GLOBAL TRENDS INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

# Think.

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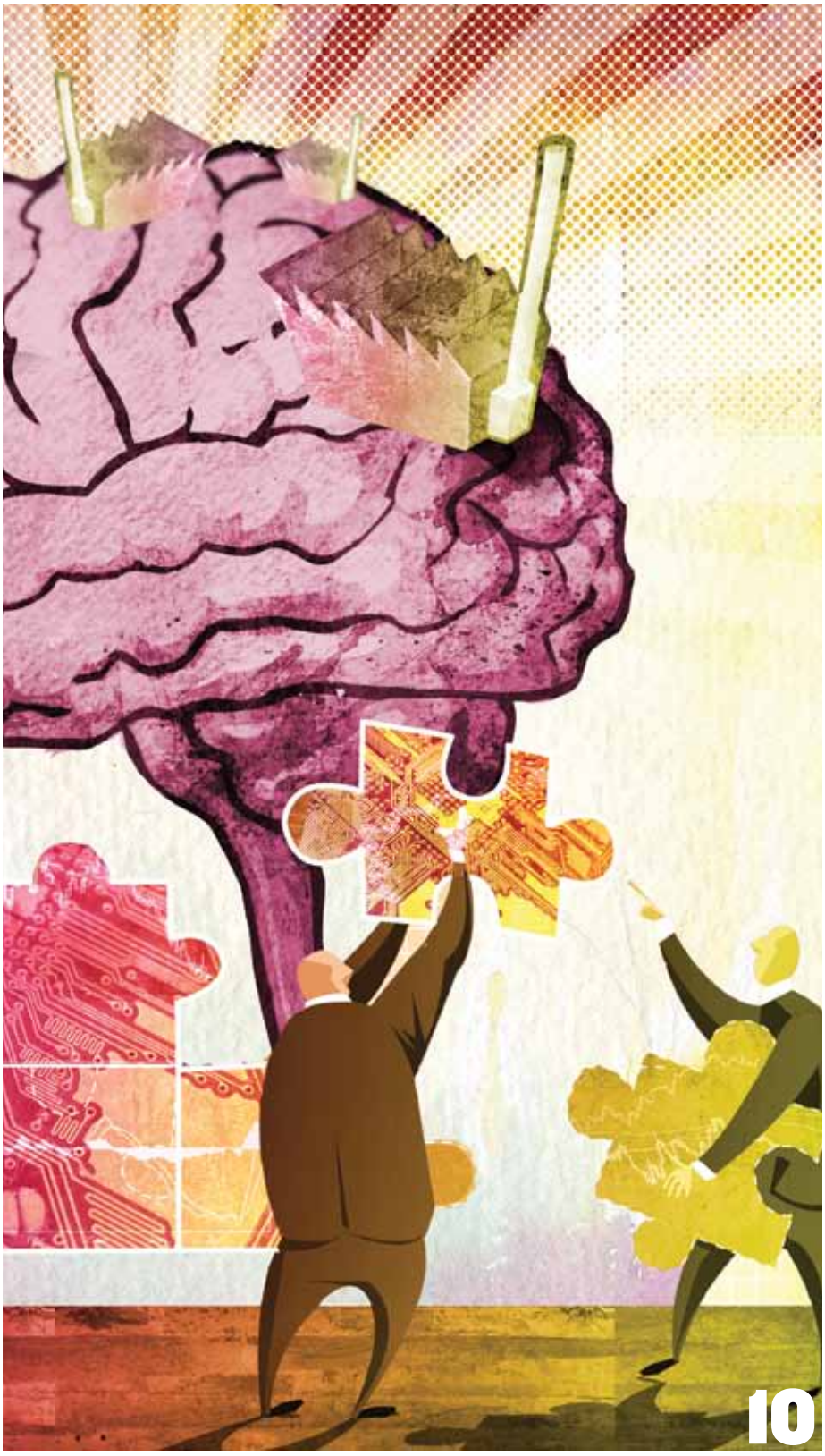
# THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY CHALLENGE

**WILL HUTTON** INNOVATION IS AN IMPERATIVE /// **PHILIP BOWRING** THE ASIAN CENTURY? IT'S ALREADY HALF OVER /// **JORGE SAMPAIO** DEFENDS THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS /// **VADDEY RATNER** FROM PRINCESS TO PRISON CAMP /// **JOSEPH STIGLITZ** GDP IS BROKEN – WE NEED A NEW MEASURE OF SUCCESS /// **BIANCA JAGGER** MY CHALLENGE TO THE DOHA CLIMATE SUMMIT

