tolerated well in rural communities. It often occurs that the *ខ្មែរ khteuy* group meets in order to spend time and do things together, frequently some relaxing activity. They also enjoy interchanges with people. K 6 states that in his experience people in the country are very accommodating of *ខ្មែរ khteuy*s because they find them refreshing and good-humored. The villagers like to listen to the *ខ្មែរ khteuy*s talk about sex. They also have a special liking for shows put on by *ខ្មែរ khteuy*s because the latter always "dress up in an outlandish way." K 15 says that events such as electing Miss *ខ្មែរ Khteuy* are very popular in the provinces and draw large crowds.

## 5) Marriage

The issue of marriage is a critical subject in the lives of my interviewees. For most of them, this subject is one that their families bring up before they do-the parents or, in their absence, people of their generation or the next older one, or even members of the same generation as the individual concerned. The family always sees marriage and the future in parallel, saying such things as "a person who is not married, who does not have a family, has no future," an equation that seems to be accepted by virtually everyone. The interviewees inevitably stressed how heavy pressure from the family is. Without exception, all have wondered about this as they positioned themselves in relation to this institution.

Overall, three different positions prevail. Firstly is the case of the interviewees who got married. Five of those in my sample are among these, including one who is now divorced. K 6 was married for several years and had a daughter, but he eventually had his married annulled, simply informing his wife that he "liked men

rather than women." All five had one or more children. Those who remained married led or are leading a double life, and have not told their wives about it. K 12 states that he acts as an ordinary husband and father. He has never brought up the issue of his orientation and prefers that his wife discover the truth herself some day.

Among the younger interviewees, K 16 and K 17 state that in the future it is possible that they will follow two roads: get married while maintaining relationships with men, which seems to them to be a compromise situation. As for K 2, he is sure that if his parents had not died prematurely and if things in the country had not been disrupted during the Khmer Rouge period, he would have gotten married to the girl that his family had betrothed him to when he was a child. K 14 and K 18 know for a certainty that they will get married soon because they have to think about their future, but they remain silent as to what their sexual behavior would be in the framework of the contemplated marriage.

On the other hand, a group of a similar number has made the decision not to get married. K 3 thinks that marriage would be a social façade, cover up a situation of hypocrisy, and he says that he would never be part of such a masquerade. K 4 considers women as friends with whom he has no inclination to have sex. As for K 5, he responded to his mother that it would be impossible for him to marry a woman because he identifies himself as such.

In a general way, all affirm that វង្ស *khteus* generally chose to បន្តល្អ *banta puj* "carry on the family line" so as to conform to social norms, while not giving up their sexual orientation.

## 6) Derogatory connotation of the word ខ្មែរ khteuy

The interviewees agree that the word ខ្មែរ *khteuy* is not well accepted by those who acknowledge that they are ខ្មែរ *khteuys* when the word is uttered by non-ខ្មែរ *khteuys*. K 2 feels that the word has had a derogatory connotation for a long time. He remembers that in the 1950s another word, សុទ្ធ *soth*, was used in ខ្មែរ *khteuy* circles.

The word សុទ្ធ *soth*, which has the current primary meaning of "pure," has another meaning in the dialect of the Battambang region, where it means "similar to" or "identical to." Adopted by *khteuys* in Battambang in the late 1950s or even earlier and applied to their context, it was often used in association with ស្រី *srei*, សុទ្ធ ស្រី *soth srei*, "identical to a woman." The word សុទ្ធ ស្រី *soth srei* was gradually exported to other regions, including the capital, and took on a broader meaning to cover more specifically a "man with a personality identical to that of a woman." In reality, with the tendency of Khmer speakers to cut down expressions as much as possible, people ended up simply saying សុទ្ធ *soth* to refer to men with a feminine character. In the end, the word សុទ្ធ *soth* became the equivalent of ខ្មែរ *khteuy*, with no bad connotation. The word was actually adopted in ខ្មែរ *khteuy* circles in the higher social classes of the time. It seems to be unknown to the lower classes. At the present time, the younger generations have never heard this word. People in their forties spontaneously use សុទ្ធ *soth* to refer to more mature, older ខ្មែរ *khteuys* of the earlier generation.

More recently, other words have come out, such as សុមាលី *somali* and បាញ់ប៉ៅ *ban beo*. The latter word is Vietnamese and refers to a lightly sweetened cake made with rice flour and a soybean paste

filling and eaten with a dash of coconut milk. Since បាញ់ប៉ៅ *ban beo* is very soft in consistency, it is said to be suggestive of the ឡើយ *khteuy* personality. The second word សុមាលី *somali* refers to a variety of rice grown in the Battambang region that cooks up very tender and melts in the mouth. It is said that the ឡើយ *khteuy* is like សុមាលី *somali* rice. It is noteworthy that these two words confirm that tenderness and softness are actually characteristics of the ឡើយ *khteuy* personality.

I would like to point out a few other words as well: ស្រីស្រស់ *srei sros*, សក់វែង *sak veng* and សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei*. According to some of my interviewees, the expression ស្រីស្រស់ *srei sros* that means "pretty girl" emerged as an expedient for organizations focusing on AIDS epidemic prevention and who work in the transvestite ឡើយ *khteuy* circles in Phnom Penh. The social workers lacked an appropriate vocabulary to refer to ឡើយ *khteuy*s in general, as the word ឡើយ *khteuy* itself is deprecatory when used by a non-*khteuy*. In that context, ឡើយ *khteuy*s who have a propensity to dress as women coined the term ស្រីស្រស់ *srei sros*, which was immediately adopted by the organizations. Although this word suits the professionals, it is known only by a very small segment of the population, that targeted by the organizations. Even in that group, the expression does not really suit everyone. K 15 is vehement in saying that he does not appreciate being referred to in this fashion, for he does not think of himself as a "pretty girl." Actually, it seems, and my observations of the milieu back it up, that the word ស្រីស្រស់ *srei sros* is not used by ឡើយ *khteuy*s at all in their milieu. Similarly, with regard to the words សក់វែង *sak veng* and សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei*, meaning "long hair" and "short hair," no one knows how they came about and they do not seem to correspond to any reality. The majority of ឡើយ *khteuy*s wear their hair in a masculine cut while some individuals let their hair grow long. Hair length is not a reliable variable in as



much as a hairstyle can be changed from one minute to the next with a pair of scissors. ស្រីស្រស់ *Srei sros*, សក់វែង *sak veng*, សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei* appear to be words that were picked up on by organizations working with the populations concerned with the risks of AIDS transmission. Step out of that environment and these three words are unknown to the other ភ្នំ *khleuys*.

# CONCLUSION

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## APPROACH TO THE "MSM" POPULATION IN THE CONTEXT OF AIDS EPIDEMIC PREVENTION

The information collected during this research work has given us greater insight into the matter of men who have sex with men in Cambodia. We now know who the stakeholders are and with whom these persons have to deal with in order to live out this sexuality. We know that these MSM players are not confined to the bigger cities of Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Kompong Som, but are also found out in the provinces and rural communities of Cambodia.

We also know that in Cambodia, men who have sex with men undoubtedly have a lot in common, although they do not form a community per se, much less so an organized one. They are spread individually and anonymously throughout society. There is no institution that brings them together or provides a network for them based on ideas or activities. In urban centers, those who identify themselves as ក្មេង *khteuys* do tend to get together from time to time and express their femininity outwardly and conspicuously and group activities occasionally take place in this context. This group makes up a small minority numerically speaking that is not representative of the set as a whole. Furthermore, in larger cities, there are also places where some gather socially, such as in public gardens, parks, bars, restaurants, etc. Our older interviewees reported that the public parks have long been—at least since the 1960s—a popular place to get together (socially) and point out even that Olympic Stadium (in the southwestern part of the city) was used in this way during the same period and in the early 1970s (with a break during the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge regime), right up into the late 1980s. As for bars, it must be stressed that they are

traditionally frequented by people from higher levels in the social strata who have often been marked by western influences. It is therefore possible that especially in more recent times, *၀ံ့၀ံ့ khteuy*s from the upper classes are developing a group culture that is somewhat similar to that observed in western countries, in Europe and America. This culture is not representative of the overall culture of this population and it would be erroneous to use the bar phenomenon to conclude that a so-called "gay" culture exists.

