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Suzanne Karpelès (1890-1969): thinking with the width and thickness of time

This article explores questions of temporality using letters written between 1930 and 1935 by Suzanne Karpelès, director of the Royal Library at Phomn Penh (1925-41) and of the Institute of Buddhist Studies (1930-41) and chief publications officer for the École Supérieure de Pāli (1925-41). Conserved within the records of the International Council of Women (ICW) at the Amazone Centre in Brussels, this correspondence was generated around the interest in educational cinematography that Karpelès shared with Laura Dreyfus-Barney, chair of the ICW cinematograph committee. The ICW-Karpelès file also includes extracts from letters Karpelès sent to her mother which the latter forwarded to Dreyfus-Barney on Karpelès' instructions, a small number of newspaper cuttings, and a copy of an article by Karpelès published in 1933 in the journal of the American Association of University Women (AAUW).[1] I augment this material with letters Karpelès wrote to the organisers of the Estates General of Feminism (EFG), which met during the 1931 imperial exhibition in Paris and which both Karpelès and Dreyfus-Barney attended (Goutalier 1989). In this article I am interested in exploring whether as an accomplished Indologist with an impressive knowledge of Southeast Asian cultures, languages and history (Hansen 2007, 125) and as a French woman who embraced Buddhism,[2] Karpelès' informal correspondence, her publication and the newspaper accounts provide insights to complicate the abstract, linear notion of time built on spatial measures that colours a view of relations of past-present and future and scaffolds understandings of Western education and of colonialism.

The article is prompted by the "temporal turn" in scholarship that privileges time as an object of analysis (McLeod 20127). I draw on Wilcox's (1989, 13) view of abstract, linear time as a historical contrivance with a history of its own, and on scholarship that (re-)casts temporal relations between past, present and future as "messy" and "moving"(Harootunian 2007; McLeod 2017). I deploy Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal's (2003) argument about the need to consider the "width and thickness" of time when discussing colonial regimes. Thinking time through width, argue Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal, creates a conception of temporality that is multidimensional and capable of capturing more than the linear time-continuum (of abstract time). It means "conceiving the present not as a 'period' but as a process of transformation of the past into the future (and vice-versa)" (422) and it requires the researcher to "trouble" the boundary processes around what is taken to constitute past, present and future. Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal point to the importance of the thickness of time which they argue makes us live simultaneously different temporalities that overlap so that "time is no longer a single 'thread' (the thread of time) but is represented with a string in which many threads are intertwined" (423). I also explore the sources through temporal entanglements that have been variously cast through metaphors of geological strata (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal 2003, 423), temporal co-existence and collision (Harootunian 2007), zigzagging (Zerubavel 2000) and as practices of synchronisation (Jordheim 2013). Exploring the temporalities of this material through width, thickness and entanglements raises question about whether distinguishing between past, present and future is a matter of

[1] There are also a small number of photographs and some official correspondence about cinematography that I have discussed in Goodman (2018).

[2] Lopez (1995, 12) notes that embracing Buddhism means taking refuge in the three jewels of the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha, which means holding a belief in the Buddha, his teachings and the community of his followers.

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“observing” distinctions that are “given” or whether it involves a more “active”, performative stance in which the historian creates and re-creates these temporal distinctions (Bevernage and Lorenz 2013, 29), a question to which I return in the conclusion.

The article begins by introducing Karpelès and by discussing scholarship on temporalities as it relates to the French Protectorate of Indochina. The middle section uses vignettes from Karpelès’ letters to explore multiple temporalities and their entanglements and how these might play into the politics of power and of desire as they thread together in configurations of gender, education, imperialism and religion. The conclusion touches on some of the challenges facing scholars interested in multiple temporalities and temporal entanglements.