# CONTENTS



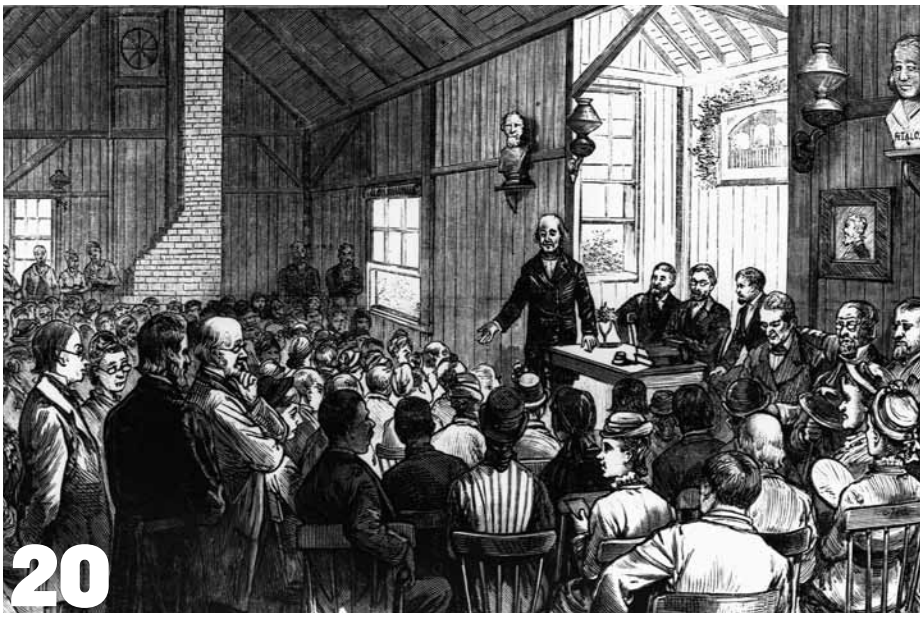




## BULLETIN



## KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY










## BRIEFINGS



## THINK. REVIEW

# CONTRIBUTORS

Joseph E Stiglitz is a Nobel Prize-winning economist and a former Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors to President Clinton. GDP is recording the wrong things and making us do the wrong things, he writes on page 36

AC Grayling is Master of the New College of Humanities in London. The liberal arts, philosophy, and literature are not just essential to the knowledge economy, he argues, but to civilization itself. Page 20

Vaddey Ratner endured the prison camps of the Khmer Rouge as a child, and her novel based on her experiences, *In the Shadow of the Banyan*, has just been published. Page 61

Jim Al Khalili is a scientist, broadcaster, author, and Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey. Can the Golden Age of Arabic Science be revived once again, he asks? Page 34

Jorge Sampaio is the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and is a former president of Portugal. Tolerance and pluralism must for be fought for, he writes. Page 48

Kristiane Backer is Global Ambassador for the Exploring Islam Foundation and the author of *From MTV to Mecca: How Islam Inspired My Life*. Education is the key to understanding our faith, she writes on page 64

Francesco Bonami is a renowned curator and a former director of the Venice Biennale. A remarkable new exhibition in Doha reflects on the men and women who contributed to the making of Arab modernity, he writes. Page 53

Bianca Jagger is an award-winning campaigner for human rights and the environment. Reversing deforestation will repair damage not just to eco-systems, but to human lives, she writes on page 6