This new insight into men having sex with men also provides us with the means to readjust any AIDS epidemic prevention policy that has been based up to this point on incorrect information. The findings of our survey lead us to make the following recommendations:

- (1) The prevention policy must from now on be thought out and designed to reach all of the MSM population concerned since the study has taught us that this population is integrated within the overall population. It is therefore necessary to go beyond minority groups that are not representative of the overall, such as groups of cross-dressing *၀ံ့၀ံ့ khteuy*s that are encountered in the cities. Indeed, the target population that requires awareness-raising lives in urban centers as well as in rural communities. In a word, the scale of the whole country is involved.
- (2) Given the precocity of initiation to sex as revealed through our survey, prevention initiatives must give special attention to the adolescent population, from 12 to 18 years of age. Again, the extensive population in the countryside must not be overlooked. Prevention can take place through the formal education system by developing a course on disease prevention from grade 7 to grade 12, which course would be part of the general natural sciences curriculum. It is important not to

overlook adolescents that are excluded from the formal education system, which means developing a specific information education package with outreach to children of this age group who have little schooling and who are among the most vulnerable.

- (3) As for accessibility, a prevention policy in rural communities must target places of social encounter, and we know that the Buddhist *វត្ត vatt* monastery is the key venue for socializing in rural communities. First, the *វត្ត vatt* monastery is not just a place where monks live, but it also accommodates a large secular population, especially male, which includes adults as well as many young men, most of them adolescents. The latter may be orphans and come to live in the monastery by making themselves available to serve the monks. They are called *កូនសេកលោក kaum sek lok*, young monk servants, or *ក្មេងវត្ត khmeng vatt*, young monastery servants. The *វត្ត vatt* sometimes accommodates young people who have been rejected by their families and who are homeless. Provincial monasteries also accommodate young people who come in from remote villages to attend a city school. The prevention effort must give attention to these three types of people.

In addition to these young people, adults-men and women (lay officiants, old women doing *vatt* monastery service)-also find refuge in monasteries, where they may live temporarily or permanently.

As both a religious and social venue, the monastery draws villagers during the many public holidays on the ritual calendar as well as on the occasion of private celebrations initiated by individuals. It is a place where an awareness-raising and prevention campaign can easily reach people who in many cases would be more receptive than at other times.

Finally yet importantly, research work must be done to gather adequate information to be used as the basis for formulating the prevention policy. It is important that such studies be handled by qualified, experienced researchers with the ability to collect data through the direct medium of the language spoken by the interviewees, in this case Khmer. The necessary directions the research should take are as follows:

- (1) The leading research theme should focus on reaching the overall MSM population. The means to specify the scope of this issue would be to conduct an in-depth study of the sexuality mechanisms in order to see in particular how contacts-the relationships between ក្មេង *khteuy*s and their partners-are made and dissolved. In a similar vein, it would be necessary to study how this sexuality negotiates with the rest of [the person's] social life.
- (2) A further priority theme is adolescent sexuality in urban and rural communities.
- (3) An in-depth study of the social life in Buddhist វត្ត *vatt* monasteries. It is anticipated that scrutiny of the day-to-day activities and events at the វត្ត *vatt* would provide insight on how to set up a prevention initiative in such a setting.

## CHAPTER II. Life Stories

### **Note**

*Four out of the 20 detailed life stories recorded in full have been selected for inclusion with this summary based on the criteria of representativeness.*

*The full list of interviewees, including salient points of their lives, appears below in order to show the diversity of the persons surveyed.*

## List of interviewees

### Level of education and career path

Number	Date of birth	Place of birth	Occupation of parents	Level of education	Previous occupations	Current occupation
K 1	1937	Pakse, Laos	Father : Forest monitor Mother : Secondary school teacher	Faculty of Music diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Singing coach</li> <li>▪ Prostitution</li> <li>▪ Soldier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social worker</li> </ul>
K 2	1937	Dei Ith, Kandal	Parents : <i>Chamcar</i> farmers	Secondary cycle educational diploma ( <i>Brevet d'études secondaires du premier cycle</i> [BESPC])	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary educator</li> <li>▪ Secretary in ministry</li> <li>▪ Military staff</li> <li>▪ Translator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Retiree</li> </ul>
K 3	1960	Battambang	Father : Farmer Mother: Storekeeper	4 years of primary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tailor</li> <li>▪ Guard</li> <li>▪ Hotel valet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dresser</li> <li>▪ Film set esigner</li> </ul>
K 4	1960	Sangkat 2, Phnom Penh	Father: Royal Palace soldier, rickshaw driver Mother : Royal Ballet dancer	8 years of schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recyclable collector</li> <li>▪ Shoe repairer</li> <li>▪ Prostitution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shoe repairer</li> <li>▪ Storekeeper</li> </ul>
K 5	1962	Tuk Laak, Phnom Penh	Father : Boat conductor Mother : Housekeeper	5 years of schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Singer</li> <li>▪ Dancer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cook</li> </ul>

K 6	1963	Chheu Kach Ba Phnom, Prey Veng	Father : Coolie, guard	Diploma, Faculty of Choreography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Small jobs</li> <li>▪ Dance coach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social worker</li> </ul>
K 7	1965	Sangkat 5, Phnom Penh	Father: Colonel Mother: Embassy secretary	High school leaving certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Smuggler</li> <li>▪ Language coach</li> <li>▪ Pimp</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stage director</li> </ul>
K 8	1965	○ Thnoat, Kompong Thom	Father: Khmer Rouge military official	8 years of schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Police officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Building guard</li> </ul>
K 9	1967	Prey Krabas, Takeo	Father : Real estate contractor Mother : Grower	6 years of "diploma"- level schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Waiter</li> <li>▪ Makeup artist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Karaoke singer</li> </ul>
K 10	1968	Doeum, Khok, Takeo	Father : Primary school teacher Mother : Silk cloth weaver	6 years of "diploma"- level schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Electrician</li> <li>▪ Police officer</li> <li>▪ Welder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Motorcycle taxi driver</li> <li>▪ Social worker</li> </ul>
K 11	1968	Chek Thmei, Kompong Speu	Father : Farmer Mother : Silk cloth weaver	6 years of "diploma" level schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Healer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wedding makeup artist</li> <li>▪ Dancing coach</li> <li>▪ NGO</li> </ul>
K 12	1969	Sangkat 5, Phnom Penh	Father: Soldier Mother: Storekeeper	6 years of "diploma" level education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Police officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Police officer</li> </ul>



K 13	1970	Thlo, Kompong Cham	Father : Storekeeper	2 years at the Faculty of Law	▪ Worker	▪ Civil servant in ministry
K 14	1971	Kampot	Father: Soldier Mother: hol cloth weaver	Grade 12	▪ Worker	▪ Educator
K15	1975	Prek Changkran, Kompong Cham	Father: Tailor Mother : Housekeeper	Grade 11	▪ Repairer ▪ Salesman	▪ Unemployed
K 16	1978	Trapeang Chhouk, Kompong Speu	Parents: Farmers	2 years of schooling	▪ Farming	▪ Worker
K 17	1979	Trapeang Chhouk, Kompong Speu	Father: Civil servant, care unit, farmer	Grade 10	▪ Laborer ▪ Makeup artist	▪ Assistant wedding makeup artist
K 18	1981	Vat Po, Battamba ng	Father: Train conductor	High school leaving certi- ficate	▪ Factory worker ▪ Prostitution	Prostitution
K 19	1981	Chiro, Kompong Cham	Father : Fisherman Mother : Grocery seller	Grade 8	▪ Factory worker	Prostitution
K 20	1983- 1984	Set Bo, Kandal	Father : Truck driver Mother : Housekeeper	2 years of schooling	▪ Newspaper vendor ▪ Shoe shining	Shoe seller

## K 2

### 1) Family background

I was born in 1937 at Dei Ith, Kien Svay, Kandal, 23 or 24 kilometers out of Phnom Penh. My father is from Svay Rieng and my mother from Kien Svay. My parents were farmers and had always been orchard keepers because we lived in a ជំកន់ *chamcar* region<sup>11</sup>. They grew fruit trees: banana, jackfruit, etc. They had a piece of land measuring 90 meters by one kilometer. They had a fair standard of living. They weren't rich, but had a decent enough income to live normally. They had two children, of which I am the elder. My sister is four years younger than I am. My parents died of sickness a long time ago, my father in 1956 and my mother in 1961. After they died, I had to go to work and look after my younger sister.

### 2) Schooling

I started school at the age of 7 in Kien Svay and went from kindergarten<sup>12</sup> to junior high school which I left in 1951. I completed my schooling in Phnom Penh at the Sisowath Senior High School. Upon arrival, the first thing I did was study to obtain my "certificate of additional primary education," and then went on to the senior

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<sup>11</sup> A field in which vegetables or fruit trees are grown.