Multiple temporalities: Indochina

Born in Paris into a wealth Hungarian-Jewish family and growing up at Pondicherry in the French Indies, Karpelès was the first woman to graduate from the Ècole orientales of the Ècole pratique des Haute Études in Paris, where she studied Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Nepalese and Tibetan religion. She was the first female member of the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO), with a posting to Indochina (1922) and an appointment to Phnom-Penh (1925). Scholars portray Karpelès as potentially the only woman to have attained her status within the Indochina administration. As founding director of the Royal Library and of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, and as chief publications officer for the École Supérieure de Pāli, Karpelès played a role in the revitalisation of Buddhism in Cambodia. Her projects at the Royal Library and the Institute of Buddhist Studies included translations of sacred texts, the establishment of the first Khmer language journal and the production of secular texts, including Khmer folktales and history books. Karpelès also inspected pagoda schools during her provincial tours in Indochina, organised the circulation of books and images, and set up educational cinematographic initiatives. Her educational role fell within one of the pillars of the French civilising mission seen as ideally suited to the humanitarian interventions of colonial women in empire. But she also ran against the grain of French colonialist discourses that saw the core mission of French colonial woman as setting up home to provide a model for the racial and cultural preservation of “authentic” Frenchness (Edwards 2004; Edwards 2007, 186-97, 234-36; Filliozat 1969; Goodman 2018; Ha 1999; Ha 2014, 72; Hansen 2007,127-9, 142-5; Le Groupe Historie et Perspectives 1997).

Norindr (1996, 19) argues that the French civilising mission to transform Indo-Chine (the land between India and China) into the territory Indochina was effected through a cultural topography in which temporality was scaffolded around notions of modernity and progress. Edwards (2007, 1) traces how within the temporal frame of progress, the French in Indochina initially mis-diagnosed the Khmers as a “vanishing race”; but having revised their view of the “vanishing Khmer” they tasked the Khmers with “mimicking their ancestors” but only after painstaking French scholarship had identified ethnocultural dimensions of the “authentic Khmer” located in temples like that of Angkor. Central to the process of French/European conceptions of linear history around progress was a deciphering of the past and its verification through texts and documents in order to understand the present. This constituted a reversal of indigenous worldviews which became entangled in what Hansen terms an “intercultural mimesis” between Khmer modernists and the French administration and contributed to the construction of a modern Khmer Buddhism that also incorporated ideas from religious reforms in Siam (Hansen 2007, 119).

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Hansen (2007) describes how Buddhist monks who became engaged in reformist activities in turn-of-the-century Cambodia had been trained during the nineteenth century in monastic schools that articulated a cosmic time frame in which “the cosmos, with its multiple worlds, moved through continuous cycles of decline and regeneration that mirrored the continuous decline and regeneration of the dharma (or Truth), among beings” (Hansen 20007, 20). As Hansen notes, in this cosmology the identity of individuals is determined by their karmic status as they move through hierarchical ordered levels of rebirth in the process of samsāra or “endless wandering”(Keown 2013, 32). In this cosmology, the circumstances of future rebirths are determined by karmic (moral) actions, which the Buddha defined by reference to moral choices and the acts consequence upon them (Keown 2013, 40). Gallois (2007) calls karma a system of “causation in time” thought to connect and order the way things are across time, in which karma describes both the morality of behaviour and the legacy of that behaviour through an “accretive layer of judgement which we build upon ourselves” (206). In this “system of causation in time” what identifies and differentiates individual human beings from each other and from the many other classes of sentient beings with whom they share this world - including animals, ghosts, deities, demons and the “more morally perfected beings” - is their capacity to escape the incessant cycle of death and rebirth by moving to *nirvana* through moral perfection. *Nirvana* fuses virtue and wisdom (Keown 2013, 49) and is a state that only humans are able to attain (Hansen 2007, 22). But it is neither another place (Snelling 1992) nor a nothingness (Gallois 207). Rather it is a “quenching or blowing out” (Keown 2013, 56) and an “overcoming of the sense of time” (Gallois 2007, 208). European conceptions of linear history and its verification of the past through texts and documents were a reversal of indigenous approaches in which the past was viewed as a “template for what the future would become as sentient beings cycled from Buddha era to Buddha era” (Hansen 2004, 49; Edwards 2007, 119).