**Think.**

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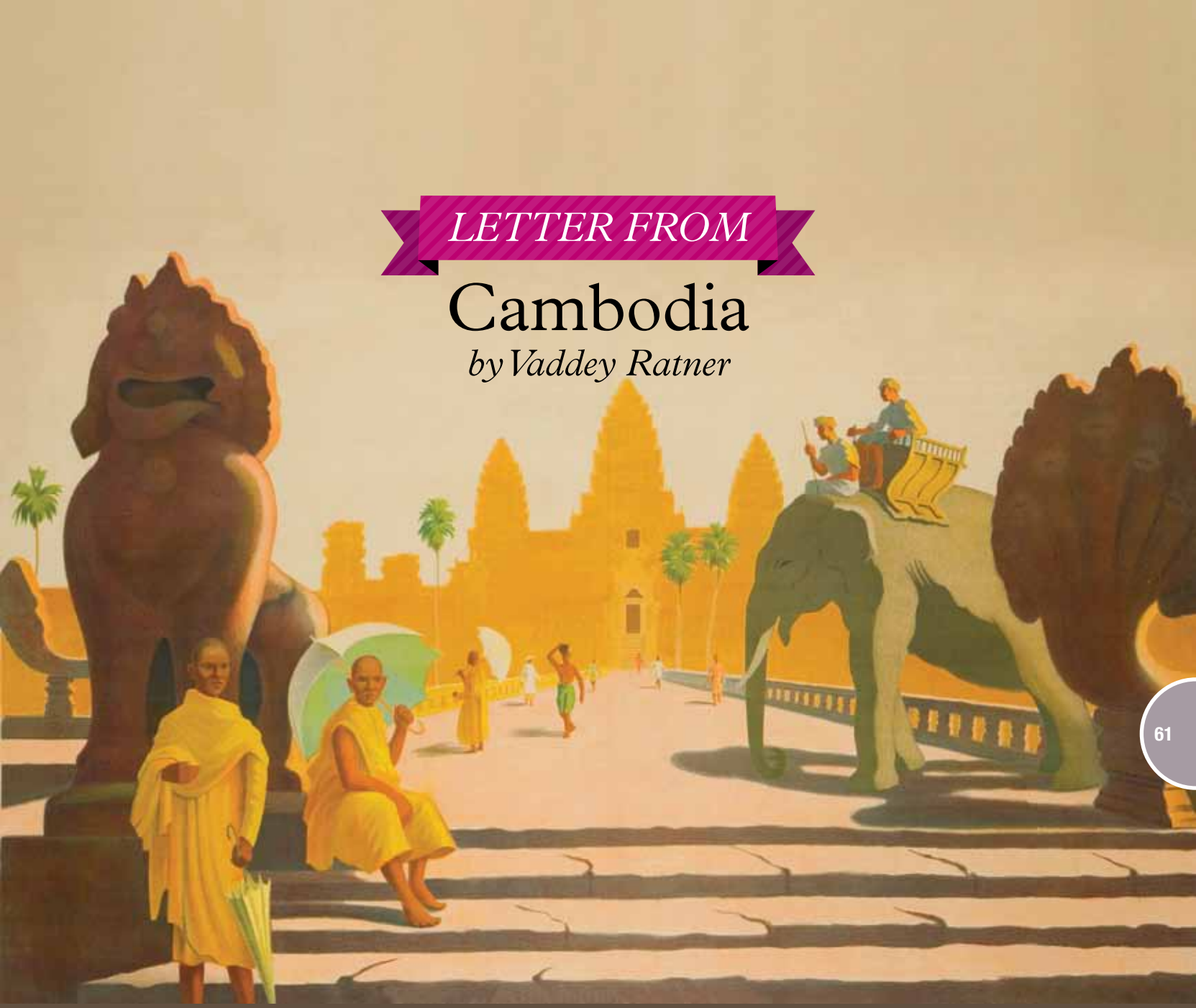