<sup>12</sup> According to what K 2 stated, the educational system of the time was copied from the French system. Children normally started school at the age of 6 by entering kindergarten, followed by the preparatory course, elementary school, grade 1 of middle school, grade 2 of middle school, upper school, each course corresponding to one grade of schooling. Then came lower secondary or junior high school, from grade 6 up to the senior year. Each cycle was concluded with exams: certificate of additional primary education at the end of upper school, elementary diploma after the 4th form, secondary cycle educational diploma after 3rd form, concluding with the high school leaving certificate at the end of the senior year.

high school entrance competition that required taking two exams, one written and the other oral. The oral exam was all in French. At that time, starting with the preparatory course, we started learning French, and it was taught at an ever-increasing level as we progressed in our schooling. I went as far as secondary year 3, and upon completion I got my "Secondary Cycle Educational Diploma" (Brevet d'études secondaires du *premier cycle* [BESPC])<sup>13</sup> in 1956 at the Norodom School, which used to be opposite to what is now the Faculty of Science. Afterwards I attended a class of second form and part of a class of first form. At the time I was living with an uncle on my mother's side on Phanouvong Street, which was just south of the Royal Palace. In November 1957, I quit school because my father had just died and my level of math was such that I could not go on. I therefore sought to prepare myself for a job and I took a training course in order to teach basic education.

### 3) Work

In 1957, I started my career path as a primary level educator. This work involved teaching people in the countryside, adults, in their particular field of agricultural work as well as in day-to-day matters. In the field of agriculture, I would teach them how to use agricultural techniques in harmony with the environment, make proper use of water, make compost, etc. While doing that, I also taught illiterate people to read and write. I had the status of a teacher and was a civil servant with the Ministry of Education. My work area was the province of Kandal and I was based in Takeo. I did field work from 1957 to 1961, going from village to village. Afterwards, I was assigned to the directorate office. I worked at this job until 1965, at which time this program was eliminated. Educators simply came to be referred to as ordinary teachers.

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<sup>13</sup> This certificate is commonly referred to as a "diploma" by Khmers, corresponding to the completion of six years of schooling.

In 1970, I made a permanent return to Phnom Penh. At that time, the government had established the Ministry of Community Development in which I worked until 1975. I worked in the private secretariat of the minister. I had no problem getting this job as I had acquired considerable experience in basic education and furthermore had a good command of French and English. The salary I was earning was quite enough to live on. I earned 4,000 to 5,000 riels a month, enough to provide for an entire family without difficulty. It cost only 20 to 30 riels to feed a whole family for a day.

After the Pol Pot period, I again settled in Phnom Penh and enrolled in the army where I worked in the logistics department. I was assigned to be a depot manager up to 1988. There was no problem finding work at that time, because the country lacked human resources. I was then 51 years old and had to do a number of different jobs to make a living. I worked for private companies, for UNTAC and various NGOs as an interpreter, a barman, etc.

#### 4) Sexual background

##### **My fiancée**

When I was 7 years old, my parents were close friends with a certain couple. The wife was pregnant at the time and she and her husband said that if the child to be born was a boy, they wanted him to be my best friend or if it was a girl, they would like to give her to me as a wife. Some months later, a baby girl was born. So it was that I was officially engaged to that person until 1965.

As far as my parents were concerned, I was destined to marry my fiancée and have my own family. When I was young, I wanted to comply with their wishes and go through with this plan. However, this became impossible with the turn of events. On the one hand, there was the early death of my parents (I was 19 when my father died and 24 when my mother passed away), and on the other, I was

not in a position materially to support a family. What happened was that after the death of my parents, one of my uncles had mortgaged our land and house and ruined the family. And I don't think I was psychologically ready for marriage. So I told my fiancée that she was free to live her own life if she could not wait for me. She eventually got married in 1965. I have remained on friendly terms with her up to this day. If it hadn't been for this unfortunate turn of circumstances, I would no doubt have gotten married.

### **Childhood and adolescence**

When I was about 10 years old, I was surprised because my schoolmates told me that I was docile, skittish and girlish in character. Actually, they were right, because I indeed suffered from fright. I was afraid of animals and anything vicious. I couldn't stand reptiles at all, nor earthworms, caterpillars, blood suckers, etc., for that matter. I was at ease with mild, peaceable, friendly people and I didn't like being with loud, exuberant types. I liked people who had had a good upbringing because I hated crude language. I would try to be with the girl classmates that I liked to play with. I remember once finding a place to hide so that I could put my feet in women's high-heeled shoes. I did this in the greatest of secrecy. In life, I would dress normally and not give any evidence of my nature.

Somewhat later, when I reached puberty, I remained close to the girls that I always considered to be friends. However, I did feel some arousal when I saw boys and I started piecing things together in my mind. But my character would not allow me to reveal my feelings to the people concerned. It was only when I was 17 or 18 years old that I really became aware of my sexual preference. At the same time, I never tried to force anyone to cooperate with me to satisfy my desires. When I was in love with a boy, I knew that my partner was not like me. And realizing this, I would allow him the freedom to live his own life, unlike others who were jealous and exclusive. I did not behave that way because I would be ashamed

of being tagged as unnatural. Actually, I was convinced that nature had made me this way and that no doubt something was lacking in the structuring of my individual. I don't think that the upbringing my parents gave me had any influence on my sexual identity. My parents never made the slightest remark about this and it no doubt never dawned on them because they had in mind that I would get married and have a family. As for me, I never talked to them about my sexual identity.

My first sexual experience goes back to the time I entered junior high school. I was 14 or 15 years old. I used to go out with a school friend and hang around at a buddy's house. Sometimes we would stay overnight at each other's place. Under the mosquito net, the friendly teasing and horseplay continued. On these occasions, we would sometimes hug and kiss one another. One thing led to another and by dint of feeling one another up, the desire was aroused and we would end up masturbating one another. As far as I am concerned, that was just a simple, meaningless act, and my buddy viewed it the same way. It very frequently happens that boys are in bed together without any ulterior motive and end up quite by chance having sex relations. We would feel each other up a little and do it and that was the end of it. When it happened, we did it, or if we didn't, that's all there was to it. So it was that I had many experiences of this type.

Somewhat later on, when I was about 17, things got more serious. I had longer-lasting, closer relationships with boys that were also my friends. We would see each other often, at their place or at mine. Others thought that we were just good friends. The next step was when I started to work. However, I never "lived" with anyone on a permanent basis, except after the Pol Pot period.

## The 1960s

I was based in Takeo where I rented a house to live in. Actually, I didn't like living in Takeo. Every night I would return to Phnom Penh. At the time, I loved dancing and would go to the bars in the evening. I loved European dances like the bolero, tango, slow, etc. I would hire bar girls from just about anywhere-from Hong Kong, Laotian girls, Khmer girls, etc.-to be my dancing partners. Bars were plentiful, especially along the Tonle Sap riverfront. I must say that the people who frequented such establishments were well bred. For instance, I never saw men drink to the point of getting drunk and acting up.

It has to be said that the city of Phnom Penh was very orderly back at that time. The anarchy that you see in the city today did not exist. The population was smaller, of course, but it seems that there were even more services.

I knew many foreigners, Frenchmen in particular, with whom it was easy to strike up a relationship. People would greet us and if we responded, a relationship, a friendship ensued. I had long-term relationships with people who were in Cambodia for cooperation.

## The Pol Pot period

When Pol Pot had Phnom Penh evacuated, I left with my sister and my six nieces and nephews. My sister was a nurse and married to a doctor. At the time of the evacuation, the two were not together. My brother-in-law was at his place of work in the northern part of the city. He was teaching at the school for midwives. They were permanently separated at that time. People told us later that they saw him heading north, totally in the opposite direction to us.

Actually, my sister and I headed for our home village in Kien Svay but we did not stay long. The villagers, those close to the family or strangers to us, were not very friendly. They were not happy to see us come. Besides, Kien Svay was a ឃុំ *chamcar* region

and therefore low on rice. So we decided to go elsewhere. We walked on aimlessly, just kept moving ahead. To get food, we traded what we had, clothing and things. When Pol Pot's men asked me what I did, I replied that I was a car driver. Fortunately I had kept my driver's license which was proof enough. At O Daeng Euv, we stayed for a while because there was a lot of food. We ended up at Snuol, Kratie. There I had to move in with a កងយុវជន *kang youvechun*, a group of young people (unmarried)<sup>14</sup>. I protested, saying that it wasn't right, as I was nearly half a century old.