Temporalities were not hermetically sealed, however (Burke 2004). In Cambodia modern Western versions of time became entangled in the quest by groupings of monks to reform Buddhism. Hansen (2007) argues that although Siamese Buddhist reforms were an important source for the intellectual and religious directions of Khmer Buddhist modernism, French discourses about modernisation and about Buddhist education were an important aspect of ideas about modernity on which Buddhist intellectuals in Cambodia could draw. French administrators sought to renew Khmer Buddhist education for political security reasons and from the ideological motivation to improve and develop the “Khmer mind” (Hansen 2007, 120). In a context in which a new kind of education in the old setting of the monastery was to redress the “degeneration of the Kingdom of the Khmers” (Hansen 2007, 124), Karpelès inspected pagoda schools and worked closely with Buddhist monks at the Royal Library and at the Institute of Buddhist Studies to conserve Theravāda[3] texts based on the teachings of Gotama (the Buddhah) which made up the Palī canon (the earliest surviving collection of Buddhist teachings). Her educational initiatives were part of an endeavour that bolstered French colonial perceptions and characterisations of Khmer civilisation and ideas as being in need of modernization (Hansen 2007, 125), at the same time as they fostered an “intercultural mimesis” that disrupted indigenous temporal understandings.

[3] Theravāda has been the dominant school of Buddhism in most of Southeast Asia since the 13th century (Lopez 1995, 8)

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The following section turns to aspects of Karpelès' letters written during her travels in the hinterland of Indochina, some of which (designated in what follows as Extracts) were written to her mother, who transcribed these extracts and forwarded them on Karpelès' instruction to Dreyfus-Barney. Gallois (2013, 252) argues that descriptions of temporal differences in accounts of engagements between colonial officials and native peoples reveal a great deal of the contours of writers' understandings of time which more usually lie undescribed. In Karpelès' case questions of temporalities are complicated by her personal orientation towards Buddhism. Edwards (2007, 189, 211) provides evidence that Karpelès had embraced Buddhism by the time she returned to Pondicherry in 1941 after being ejected from Vichy Cambodia on the grounds of her Jewishness, her gender and her internationalism. But some of the following sections illustrate that Buddhist cosmologies infused Karpelès' temporal maps prior to this date.

Temporal mimesis and the politics of nature

At the end of 1932 and the start of 1933, and again at the end of 1933 and in the early months of 1934 Karpelès travelled extensively in Indochina, inspecting pagodas, monuments and pagoda schools. In a letter to the EGF Karpeles describes her sphere of action as the whole of Cambodia, the south west of Cochinchina and Laos. She notes that during her travels she comes into contact with people who have never seen a French person and others who had only seen the wives of gendarmes, whom she describes in unflattering terms (Karpelès to EGF, 20 April 1930). During her 1932-33 journey she moved virtually the length of Indochina at a time when it took longer to travel from Saigon to Luang-Prabang than it did from Saigon to France. Her journey to Hanoi and and then to Xian Khouang via Vinh and into the Mekong Delta by car, canoe, on horseback, and on foot, moved across the land of indigenous people called (at the time) the Muang and into the mountains where the Meo people cultivated opium (Karpelès Extract, December 1932). By the start of 1933, she is in north Western Cambodia at the town of Battambang, which connected the region with Phnom Penh and Siam (Karpelès Extract, 9 October 1933). Repleat with French colonial architecture the grid-style layout of Battambang spatialized geometrically the quantitative, measurable differences that characterised French colonial temporal notions of progress along lines that Bergson terms differences in kind. These are the repeatable units that have been understood as "measures" and tend to be addressed as if they exist independently of humankind (Perovic 2013, 87).