*LETTER FROM*

Cambodia

*by Vaddey Ratner*

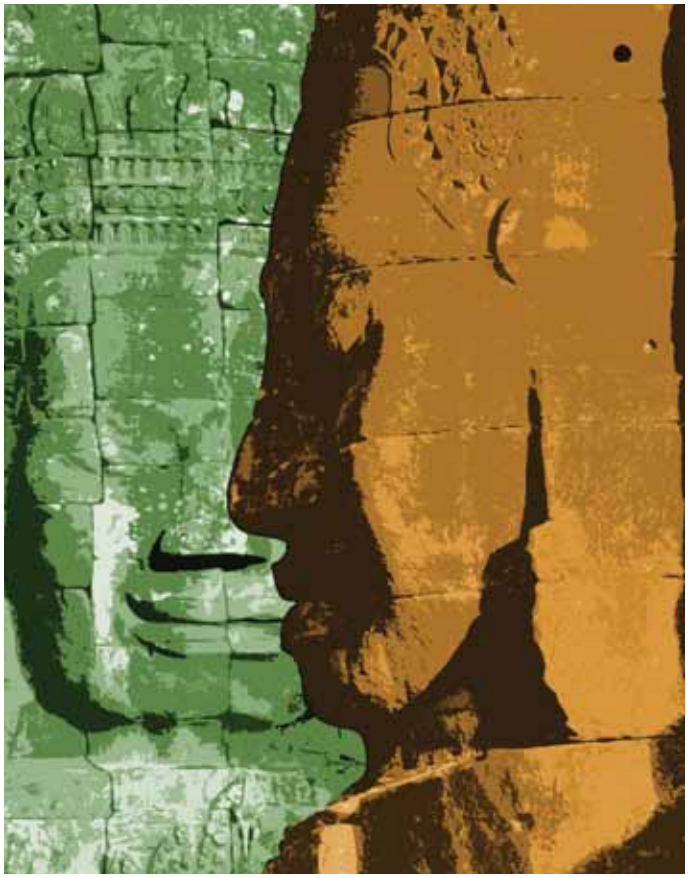


# In the Land of Fallen Palm Leaves

In 1975 the Khmer Rouge came to power in Cambodia, setting in motion a genocide in which up to one-third of the population died. Vaddey Ratner, a princess in the Sisowath line of the country's royal family, was then five. Over the next four years, while she and her mother endured forced labor and near starvation, many members of her family died or were executed. *In The Shadow of the Banyan*, her debut novel, is a fictional retelling of her life under a regime that tried to destroy all traces of education and learning

*Not far* from the ancient temples of Angkor, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, I have built a home nestled among the sky-tall sugar palms. When I am on the land and all else is quiet, I'm sometimes startled by the whistling of a giant palm frond on its swift descent before crashing to the ground. This sound reminds me of the night of my sister's death, when, despite the surrounding stillness, a pair of twin palms swayed in an apparent gesture of consolation, as if rocking her tiny body. She was only two, hardly more than a baby, and though we had been born into a life of royal privilege, she died under the Khmer Rouge from the most basic of privations.

I often wonder, as I walk among the palms, how many deaths and how many births they must have witnessed. Slow-growing trees, sugar palms take many generations to reach full height, each season shedding another layer of fronds. While temple inscriptions in stone detail the exploits of conquerors and monarchs, Khmer poets of antiquity, reflecting on the beauty and the injustices of everyday life, used palm leaves to convey a more subtle and varied tradition of artistic expression.



**In 1981,** when I arrived as a refugee in America, aside from a thumb-sized photo of my father, there were three things my mother had been able to keep with her, the sole remnants of our life before the Khmer Rouge: a tiny pocket of jewels she'd sewn into her clothes, a rice pot, and a small notebook, its pages worn, the writing barely legible. I remembered she had written secretly in this notebook in the dark of night with a pencil whittled down to nearly nothing. These items bore the mantle of our survival. The rice pot fed our bodies, the jewels offered a currency of hope, the possibility of a trade for mercy or escape; and this notebook, in which my mother wrote passionate letters to my father in the coded language of the revolution, gave her the continuity of love, even as she knew in her heart he must have been killed soon after the soldiers discovered he was a Sisowath prince and took him away.

It was an extreme risk for my mother to keep these written pages. If she had been caught reading or writing, it could have meant instant death. Thus, should the notebook be discovered, she would sprinkle her *billets-doux* to my father's ghost with lines of pro-regime rhetoric, "Even as I think of you… I always strive to serve the Revolution and the Organization…" She couldn't have survived without the notebook. I know now the writing sustained her.

Under the Khmer Rouge, knowing how to read and write was viewed as so dangerous that to be seen with a book was cause for execution. It was the most absolute form of censorship. If I had been discovered as a child, knowing how to read, I too could have been executed. Before the revolution, even before entering school, I'd been initiated into the intricacies of the Khmer alphabet by my father, who described its letters in human form, adorned with "hair" and "feet". I'd been raised in a milieu of books, and was soon captivated by the written word, fascinated by the mythical tales that seemed to mirror my own family's life. Like the gods in these tales, I witnessed my parents' many manifestations – the way my mother could transform herself on festive occasions into a butterfly in diaphanous silks, or how my father, often solemn and introspective, would take on the vibrant characters of the poetry he read aloud at family gatherings.

**So, under the** revolutionary regime, while the fear of death was overwhelming, the prospect of a life without written words was also terrifying. Even as books had all but disappeared, I remembered the stories I'd read, invoking them when I was scared, when I needed shelter and escape. These stories saved me. In adulthood, I came to learn it was no coincidence that the villages and towns I was sent to during the Khmer Rouge had no books in their so-called schools. Worse, the suspicion I couldn't articulate as a child was confirmed: the writers of that time had also "disappeared" – targets of a regime that sought to root out the intellectual class.