They also tried to marry me off, but I replied that I was already married and was looking for my wife, which was altogether false. Nevertheless, this saved me from a Pol Pot marriage.

Once settled in Snuol, I started doing farming and dike work. Then one day, one of the chiefs, a មូលដ្ឋាន *moulthan*, asked me what I could do best. I told him that I was very good at cooking. That got me assigned to the kitchen. I must add that I am meek and guileless in character and others must have felt pity or compassion towards me, even the មូលដ្ឋាន *moulthan*. Looking at it another way, I did not realize that the situation in the Kratie region was less difficult than elsewhere because at the time I had no idea of what was going on in the rest of the country.

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<sup>14</sup> Democratic Kampuchea was divided into two different classes: on the one hand the មូលដ្ឋាន *moulthan*, who represented those who had lived in the Khmer insurrection regions prior to 1975. On the other hand, the "April 17ers" or ប្រមាណស័ក ព្រះមហាក្សត្រ *pracheachon thmei* were those who lived in zones under the control of the Lon Nol army until April 1975. The two classes operated based on laws that were quite different.

The "April 17er" society was itself organized in separate groups called *kg kang*, which were not based on family ties. In most instances, there were no longer any true family units or households. A *kg kang* meant a group of people, anywhere from 30 to 60 or more, who were put together according to age, sex and marital status. During the Pol Pot time, the យុវជន *yuvCn* young people aged from 18 to 25 years of age were generally single and put together in a particular *kg kang*.



I found myself to be the only man, a deportee from Phnom Penh, among the women មួលថាន *moulthan* in the kitchens. Furthermore, I was there with the job of supervising these women, which was something quite unusual. The food was rice and សម្ប *samla*<sup>15</sup>. Miraculously, I did well in the kitchen, especially cooking rice. For the whole សហគមន៍ *sahakor*<sup>16</sup> cooperative, we had to cook 165 cans of rice. I remember once that we were given orders to make steamed rice, which was both delicious and very economical because there was no crust. It took only 120 cans, which allowed me to stash away 45 that I kept for the family.

In that region, we mingled with many ethnic minorities. There were the ស្បែង *Stiengs* and ភ្នំ *Phnong*. The area abounded with wild animals, which meant that everyone would go out to catch game. The people liked eating ត្រក្តុត *trâkuot*, a species of small crocodile that lives in trees. I could never bring myself to eat the creature. When I had to prepare it, I would use a rag to keep my hand from touching the animal, as I found it so disgusting. Its skin was scaly, like chicken feet.

I not only ate normally during this time, but by the time the Pol Pot regime ended, I had put on five kilos! I think I was really very lucky.

My sister stayed in the same village throughout that time. My nephews and nieces were separated from their mother. They were កង *kang* members and had to go off to work in different locations. Fortunately we were able to find all of them again in 1979.

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<sup>15</sup> សម្ប *Samla* is a soup dish made with vegetables, fish, meat or chicken.

<sup>16</sup> People's daily lives were centered around the *sahakor*, or cooperative, that was like a ឃុំ *khum*, an administrative division equivalent to a commune and included several PUmī phum villages.

During the Khmer Rouge years, people in the region I was in didn't dare talk about sex. You had to be very careful. However, I had sexual affairs. First it was with people who were deportees like me. We lived in fragile little shelters and it just happened. My partners were macho men. As far as I was concerned, these affairs had no meaning whatsoever. We relieved our urges, nothing more.

As for my relations with the ម្ចាស់ *moulthan*, it was more routine. It was always an initiative that they took, never me, and the initiators all occupied positions of responsibility. I had three experiences. The first one was strange. He was a young យុវជន *youwechun* មេកង *mékang*<sup>17</sup> who I personally noted to be very handsome. One day he was heading across a rice paddy and I thought aloud, "Who's that good-looking guy?" A little fellow beside me heard me say that and answered, "He's a មេកង យុវជន *mékang youwechun* but he has the reputation of being very mean!" I said inwardly at that time that I would really like to catch him. And it actually happened. One day in the early afternoon, everyone had eaten the meal that I had prepared. And the មេកង *mékang* in question came over and said, "Here, I kept a bit of sugar and game for you. You look beat. Come and have a rest on my lap!" I was really taken aback and didn't dare respond to his advances.

The second incident was also with a កង *kang* chief who started by giving me items of clothing. At that time, these were precious gifts because we had nothing. One night I went to bed as usual. The *mékang* slipped down from his hammock and took me in his arms. I did not dare protest and yielded to his desire.

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<sup>17</sup> Each kang was headed by a Khmer Rouge staffer called a emkg *mékang*, or kang chief.

The third one was with an official in charge of economic problems who I found very attractive. One day he transferred me to a different កងយុវជន *kang youvechun*. One evening after a meeting, I was going to go back to my កង *kang* when suddenly he grabbed me in the dark, covering my mouth with his hand and whispering, "Don't say anything. I love you but can't do anything because of the restrictions. I am going to be transferred, so you take good care of yourself. I hope things will change and we will have another chance to meet." The way he was acting betrayed his desire for me and I decided to tell him that I loved him too. After the fall of Pol Pot, he came looking for me in Phnom Penh, but he was already married then. Nothing more happened between us. One thing was sure, I didn't dare express my sexuality and I somehow feel that I had been raped by the មេកង *mékang* with whom I had that sexual exchange.

### **Homosexuality and heterosexuality**

When Khmers are around 19 or 20 years old, they habitually have relationships with their peers of the same sex without that meaning that they think they are homosexual<sup>18</sup>. It usually involves masturbation. However, it does happen that the partner is a true homosexual who, after a few bouts, reveals his orientation to his heterosexual companion, and the two of them end up living together for 7 or 8 years, after which both of them get married.

Many homosexuals lived as such in the early years of their adult life, but later got married. Once married, they forget the past as if it never existed. This homosexual "passage" in their life has no significance as regards their sexual identity. The same is true of heterosexuals. Some of them were in love for a long time with homosexuals; I am speaking specifically here of friends that I have

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<sup>18</sup> The interviewee actually used the words "homosexual" and "heterosexual" in French throughout this passage. I have transcribed what he said as is.

known. One day one of them goes to look for a wife for his companion before getting married himself. When I was working out in the country, I remember a very effeminate man who was busy one day making អំអង្ស num ansam<sup>19</sup>. I asked what he was making it for. He replied that it was for his own engagement!

In Cambodia, it is very specific. The Khmer homosexual is attracted by manly men, strong and tough, because they are the opposite of men that are docile and effeminate. In other countries, because I have known foreigners who explained homosexuality in other contexts, homosexuals are attracted to their peers, homosexuals as they are.

Here, homosexuals are silent and secretive. They don't come out of the closet. In Cambodia, homosexuals seldom live together as couples because there is the weight of what the family thinks, of the family line that has to be carried on. It happens that people talk about ខ្ចីវ khteuy, but they do not think of it in terms of sexuality because most ខ្ចីវ khteuy eventually get married.

There are homosexuals in all levels of society, among the poor and rich classes alike. There are many in the entertainment and art world, in diplomatic circles as well. It is hard to point them out, especially in the higher classes of society. Out in the country, people are more naïve and homosexuals unwittingly give themselves away.

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<sup>19</sup> This is a cake made with a sticky rice base, wrapped in banana leaves and boiled in water for at least seven hours. It can be a little salty or sweet. When salted, it is made of sticky rice, soybeans, pork fat and coconut milk. Sweet nMGnSm num ansam are made with sticky rice and fruit : banana, jackfruit and coconut milk. nMGnSm Num ansam are made on the occasion of major public or private ceremonies.

In Cambodia, homosexual relationships are much more common than elsewhere. Out in the country, for instance, prostitution does not exist and men still have to satisfy their sex drive. Because it is not always possible to have access to women who are traditionally protected by their families, men get by with their fellowmen. I would say that as a rule 90 percent of men have homosexual relations prior to getting married, and that's a fact. It happens this way because of society, economic constraints and traditions.

### **Expressing one's homosexuality**

Expressing one's homosexuality depends entirely on the character of the person and not his social background. In all classes of society, there are people who have no problem and others who have a problem revealing this aspect of themselves. I feel that most homosexuals in Cambodia tend to hide their identity.

## K 3

### 1) Family background

I was born in 1960. My father was a farmer and my mother ran a small business in Battambang. My mother had 13 children, but many of them died very young. Only five survived. There is an age difference of over twenty years between my oldest brother and me. We spoke TICIV techieu Chinese at home, but I learned Thai from the woman who looked after me and Khmer when I was away from home. I am now really most at ease speaking Khmer.