During her travels Karpelès produced diary-like daily accounts sent to her mother in which she deploys an established tradition of female travellers using the written medium to assert their expertise by adopting what Simon-Martin (2012, 595) terms a "masculine" omniscient and commanding subject position. Her detailed daily descriptions of landscapes, peoples and villages and of the experience of travel itself illustrate how for Karpelès travel acted as the type of experience that Simon-Martin (2013) describes as transformative and which incorporates multiple temporalities. Karpelès writes of exhilarating experiences negotiating rapids, of the heights of mountains and steep paths, and of the verdure as well as barrenness of the lands through which she passes. But travellers do not simply record what they see. They observe and write according to establish models, having these in mind even when they wish to query or depart from them: "No one who travels and writes of their experience can be said to be writing purely as an

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individual. Their descriptions and judgements reveal the values of class, gender and nationality", writes Young (cited in Simon-Martin 2012, 595). Karpelès' accounts of her travels invoke the notions of space that Mills (1991) terms contact zones (Mills 1991). They also illustrate a cartographic imagination underpinned by temporalities of stasis and change that invoke both imperialistic differences in kind and the qualitative difference of degree that Grosz (2004, 159,162) argues Bergson sees as irreducible and potentially incommensurable.

The sensuousness of the countryside, the clearness of the air, the blue of the sky and the beauty of mountains and rivers all shine through Karpelès' descriptions of the countryside through which she travels. In Buddhist cosmologies the universe comprises earth, wind, fire, earth and space and is divided into three realms: the realm of desire, the realm of pure form (a spiritual state in which the gods perceive and communicate) and the formless realm (a sublime state in which beings exist as pure mental energy)(Lopez 1995, 12; Keown 2013, 12, 32). Humans inhabit the realm of desire, along with animal and insect life and a class of beings translated as ghosts, some of whom are visible to humans, some of whom are not (Lopez 1995, 13). As Keown notes, in Buddhist cosmologies the universe comes to be seen as a dynamic network of interrelated causes and effects and not a collection of more or less static objects (Keown 2013). While this universe has no beginning, its physical constituents move through a fourfold cosmic cycle of evolution, stasis, devolution and vacuity (Lopez 1995, 14). As she passes through villages Karpelès' descriptions of the sensuousness of the countryside and her descriptions of indigenous peoples convey a sense of timelessness that can be read through stasis within the Buddhist fourfold cosmic cycle.

Karpelès' portrayal of time as static and in terms of lassitude can also be mapped onto the type of mental template that (Ballantyne and Burton 2009, 5) claim localises communities and spatialises populations through temporalities associated with portrayals of colonialism through the lags and delays which Harootunian (2007, 475) argues constitutes a "noncontemporaneous contemporaneity". Harootunian associates the "noncontemporaneous contemporaneity" with the imperialisation of a world-standard time of calendars and clocks that conceals the unevenness of modes of production and through which (as Marx had earlier indicated) rank and influence are assigned. Karpeles writes of being in a different world (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney, December 1932). In the Meo countryside she describes a wedding party where she likens the men to Kublah Khan and Ghengis Kahn, with "their ivory, their Chinese bonnets, their necklaces of silver around their necks, their indigo blue trousers, fastened by red belts; and the women dressed in short pleated skirts, batiked and embroidered in red, a turban, with blue bands". She describes their dress as having "an historic air" in "a world hardly known" (Karpelès Extract, 26 December 1932). She writes, "I have the impression of living in a word of which we do not have a suspicion that it exists and which has not changed for centuries and all that in an atmosphere pure and light like that one acquires in a moment of lassitude" (Karpelès Extract, 26 December 1932). Here, descriptions of rural areas untouched by the effects of the acceleration and change, speed and velocity that Harootunian (2007, 487) sees as characteristic of modernity, map time onto space through a dichotomy around the slow life of tradition that is "other" to the fast life of (Western) progress (Assmann 2013, 51).