The Khmer Rouge, in attacking writers and intellectuals, were seeking

to erase an entire history of artistic and literary achievement. Cambodia has a rich tradition of poetic narratives, stories set in verse, first passed down orally, then recorded on palm leaves, and later printed in volumes known to every educated Khmer. These were the tales I had learned as a very young child. Even before I attended school formally, I had read, with the help and encouragement of the adults around me, versions of *Mak Thoeung* and *Tum Tiev*, stories that expose the excesses of power and caution against the rigidity of social traditions. Consider this opening scene from a modern stage adaptation of *Tum Tiev*, a tale first recorded in the late 19th century:

*The curtain is raised, and through silken gauze separating the stage in two, we see in the background a young king seated high on his throne. At his feet, his concubines gather in circles, gossiping over card games as clouds of opium smoke rise from their pipes. Suddenly, the king lifts his hand in the sign of a command, and, in the foreground, following that command, the palace executioner emerges into what looks like a forest, his gait purposeful trailed by a line of prisoners, connected neck to neck by a heavy iron chain. The prisoners stagger forward, prodded on by swords of the palace guards walking beside them. Singers unseen raise their mournful voices as the death march continues. The last prisoner, separated from the rest, steps forward, his neck locked in a wooden yoke, his hands clutching strips of dried palm leaves, the records of cruelty and injustice he has witnessed, the evidence of his crime against his monarch. He is a writer, the chorus laments, and these are the pages of his life's work. With each step, he lets a strip fall to the ground, leaving a trail of words. As he and the prisoners pass out of sight, we hear only their tormented screams amid the pounding drumrolls of execution. Yet, even as the writer dies, a young woman and man are discovering the trail of words left behind. Cautiously, furtively, they pick up the scattered strips, pressing them to their chests. In the approaching darkness, these shreds seem to glow, reflecting the sunset, and guide their steps forward.*

***Tum Tiev***, like any literary classic, carries a timeless message, and for me this scene resonates with great poignancy. It is a vivid metaphor for the role of writers in society, who may not always achieve renown or victory in their own lifetimes over the injustices they portray, but nevertheless produce a legacy for future generations to continue the tradition of bringing to light social wrongs. The Khmer Rouge leaders, in a perverse attempt to create an egalitarian society and eradicate centuries-old injustices, ended up assuming, behind the anonymous cloak of "The Organization", the absolute power of a feudal monarch. During the regime, almost an entire generation of writers was killed and their works systematically destroyed. A child survivor, and now a writer, I see myself in the position of the youths in *Tum Tiev* who pick up the fallen palm leaves, and while I write in English, it is the rhythm of my native tongue I wish to capture. Cambodians have long used poetry, song, and the spoken tale to express our collective experience, our history, our suffering, and our wisdom. Literature embodies all of these voices. Its survival is ours.

*"During the regime, almost an entire generation of writers was killed and their works systematically destroyed"*

I realized this when, as a student at Cornell University, exploring the depths of Kroch Library, I was astonished to find *Tum Tiev* and a whole collection of Cambodian literary classics carefully preserved. Indeed, as the National Library of Cambodia was being revived in the 1980s, it had turned to Cornell, one of the world's premier archives of Southeast Asian literature, to replenish its own shelves. In losing a generation of thinkers and artists to the atrocities of the regime, it felt to me that our society had been stripped of its soul and voice. How palpable, then, to hold these texts, testaments to the fact that the destruction was not complete.

"Between revolution and religion," wrote Octavio Paz, "poetry is the other voice."

In a world where absolutes can be destructive, the artist's role is an essential one.

The writer holds a mirror to society, and if successful, provides a reflection in which readers can identify themselves. Cambodia today is in the midst of a tribunal charged with bringing the surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge to justice. While this is a necessary step to document and raise public awareness of the past, and to establish accountability, it will never be sufficient to bring about reconciliation or healing. For true reconciliation to occur, I believe two things are necessary: atonement and forgiveness. Writing, for me, is an attempt at understanding my history, a first step – the most important, I believe – in my own reconciliation with the past, with the possibility that, for those who suffered and died, justice may never be found.

**When my** mother wrote secretly in darkness, writing was punishable by death. These faint words and tattered pages became the inspiration for the notebook of poetry that appears in my novel, *In the Shadow of the Banyan*. When I set out to write, I realized there were so few solid remnants of the life we had lost, so many voices I recalled in fragments. I knew that I could not confine myself to a written chronicle of events. I wanted to capture a world in all its prismatic complexity, its beauties and its tragedies, and to explore its unanswerable losses.

When so little is certain, when we strive nevertheless to discover a truth, we are required to imagine. And that, I believe, is an art we cannot live without. ●