### 2) Schooling

I only attended school for four years. I did not care for school even though I always got good marks. In terms of study, I would have won first prize for laziness. I didn't look after my things. I remember how I used to just pitch my books anywhere when I got home. They were in a real mess. I was not a person inclined to study.

### 3) Sexual background

I believe I was sexually quite precocious. By the age of 9 I was already dabbling with sex. I knew how to kiss and hug boys when I was not yet aware of who I was. After school, I would never go straight home. I used to stop at the Buddhist វត្ត *vatt* monastery nearby because I liked to hang out with the young students who lived there. They were 15 or 16 years old and spent a lot of time studying. When they had spelling exercises to do, I would dictate the words for them. I learned a lot with them. They were naïve and although older than I was, it was me who initiated them to sex. At the time,

there was no prostitution and these young men were actually happy with my initiatives. I *sul si* ate all of them, one after the other. These students were my first sex partners. My association with them no doubt had a major influence on the development of my personality.

My father died in early 1972. My mother found herself alone but she was left with a good inheritance as my father had bought up a lot of land. However, she was not pleased with my behavior and could not control me. Thinking that a different environment would settle me down, she sent me to Phnom Penh to live with a female cousin in 1972. I was supposed to attend school there, but it didn't work out because of the war. In the capital, I discovered the world of the ភ្នំ *khteuy*s, many of whom including Frenchmen would hang out at Olympic Stadium. Since I spoke a smattering of French, I could communicate with them. I would woo the athletic types. ភ្នំ *Khteuy*s could also be found in front of the Royal Palace and near វត្តបូក *vatt Botum*. In the capital, life became risky because of the bombing, so within six months my mother had me come back to Battambang.

### **The Pol Pot period**

In April 1975, my mother took us to her home village, Prey Raneam, which had been under Khmer Rouge control for quite some time. Most of the villagers were related to my mother's side of the family, and they actually felt indebted to us because my mother had helped them out a lot in the past. For this reason, my family did not experience any difficulties. There was always rice at home and we never suffered from hunger or anything else. As for me, I was recruited by the art unit and I had to train for dances of the revolution on such themes as the farmer, laborer, worker, father, mother, etc. The dances were based on the movements of the occupation involved: the harvest dance featured farmers reaping

rice in the paddy. I remember those dances very well and am still able to perform them.

ខ្ញុំ *Khteus* had no particular status and no one really paid any attention to them. As for me, I just carried on spending my time catching men. So it was that I ឥឡូវ *"ate"* absolutely all of the មេកង *mékang* in my area. Heterosexuals were also active because all the women were pregnant during the harvest, but the children born died like flies.

### **1980: The refugee camps**

After the Pol Pot period, I had become an orphan and my place in the family was now uncertain. My surviving brothers and sisters were already married and I was the last one. I couldn't think of living with one of them because I wasn't sure how to act with the spouse. So I went to live in a វត្ត *vatt* for a time. Unfortunately, I couldn't put up with the company of the young people in the monastery. They were unemployed, homeless and lazy. I eventually left to visit a female cousin who then suggested that I go to the Thai border and get into one of the refugee camps. As for me, I wasn't really interested in leaving Cambodia. I had no specific plan, but just went from pillar to post. My cousin and I finally were admitted into Khao-I-Dang camp where I again had the opportunity to exhibit my taste and talents for dancing. It was a place where there was an intense sex life. Prostitution did not exist in the camps. I had relationships with Khmer refugees and innumerable affairs with Frenchmen who were working in the camp. The latter were very kind and caring towards me. This really touched me. At that time I felt very much Khmer and this identity expressed itself in my artistic activities.



## **1981: Arrival in France**

In January 1981, I arrived in France where I lived in Calais for an initial intake period of 8 months. I later moved to Paris and lived in a number of districts including the 18th and 19th, where I could rent a 16-square-meter studio for 700 francs. When I just arrived, I had to take a two-year apprenticeship as an electrician, but I never did take up that trade. Actually, I went in for sewing after that. I assembled clothing and was paid by the piece. There was a big demand. Then I spent a long time working in hotels as a room valet and night guard. I was always hired on as a casual contract worker, but this status didn't bother me. I was quite unstable by nature. Actually, whenever I was recruited as regular staff, I would drop the job quite quickly.

I only associated with the Khmer community in France. I didn't get along with the French because they resented foreigners. This hostility was most often seen in the administrations such as the police headquarters where papers were issued to foreigners. The workers had no consideration for me and called me a "rice bowl." That really put me off. As for sex, my partners were mainly Asians from other countries.

In France, I shared in the activities of an association that linked European *khm̃w khteuy*s with those in Asia by means of trips. I was able to go to Taiwan, New Zealand and finally Singapore. The plane fare was paid for and we lived with the corresponding host. I hit it off well with the one in Singapore where I stayed for six months. After that trip, I came directly to Cambodia.

## **1996: Return to Cambodia**

Once in Phnom Penh, for the first time I sat down and thought out a workable plan. I first of all wanted to get my orphaned nephews and nieces together and look after them as best I could. Out of all the children in my family, only the sister closest to me and I were left.

Since I had had the opportunity of living in France, it was my responsibility to uphold the family honor. Then I turned my attention to my fellow ខ្មែរ *khteuys*. I felt sorry for them because they were in a deplorable situation. I didn't have much money to give them, but I concentrated on educating them so that they could find their place in society.

With the money I had saved, I was able to have a small apartment building put up, most of which I rented out. I lived on the top floor. My position as a pivot point in the ខ្មែរ *khteuy* community soon became known. Organizations included me in their projects and I personally shared in activities to help ខ្មែរ *khteuys* fit in with society. My apartment thus became a venue for dance training and meetings focusing on education and health. I also took in homeless people who had no occupational training. In time, they found their way and are now able to manage on their own.

### **My sister and I**

My sister is very well aware of who I am because I never hid my personality either within the family or outside. I don't care at all what people think of my being a ខ្មែរ *khteuy*. My sister accepts me as I am, as well as her children, who act decently towards me. Of course, she keeps bringing up the matter of marriage to me because we have to think about continuing the family line. Since I have never done anything without asking questions, I asked her if marriage was really what the future was all about for a person. What about ខ្មែរ *khteuys* who get married but who never sleep with their wives and go after men? Is that honorable?

### **The world of entertainment**

In Cambodia, I never had a problem getting into the world of entertainment because I am a natural performer. And these days the country desperately needs qualified actors. I could do anything on television. I could direct shows of the "Moulin Rouge" type,

comedies, films based on traditional stories, etc. I remember the shows that we put on in the country and how successful I was. People loved it. I'm now directing a film that is a sequel to a traditional story.

### **ꠘꠗꠊ *Khteuys* and work**

I don't think that ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys* suffer much discrimination or rejection at the level of insertion into the work environment. If you apply for a job that you are not qualified for, then you certainly won't be hired. If you give attention to your appearance and apply for a job as a hairdresser, you have every chance of getting on. But if you're very effeminate and apply for a job as a soldier, you very likely won't be hired.

Actually, the greatest danger facing ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys* is AIDS. Heterosexuals take at least a minimum level of precautions in the area of hygiene, but ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys* have no compunction with regard to external constraints, no matter what the time or place may be. They do it anywhere, on the grass, in the straw, down a back alley, etc. ꠘꠗꠊ *Khteuys* aren't fussy, but they are quite moody. They are somewhat difficult to get through to.

### **ꠘꠗꠊ *Khteuys* in society**

The status of ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys* has changed. Formerly, before any event, men went after or solicited ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys*. These days, ꠘꠗꠊ *khteuys* have dropped to a very low level in society. They have to buy boys!

Before, women were inaccessible and prostitutes rare. Men had little opportunity to have sex. Today things are different. Prostitutes are out working everywhere and girls have become very bold, especially out in the countryside. ꠘꠗꠊ *Khteuys* can't compete with them in catching men. They are faster and more adventurous.

A more or less early awareness of one's sexual personality depends on the environment in which one has lived. If a person lives in an environment conducive to it, he comes to realize his ឆ្មើង *khteuy* identity quite early. Those with a less feminine personality only come to realize their sexual orientation at puberty. Usually they hated ឆ្មើង *khteuys* when they were children.

In Khmer culture, no one is sexually attracted to ឆ្មើង *khteuys*. However, heterosexuals<sup>20</sup> quite willingly agree to give themselves to ឆ្មើង *khteuys* because Khmers think that the sex act is like a game, relieving a desire, a moment of relaxation. Heterosexuals get a lot of pleasure from toying with ឆ្មើង *khteuys*. They do not feel that having sex with a ឆ្មើង *khteuy* has any influence on their overall identity.