Karpelès' deployment of the picturesque and a closeness to nature also operates as a temporal measure that resonates with Norindr 's (1996, 6) argument that advocates of French colonialism in Indochina wanted at all costs to preserve the image of an idyllic world untouched

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by the reality of political unrest (Norindr 1996, 6). Karpelès links clothing, habitations and bodies when writing of picturesque villages where “embroidered turbans and skies equally embroidered” draw her to “all the the strong women with their confident look” (Karpelès Extract, December 1932). On reaching one village she writes about women’s dresses of white pleated skirts, aprons of black satin, embroidered belts, turbans tied at the front. She comments: “How to describe the allure of these sprightly women, with shiny skin coloured with good health, pale roles. I made photos. Their skirts give them the allure of amazons” (Karpelès Extract, 26 December 1932). Karpelès locates herself as a feminist and in harking back to a Greek mythology that portrayed Amazons as a tribe of women warriors she deploys a feminist trope that differentiates “races” temporally, while also drawing on the affective and the sensuous in ways that entangle with desire through what Norindr (1996, 16) terms the French colonial phantasmic - an “unconscious fantasy or group of fantasies” that underlies “dreams, symptoms, repetitive behaviour and day dreams” (Silverman 1992, 161). Here Karpelès’ descriptions are suggestive of Western feminist orientations around (Bergsonian) differences of degree, where freedom, agency and autonomy are linked with becomings that include a capacity for “making oneself even as one is made by external forces” (Grosz 2011, 62). In Buddhist “awakenings” a notion of “no-self” forms an element that is “beyond both the eternalised view of self and the nihilistic view of no-self” and which Abe (1997, 68) argues cannot be conceptualised either in an affirmative or a negative manner. This notion of “no-self” is at variance with how notions of the Self have been configured in Western frameworks. But whether Karpelès descriptions also constitute a “temporal mimesis” between Western understandings of the Self and Buddhist teachings that affirm a notion of “no-self” remains a matter of conjecture.

As the following vignette illustrates, while Karpelès’ correspondence can be read through temporalities that entangle as cultural mimesis, when she locates herself as a feminist and writes about the anti-feminism of her male French colleagues she deploys a linear, spatialise language of lag, delay, and the need for “catch up” more usually deployed in relation to native populations within the politics of colonialism.

Temporal lags and the politics of (anti-)feminism

Karpelès wrote to the EFG that the foundation of the Buddhist Institute was a great victory from a feminist point of view because apart from Governor General Pasquier (governor general 1928-34) none of her French colleagues had helped her deliver the Buddhist Institute project, although it had been welcomed in Cambodia. She writes of the French administration being against her solely because she is a woman, and of the struggles and rudeness that she has to put up with along with the bad faith of high-ranking French functionaries, whom, she portrays as three centuries behind that of France when it comes to ideas about women. Here Karpelès inverts colonial rhetoric usually applied to native populations by applying the spatialised language of lag, delay and a need for “catch up” to her colonial colleagues through the vocabulary of unevenness that Harootunian (2007, 474-5) argues was used to stigmatise the “nonmodern” when conceptualising global orders and disorders. Karpelès writes that her male French colleagues are jealous of a woman at the head of a service, jealous that Pasquier wished her to fulfil a post comparable to that of a man and jealous of her good relations with Cambodians; and that they had tried to interfere with her work by threatening a campaign in the press (Karpelès to EGF, 20 April 1930).

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Matters became so bad, writes Karpelès that she had packed her cases but had decided to hang on because she had worked herself to death for five years (Karpelès to EGF, 14 July 1930).

In a letter to the EGF, Karpelès calls attention to the what she terms the masculine colonists' mentality, which she says is as a barrier to women's work in Indochina. She notes that the (majority) of men in the Indochina colonial service thought of "feminism" as the equivalent of "communism" (Karpelès to EGF, 20 April 1930). Her letters to Dreyfus-Barney chart delays in gaining answers to her requests when they mention the French National Council of Women (CNFF) or the ICW (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney, December 1932). Writing to Dreyfus Barney in January 1935 about her wish to accompany Dreyfus-Barney to the forthcoming International Woman Suffrage Alliance conference in Istanbul she notes she has waited three months for a reply to her letter about her holiday but was not yet able to say when she would leave (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney, 29 January 1935).[4] Aware that mention of the CNFF or the ICW causes delay makes her smile, she writes, but at bottom she finds it sad (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney December 1932). She recounts to Dreyfus-Barney a conversation with "an intelligent man" who had told her in passing that it was an anomaly for a woman to work and that it should not be admitted in the colonial administration. When she had asked if he wanted her to retire to allow herself to dedicate herself entirely to housework, he had responded that this would turn her into a "real" woman (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney, December 1932). Entangling the past and present across imperial borders she tells Dreyfus-Barney that it is the memory of her time spent in France and their friendship that fortifies her currently in Indochina (Karpelès to Dreyfus-Barney, 29 January 1935).

