"NEW LIFE IN THE FREEDOM COUNTRY":

YOUNG CAMBODIANS IN ADELAIDE

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

As a result of turmoil in Cambodia during the 1970's thousands of Cambodians left their country and were dispersed throughout the world, where they undertook the process of reconstructing new lives. Approximately 2200 Cambodians, the majority of whom were youthful, settled in South Australia in the first half of the 1980's. Their experiences in this "The Freedom Country" are the subject of this research.

Theoretically the research draws on the contributions of Eisenstadt (1954), Gordon (1964), De Vos (1975), Schermerhorn (1978), Van Den Berghe (1981), Banton (1983) and Yinger (1986) who provided theoretical insights in the area of ethnic group interaction and integration. The work of Keller (1975) and Kunz (1980, 1981) on refugee movements was used to underpin conceptualization of refugee flight and resettlement. From these sources, the concept of "inclusion", which is conceived as a multi-faceted, non-linear process with structural and cultural dimensions, was developed to describe the process by which members of ethnic groups become included within their environing societies.

The research revolves around the following questions. Under what conditions are members of immigrant groups included within their environing societies? What are the consequences of inclusion for social equality, cultural heterogeneity and inter-social relations for members of immigrant groups?

In considering these questions the study examines the experiences of 92 Cambodian young people during the first few years of their lives in Australia and reviews their school experiences, labour force participation on leaving school, the level of formal and informal social participation with members of their own ethnic group and the wider Australian community, and cultural continuity and change in the areas of language and religion. Host society attitudes to the structural inclusion of young Cambodians have been addressed principally through the medium of the education system. The operation of specific policies and programs designed to foster the educational participation of students from non-English speaking countries in South Australian schools are examined.

The research suggests the host society has demonstrated liberal attitudes to the structural inclusion of young Cambodians, with the establishment of special programs to facilitate educational adaptation. There was also evidence that young Cambodians have sought structural inclusion in Australian society, but with participation limited to the educational and occupational spheres. Wider structural integration at the social level has not occurred and has been actively resisted by the majority, partly as a reaction to their perception of rejection by the wider Australian community. The evidence on cultural inclusion indicates that while all respondents had learnt some English, many respondents had also formally studied Khmer and Chinese language in Australia. Although there was also some evidence of change in reported religious affiliation and behaviour, the majority continued to subscribe to traditional beliefs.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

..........................

Christine A. Stevens

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