Some married men, often under pressure from the family or because of some problem, will secretly go after boys. I don't consider them to be bisexuals<sup>21</sup> because they never go after women.

Khmer society is very tolerant in the sense that Khmers are not hostile to what goes on outside their family. ឆ្មើង *Khteuys* have no problem in life as long as their families aren't affected. Other people can do what they want, but it is not tolerated when it rebounds on one's own family. Furthermore, some ឆ្មើង *khteuys* go overboard and upset the neighborhood. Problems come up in that case and hostility is expressed. But if ឆ្មើង *khteuys* keep a low profile and act normally, people accept them and do not reject them. People reject the negative aspects, the misconduct.

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<sup>20</sup> Term used by the interviewee.

<sup>21</sup> Term used by the interviewee.

It is virtually impossible to categorize the ខ្ចីយ *khtey* community. The terms សក់វែង *sak veng*, សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei* are misnomers. I have often said this. One thing for sure is that the community can be divided into two groups: those who come to terms with their sexual orientation and those who do not and who, therefore, try to hide their real identity. In this group, some people are quite feminine and others less. Expressing this sexual identity also depends on the environment and circumstances. And they express some things but keep others hidden. In Cambodia, nothing is clear-cut and precise, so it is really difficult to determine distinct groups.

The classifiers សក់វែង *sak veng*, សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei* are misnomers that were coined by people outside of the community. In Cambodia, the situation is far more complex. Also, these terms សក់វែង *sak veng*, សក់ខ្លី *sak khlei* are recent creations. I usually say this to set the record straight, but I think people need to simplify things.

## K 12

### 1) Family background

I was born in 1969 in Phnom Penh, in សង្កាត់ *sangkat* ward Number 5<sup>22</sup>. My mother is part Vietnamese and comes from Kompong Trach, Kampot. She ran a small grocery store in front of her house until she got married. She is still living and is now 70. My father was born in Koh Thom, Kandal. He was a soldier and disappeared under Pol Pot. One day in 1975, some people took him away "to get an education," as was the case with many. He was never seen again.

There were nine children in the family, all born in Phnom Penh, although three died under the Khmer Rouge. My older sister who was in the army commando unit disappeared at the time of the evacuation of Phnom Penh. I think she must have died at that time. One of my brothers, the second oldest of the children, was a soldier and died during the same period. What I know about my fourth sister is that she was killed in 1978, towards the end of the Pol Pot regime. She belonged to a កងចល័ត *kang chalat*<sup>23</sup> and was executed on her way back to the village. I heard about this from my family long after the event. These days, my other sisters all run small businesses in front of their homes or stands in the market. My only living brother is a police officer in Phnom Penh like me.

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<sup>22</sup> Up until 1975, the *sangkat* was the largest administrative unit in the city of Phnom Penh.

<sup>23</sup> A traveling group made up of strong, healthy young people who could move about and do specific jobs.

## 2) Childhood

I have had a feminine character since I was very young. I remember how I liked to play with girls of my age at the games they played: elastic band game, hopscotch, skipping. My mother didn't pay any attention to these preferences. She had plenty of things on her mind, especially after 1979 when she found herself a widow with six children to raise. She would buy vegetables and carry them around on her head to sell. She never noticed details like that.

I was not aware that I had a preference for boys at the time. I simply knew that I liked to play with girls and dress up like them. I often put on stretchy gathered skirts. But when I came to a certain age during adolescence, I stopped wearing such clothing. I was aware that it wasn't normal. I was ashamed of having a skirt on, so I dressed like the other boys, but my sensitivity had not changed.

## 3) Sexual background

### The Pol Pot period

In April 1975, we first went to Koh Thom, my father's home village. A month later, my father disappeared. A second deportation led us to Anlong Vel, Pursat. That was a lucky move because if we had stayed in Koh Thom, no doubt the whole family would have been executed.

I did not live with my mother at Anlong Vel. The family was broken up according to different *kangs*. I was six years old. I was in a *kang komar*<sup>24</sup> and gathered weeds and cow dung. I remember well one event that I came upon by chance. It was in late 1978, near the end of the Pol Pot period. I used to secretly join my mother

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<sup>24</sup> Group made up of children who were old enough to work.

who was assigned to the kitchen detail. She managed to put some left over food aside for me. What I really liked was rice crust. During that period of famine, this scraping off the bottom of the pot was a wonderful treat. Sometimes she would succeed in hiding away some pieces of sweet potato.

To get to where my mother was, I had to cross through an area of forest and fields. It was a safe way so as not to be seen by the *ឃ្លុប chhlop*<sup>25</sup>. One day, I headed off to my mother's *សហគមន៍ sahakor*. When I got there, I saw a group of people beside of a large ditch that had just been dug. There were about twenty or so, men and women. They were naked and their arms were tied behind their backs. Someone else dressed in the usual black outfit was holding a shovel and knocking down the prisoners one after the other. Once hit, the victim was thrown into the ditch. After the second victim fell, I ran off. I didn't want to see any more, but I was not overcome by any particular fear. I think that I was too small to realize the enormity of the situation. I kept on going until I got to my mother and I told her about what I had just seen. The people in her group said the victims were of Vietnamese origin and came from Svay Rieng.

**Profession: police officer**

After 1979, we stayed on in Pursat for three more months before attempting to reach the capital city in a car that was willing to transport us free of charge. We ended up at Kilometer 7, Chraing Chomres. Since we had no means of going on further, we settled there. I started school in 1981 at the Russei Keo school, and kept on until I got my diploma in 1987. Afterwards I was enrolled in the police training school due to contacts my older sister had with staff in that institution. I wanted to become a policeman. For one thing, getting into that profession meant that I was exempted from enrolling

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<sup>25</sup> The *ឃ្លុប chhlop* were staff members in charge of overseeing the deported population, *ប្រតិភូស្តី pracheachon thmei* or "April 17ers."



in the army. I had no desire at all to go out and fight, to go to war. In 1988, I began working as a police officer in a working class area in Phnom Penh. I was 19 years old.

Meanwhile I had my first experience with sex. It was in 1985 and my partner was a classmate who was older than I was. He was 20 and his name was Saran. He was from a family who was better off than mine was, because three of its members lived in the United States. His house was just in front of the Russei Keo *vatt*. He was a កូនសេកលុក *kaun sek lok*, a young person at the service of the monks. When they were not studying, these young helpers were supposed to do housework in the monastery: cleaning, tidying up. At first, I would go and help him there in my free time. We were both completely virgin.

It was my first sexual experience and his as well. I didn't know a thing about sex. I would go and see Saran because we got along well. We had fun together. Then we felt each other up and embraced. Suddenly the desire was aroused.

We were really in love. We ate and drank out of the same receptacle. We would often lie down in the daytime under the canopy of the ក្តី *kuti*<sup>26</sup> and hug and kiss as man and woman. This liaison with Saran made me aware of my sexual preference for men.

The monks' servants were aware of our relationship, but no one else. After my work, I would go and join him at night right in the ក្តី *kuti*. One day in 1989, I came to see him as usual. He was with a group of girls and boys. Among them was another ខ្ញុំ *khtey* that I knew. I threw a fit because I was overcome with jealousy. Saran gave me a powerful slap and left. He came back fifteen minutes later, took me by the hand and then in his arms, asking me to forgive him. I didn't hold it against him.

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<sup>26</sup> The living quarters of the monks.

Unfortunately, Saran's father was informed about our relationship the year that Saran got his high school diploma (*baccalauréat II*). He came to get his son and take him home. I missed Saran terribly, so much so that I felt like taking my own life. I loved him and could not bear to be without him. I went looking for him. I found him at Chheu Kach Ba Phnom. He came back to me, but did not stay long. Under pressure from the family, he left for good. I was reduced to despair.

I was disoriented. And I felt the need to get over my sorrow. So I started going to places where ខ្មែរ *khteuys* and ប្រុស *boys* could be found. When I saw a man alone who looked lost, I would sit beside him and start a conversation. I would ask him if he was married and had a job. I told him that I could help him and invited him to go and eat something with me. Usually that worked. He would come with me and we would eat. After, I would take him to my headquarters and introduce him as one of my friends.

After connecting, we separated. I never give money to my partners. I just pay for what they eat or drink. I cannot count how many partners I have had. I did not get attached to any of them. After my misadventure with Saran, I no longer had any feeling of love or affection. Deep down, that's perhaps better, because you don't experience any pain.