Karpelès' deployment of temporalities of lag and delay to present herself as embattled and her male French colonists as anti-feminist draws on a model of feminism built around "freedom from" oppression that is grounded in a politics of identity tied to options and alternatives provided by the present. As Grosz (2000; 2011) writes, such framings of oppression and of identity in feminist political discourse are underpinned by quantitative temporalities linked to liberal understandings of autonomy, agency and freedom. In her discussion of her male French colleagues, Karpelès operationalises this model in terms of the need to remove oppressive, unjust and unfair forms of constraint that she describes to the EGF, and the attainment of rights related to her work and recognition for what she has achieved. This stance around "freedom from" is at variance with the temporal politics of becoming that threads through some of her descriptions of transformative encounters during her travels where she embraces a model of "freedom to" associated with Western notions of desire and becoming (other or more than one already is), a model that Grosz 2011, 59-61) argues is rooted in opening up the present to the invention of the new.

Whether Karpelès viewed her complaints about the anti-feminism of her colleagues through Buddhist temporalities around karma and dukkha (the truth of suffering or "unsatisfactoriness") (Keown 2013, 50) remains a matter of conjecture. But suffering is ingrained in the Buddhist fabric of being in the Buddhist realm of desire. Similarly, whether Karpelès viewed the actions of herself through Buddhist understandings of non-attachment, benevolence and understanding (as good) and the "bad faith" of her male colleagues through Buddhist understandings of greed, hatred and delusion as bad (Keown 2013, 43) also remains unclear. But the temporal

[4] The EFEO Bulletin (1935, 463) notes that Karpelès went on holiday in June 1935.

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map in her correspondence is further complicated through temporalities around rites of passage that emerge from the French newspaper cuttings and her AAUW article. These point to the coexistence and potential collision of temporalities within and between French and Cambodian society.

Temporal collisions and the politics of hair

In French newspaper cuttings Karpelès is portrayed visually surrounded by Buddhist monks and she herself fashions her image in the AAUW text along the lines of a consecrated priest. In an article entitled *Au coeur du Cambodge* journalist Renè Barrotte notes that while Karpelès did not wear the yellow tunic of a Buddhist monk and had not shaved her head, her devotion to the service of God gives her a character that was almost sacred (Barotte 1933). The unattributed and undated article *Une Française abbesse* (nd) that purports to record Karpelè's words deploys a Buddhist frame when writing that Karpelès must have been a Buddhist priest in a previous life. In her AAUW article Karpelès (1933, 71) states that she was able to consecrate herself wholeheartedly to the revitalisation of the intellectual atmosphere of Cambodia and to the renascence of the Buddhist religion, which she thought should be considered not as a religion at all but as a powerful moral force for the maintenance of society. While a religious language of consecration can operate to mask female ambition, Karpelès adheres to a Buddhist cosmology that Hansen (2007, 20) illustrates frames the identity of individuals through their karmic status as they move through a hierarchically ordered cosmos that depends on their accumulated stores of merit derived from good or beneficial actions the past. Barrotte (1933) writes that Karpelès had sensed the grandeur of Buddhism and aspired to "the eternal Euphoria" promised to those who had rid themselves of impurity on earth.