At work, no one knows that I like having sex with men. I have never encountered any difficulties because of my sexuality. I must say that if an outsider didn't know my sexual orientation, he could never suspect a thing. Outside, I am no different from an ordinary man.

My mother long knew that I had a rather ខ្មែរ *khteuy* character and she was not happy about it. I think that she just couldn't imagine how I could have sex with men. My brothers and sisters

were not sympathetic when they saw me in the company of effeminate men. They said that I dishonored the family.

My mother always spoke about marriage and felt that it was not normal that my younger sister got married before me. She put a lot of pressure on me to start a family.

## **Marriage**

In 1999, the people in my neighborhood started saying that it was perhaps about time for me to think about my future and to take a wife. When I say the people in my neighborhood, I mean those who are under the jurisdiction of my district. I look after the physical environment of the area. I see to it that people don't hang their laundry out just anywhere. They like me a lot. They always give me a little money to round out the low salary I get as a police officer.

There was a lady in the neighborhood who was a gold seller. She considered me to be like a nephew. Initially, she wanted to test my honesty. She deliberately left out a large gold necklace within easy reach in her house. That day I was the only person there. When she saw that I hadn't touched it, she developed a fondness for me. She took me to visit her orchard in Prek Eng. She said that I was now getting older and that it was time for me to get married. Furthermore, she knew someone who might suit me. I agreed.

She acted as the go-between. The girl was from Kompong Cham, 22 years old, considerably younger than I was. I decided to get married then because I wanted to have children and keep the family line going. I knew that a relationship with a woman was not going to be like what I had experienced with Saran, although I had never had a relationship with another woman before.

The marriage took place at my sister's place, near Phsar Depot. One year later, I had a child.

Whether I sleep with a woman or a man, I feel desire. But there is a difference just the same. My desire for men is much stronger.

My wife does not know my true nature. I act one hundred percent as a man and a good husband. I admit that I have not done anything at all that could lead her to believe that this is not the case. I will keep my orientation from her until she discovers it herself. Women could despise their husbands if they knew. I have ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* friends who got married and brought men home. They had to get a divorce afterward. Other couples have remained together even so.

As for me, I was faithful to my wife during the first six months of our life together. Then I started thinking about men again and telling myself that I could have fun from time to time. However, I never said anything about it to my wife. I take advantage of my working time to go and look for the company of other men.

During my work, I have to be on guard duty once a month, which duty I carry out. Beyond that, I have other days when I can go wandering. But I don't do it every day. My wife can't suspect a thing.

Khmer society is a society that hinges on money. If a rich family has a ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* child, the child won't have any problem continuing his studies and finding a job. You can do anything if you have money and power. Only poor families have a hard time fitting ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* children in.

On the outside, my personality cannot be suspected. Now, if you're a ខ្ញុំ *khteuy* and a real wimp or you dress in a feminine way, you won't get a job anywhere, unless you belong to a family that is well off. On the other hand, if you look normal, you won't have any problem getting accepted.

I am one of those ខ្ញុំ *khteuys* who doesn't come out of the closet.

## K 14

### 1) Family background

I was born in 1971 in Kampot. My family is from Tang Yap, Prei Krabas, Takeo. My father was a non-commissioned officer in the army, while my mother wove hUI hol cloth and grew rice. Her ហ្នែង hol<sup>27</sup> was much sought after and was known as បន្ទាយស្រី *Banteay Srei*. We used to own a lot of land. There were six siblings in our family, but one boy died a long time ago when he was very young. The oldest one is 42 and the youngest is under 30. My brothers and sisters work as civil servants in various ministries or as teachers.

My father was in the Lon Nol army. One day back in 1972 he was assigned to lead a troop that had revolted. He went by helicopter and never came back. My mother kept looking for him up until 1975 but never found a trace of him. We think that he was killed. Apart from that, I know nothing of the situation of my parents nor that of the country. My memories go back to 1975.

### 2) Schooling

I attended school in 1980 at the Wat Koh school, after the Pol Pot period. I was completely illiterate when I started. I didn't know a single letter or number. I failed my first year. Things were better the next year. I was able to keep on studying until I got my high school leaving certificate (*baccalauréat double*). Afterwards I studied foreign languages: Thai, Mandarin Chinese and English.

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<sup>27</sup> Woven silk cloth with patterns obtained according to the technique used to tie the yarn.

### 3) Childhood

#### Pol Pot period

My earliest memories are deeply gloomy. In April 1975, we were in Kampot. I remember that we got on a train. We were given bread to eat. Grown-ups were allowed a full loaf and children only half a loaf. I didn't know what was going on and I protested. I cried so that I could get a whole loaf.

Actually, we were being evacuated. We were to be deported to a village called ភ្នំចិន *phum Chen* where Khmer families of Chinese origin or who had white skin were put together. My mother said that she was a widow and that she would like to settle in a មូលដ្ឋាន *moulthan* village at West Sras Chhouk, Phnom Srok, Battambang. In the beginning, all of the family was together. Six months later, each of us was forced to move into a កង *kang* based on age and sex. There was no exemption possible under Pol Pot. When we were assigned to a group, we had to stay with it. There was no possibility of being together with the family. We had to manage things secretly if we wanted to go see our family members.

My older sister was in a កងចល័ត *kang chalet*, my mother in a កង មេម៉ាយ *kang memay* with other widows, and I was put in a កងកុមារ *kang komar*. We succeeded in seeing each other from time to time. It was terrible. I was hungry and had nothing to eat. I would catch any animal that came within reach. No rat, grasshopper or cockroach could survive. I would claw out grains of paddy rice that had been left stuck in the walling material.

One day I went to dig up a sugar cane cutting that had just been planted. Some people saw me. I ran away and hid in the bushes. It took a long time for them to find me. They tied me up and put me in jail for a day and night. I often stole the cuttings they put in the ground. I sometimes got a beating when they caught me doing it.

In the កងកុមារ *kang komar*, my jobs were to carry loads of dirt and collect cow dung or other manure. These were not exhausting jobs, but it was too much for an underfed child to do.

At the time, hunger was the main thing in my life. I never ate human flesh but in the same village, someone had. The person was the survivor of a family that had all been killed. He was by himself and had nothing to eat. He dug up a baby that the neighbors had just buried and boiled it up in a large earthenware crock. He was caught by the ឈ្មួត *chhlop* and tied to a tree in the middle of a field. The child មួលដួន *moulthan* stoned him with chunks of dry dirt. The starving man was in his death throes and it wasn't long before he breathed his last.

My aunt's family was also at Sras Chhouk, but she and her husband died, leaving seven children.

## 1979

The time right after Pol Pot was another period of suffering. The Khmer Rouge killed anyone who left his or her village. I never saw a killing scene but I would find what the victims left on the roadside, most often cooking utensils.

My mother succeeded in getting her children and seven nieces and nephews together and got us on the road to Siem Reap. We were walking. Our getaway was during the harvest season. My mother made us glean the ears of rice that had been dropped in the paddies. We quickly hulled them and cooked them, then went to sleep in the open air. One time we awoke the next morning to discover that we had cooked our rice with water from a pond in which 7 or 8 corpses were floating.

We traveled as far as Oudong where all the rest of the family had gotten together. There was nothing to eat in that region. There were 13 of us and we had only one can of rice and some bamboo shoots to eat for the whole day. We went looking for ripe sugar palm nuts to cook up as a supplement to our food. We stayed there for a whole year.

We arrived in Phnom Penh in 1980. A girlfriend of my mother found us a house and gave us five *chi*<sup>28</sup> of gold. We were in the Tuol Tom Pong quarter. My mother looked for a job, but her only skill was weaving silk. She introduced herself to a tailor shop in Phsar Tapang. She stated that she was a widow with thirteen children to raise. She was hired. She had to learn how to sew with a machine. We helped her. She was able to put together 13 pairs of pants a day.

#### 4) Sexual background

We lived in a large wooden house that my mother sold soon afterwards for two *chi*<sup>29</sup> of gold. Then we moved down close to the Tonle Sap. At the time, there was no shortage of houses.

They were not occupied but were dirty and full of excrement. You could take over as many as you wanted as long as you were prepared to clean them up. People didn't like the ground floors because they were so filthy and left one exposed to criminal elements.

During my adolescence, I would hang around with children of the neighbors who were upper class. At the time, we used to like going up on the rooftops of buildings to play and sleep. These roof terraces had no walls and offered a welcome open space for children.

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<sup>28</sup> A measure of weight equivalent to 3.75 grams.

<sup>29</sup> Idem.



I started experiencing sexual arousal at the age of 14 and had a preference for boys. But I first had sex with a 13-year-old girl. I was completely naïve and she seduced me. We continued this relationship until her family moved to another area.

Afterwards, the sex drive was still strong in me and one day I had my second experience with a boy. He was a buddy who would come up to play on the rooftop. There were 6 or 7 of us sleeping on straw mats. As usual, we fooled around touching one another and frolicking as if there was nothing to it. But then I had my first sex act with a boy.

I then had relations with a girl who was a prostitute. In my life, I have had sex with 5 or 6 women but I cannot count the number of men with whom I have had sex.

What's more, I fell into prostitution one day quite by chance. A friend had invited me to go for a drink at the former Tonle Sap bar. He was with a Thai man who was a ភ្នំ *khteuy*. I had never set foot in this type of establishment. We had something to drink. Then the Thai man invited me to go with him somewhere else. He took me to The Casa where drinks cost \$5. I must have drunk beyond my capacity. I was drunk. The Thai then took me to a guesthouse. We had no sooner arrived and I rushed to the toilet to throw up. He asked me why I threw up. I told him that I hadn't eaten and that drinking alcohol on an empty stomach made me sick. He had some food brought in. Afterwards, he taught me everything I didn't know about sex techniques. The next morning he dropped me off at the Bopha Tip and gave me \$30, which was a huge sum of money to me. I had never had so much money and I didn't realize that I had sold my body. The fact was that I had been introduced to a business that could easily bring me an income. That way I would no longer have to depend on my mother. From that day on, I have sold myself in order to be financially self-sufficient.

I focused especially on foreigners, because we were freer. They would let us do what we wanted. Khmers treat us like slaves. We have to satisfy them no matter what.

I had met a Frenchman at my sister's restaurant where I had been working. I was frying up some noodles in the kitchen. One day, this man came in to eat. He then made me a proposition that I accepted. I saw him five or six times before stopping. But he kept on giving me money every Sunday, 30,000 or 40,000 riels.

I have never been "in love" strictly speaking. When I like a man, I establish a relationship with him and if he is someone respectable, I can meet him again. But then he becomes like a friend to me. That ends the sexual relationship. And if he's a bad guy, I call it off and drop him.

The strange thing is that if someone tries to seduce me, I don't feel any attraction to the person. But if I am the one who is trying to go after the person and he does not respond to my advances, that excites me and I am increasingly interested.

In reality, I have no desire to have feelings. That could result in pain. I don't want to suffer.

### **Thoughts on sexual identity**

I think that I do not have a definite preference for one sex or the other. I like both women and men. The only difference is that I am attracted to women of all ages, even up to 50 years old, but I don't like old men. I don't like them to be manly either. They have to be a little bit effeminate. As of now I have not yet decided. I don't know if I will seek my future with a man or a woman.

My mother doesn't know a thing about all this. She has never made any remark about it. She would be very angry if she was told that her son was a *គ្រូ ក្មេយ្យ* *khteuy*. She would stick up for me because she adores her children.

I am quite sure that I will get married in the near future. I know that I have a preference for men, but I have to think about my future.

Men who have sex with other men are necessarily homosexuals. They have a feminine part in them to a greater or lesser extent. If it is very strong, they are very wimpy and mannered like women. There are many men who love men. But most of them will not admit it and do not show it. They hide it. 60 percent of men are *ក្មេង* *khteuy*. I know that is true because I am in that milieu. They are even in the ministries. They get boys through a go-between who may be someone with whom they once had a relationship or a professional [pimp]. All of them get a commission for this service.

# SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Interviewee No. ....

## I. Family background

- 1) Interviewee's age or year of birth
- 2) Interviewee's place of birth
- 3) Place of birth of the interviewee's parents
- 4) Occupation of the interviewee's parents
- 5) Place of birth of the interviewee's grandparents
- 6) Occupation of the interviewee's grandparents
- 7) Number of brothers and sisters of the interviewee
- 8) Occupation of the brothers and sisters
- 9) Interviewee's current place of residence
- 10) Current place of residence of the siblings
- 11) Language spoken at home
- 12) Religion practiced

## II. Geographic and social context

- 1) What is the key feature of your home srok?
- 2) What secondary activities, if any, are engaged in?
- 3) What things may be grown in the chamcar?
- 4) What was the economic situation of the country like?
- 5) How many markets were there?
- 6) Did you live near a market?

## III. Schooling background

- 1) How old were you when you started school?
- 2) Features of the school?
- 3) How many years did you attend school?
- 4) If you stopped going to school prematurely, why?
- 5) How did you do in your studies?
- 6) If you had to quit school, would you liked to have continued?

#### **IV. Childhood, adolescence**

- 1) What is your earliest memory of the country?
- 2) What did you like to do when you were a child?
- 3) Did you have friends at the time?
- 4) How do you identify yourself sexually?
- 5) At what age did you become aware of the characteristics of your sexuality?
- 6) How did the specific nature of your sexuality find expression?
- 7) How was your nature perceived: by your family, your neighbors, the villagers?
- 8) When others disapproved, did you attempt to make an attitude change?
- 9) Did you have friends during your adolescence? How many?
- 10) What activities did you used to do with them?
- 11) Did you talk about your problems with them?
- 12) What was life like at the time? What were your activities at home? Outside?
- 13) Were there other persons with the same character as you in the srok?

#### **V. Sexual background**

- 1) What was your first relationship?
- 2) Where did you meet this first partner?
- 3) What was he like? How old was he? What was his occupation?
- 4) How long did this relationship last?
- 5) Have you had many relationships?
- 6) Who was your last partner?
- 7) What do you think about a steady life with a person of your choice?
- 8) Have you had sex with a woman?

## **VI. Relationship with the family**

- 1) Are your parents still living?
- 2) Do you often return to your srok and how often do you travel?
- 3) Why do you go back?
- 4) How many times a year do you see your parents?
- 5) How long do you stay with them?
- 6) What is your relationship like with your parents?
- 7) What do you talk about with them?
- 8) Do you talk about important issues with them?
- 9) Do your parents come to see you at your place?
- 10) How many times a year do you see your brothers and sisters?
- 11) What is your relationship like with your brothers and sisters?
- 12) What do you talk about with them?
- 13) Do you talk about important issues with them?
- 14) Do your brothers and sisters come to see you at your place?
- 15) Do you have any interchange with other members of your family?
- 16) Who?
- 17) What is your relationship like with them?
- 18) How many times a year do you see them?
- 19) What do you talk about with them?
- 20) Do you talk about important issues with them?
- 21) Do they come to see you at your place?

## **VII. The issue of marriage**

- 1) What do you think about marriage?
- 2) What does your family think about marriage?
- 3) Do you think that marriage would enable you to have a social life like everyone else?
- 4) What would you do the next time your family asks you to get married?
- 5) Do you want to have children?

## **VIII. The issue of work**

- 1) How old were you when you started working for money?
- 2) Can you say what this first occupation involved?
- 3) How long did you work at this first job?
- 4) How much did you make a day or a month at this first occupation?
- 5) How did you use the income?
- 6) What was your relationship like with other persons involved in this occupation?
- 7) Did you have interchanges with these persons, workmates or others, in the framework of the job?
- 8) Did you have interchanges with these persons after work?
- 9) How was your character perceived in the framework of this first occupation?
- 10) Why did you leave this first job?
- 11) Could you talk about other jobs that you have had?
- 12) And what does your current job involve?
- 13) What is your monthly income?
- 14) What type of work would you really like to do?
- 15) What keeps you from doing it?

## **IX. Relationships with friends**

- 1) How many friends do you have?
- 2) Where do they live? Are they in Phnom Penh or in the province?
- 3) Which friends did you see last month?
- 4) How often do you see your friends?
- 5) In what circumstances do you meet them? At your place? At their place? Elsewhere in a private location? In a public location?
- 6) What activities do you do with them?
- 7) Do the friends in question have interchanges among themselves?
- 8) What type of interchange? And how often?
- 9) What subjects do you discuss with them?
- 10) Do you talk about important issues?
- 11) Who could you count on if you were short of money?

## **X. Relationships with neighbors**

- 1) Do you have relationships with your neighbors?
- 2) If not, why not?
- 3) If so, with how many neighbors?
- 4) Do you greet them when you meet them casually?
- 5) Do you have long conversations with them?
- 6) What do you discuss?
- 7) Can you ask them for help?
- 8) Do you ever exchange food with one another?

## **XI. Relaxation**

- 1) How much time is devoted to relaxation?
- 2) What do you usually do?
- 3) Who do you go out with?
- 4) Where do you go?



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