Karpelès was in her forties when both newspaper articles were written but both newspaper reports comment on Karpelès' youth. *Une Française abbesse* (nd) refers to Karpelès as "une petite jeune femme française" and Barrotte (1933) notes that the monks call Karpelès "la petite demoiselle". Within the "intimacies of empire" (Stoler 2006b) the "diminutive" of "la petite demoiselle" points to a nearness around what Stoler (2006b, 15) calls a Heideggerian sense of degrees of involvement, engagement, concern and attention built on structures of feeling around respect. While *Une Française abbesse* (nd) notes that Karpelès was "certainly not a European conception", it records that she spoke with a smile in her eyes and a soft voice (Barotte 1933) which suggests a degree of vulnerability associated with European conceptions of femininity. Both articles comment on Karpelès' beauty in gendered terms through scripts that the French would recognise. *Une Française abbesse* (nd) describes Karpelès as a young woman in all the radiance of her beauty, while Barrotte cites a description from a French woman doctor who had travelled with Karpelès the previous year to comment on Karpelès' skin, her deep eyes and her black hair. Both articles remark that the monks were insensible to Karpelès beauty, a construct that Stoler (2006a, 2) argues imagines certain groups to have more limited emotive capacities than others.

While both articles describe Karpelès in terms of youth and *Une Française abbesse* (nd) points to Karpelès black hair, in Khmer culture, hair was not principally a marker of gender. For Khmers, as Edwards (2001, 394) notes, the sacrality of hair stemmed from Indic reverence for the head as the supreme locus of power and from the Khmer animist view of hair as a lair of evil

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spirits. By the nineteenth century, short hair had become implanted in Khmer culture and denoted particular stages of life. Clipped short after birth, cropped at adolescence, cut on marriage and short in mourning, hair functioned as a marker of Cambodian rites of passage. A topknot signified childhood; short cropped hair signalled the passage to adolescence; and in adulthood a shaved head communicated mourning for kin (Edwards 2001, 394).

The French newspaper cuttings point up the "thickness" of coexisting temporalities within and between societies though practices by which youthfulness and rites of passage around hair are indicated. One the one hand are the descriptions from French journalists of Karpelès' youth through references to her skin, eyes and black hair, and of the monks "insensibilites" to these aspects of the "radiance" of her beauty; on the other are Khmer practices of hair-cutting, that denote particular rites of passage. Here temporalities collide around an "asymmetrical interplay" (Harootunian 2007, 478) of hair as temporal marker. But in the French newspaper accounts the uneven rhythms of co-existing temporalities are veiled by the embrace of Western notions of beauty underpinned by the exported world-standard linear time of imperialism allied with Western racialised notions of emotion.

Coexisting temporalities within and between societies entangle in Karpelès' accounts of her visits to pagoda schools, to which the following section turns. Here aspects of education as an element of the French civilising mission operate to synchronise multiple temporalities around a linear notion of time.

Temporal synchronisation and the politics of pagoda education

In Indochina as elsewhere the French brought in a dual system of French schools and Franco-native schools that provided Cambodian pupils with a type of education that would not foster liberal ideas and a system which culminated (for males) in a secondary school certificate that gave access to the University of Hanoi but not to metropolitan French universities (Norindr 1996, 44). In the 1930s the largest number of French schools were in Tonkin (18) followed by Cochinchina (12), Annam (8), Cambodia (30) and Laos (1). There were 270,330 students in the 3268 Franco-native government schools, although 2835 of these schools offered only elementary classes (Ha 2005, 187). At the EGF Karpelès spoke of the education service working to revive pagoda schools, which she considered better adapted to "native mentalities", whether for boys or girls (Goutalier 1989, 279-80).

Edwards (2002, 123) notes that by 1931 there were 20 girls enrolled at the Protectorate's three girls' schools in Phom Penh and a further 377 spread among ten schools in the provinces. The first Cambodian headmistress was appointed in 1932 to the School of Young Princesses, which aimed under her guidance "not to form intellects" but to foster proper social deportment through lessons in French etiquette and embroidery. Editorials and articles in Cambodia's first Khmer language journals pioneered by Karpelès' Royal Library - *Srok Khmer (*Khmer Country, founded 1926), and the highbrow Buddhist *Kampuchea Surya* (Cambodian Sun, founded 1927) - exhorted parents from the Cambodian elite to send their daughters to school (Edwards 2002, 123). Karpelès' 1933 correspondence provides instances where she came across "reformed" village pagoda schools educating girls rather than solely focussing on the education of boys as she had found to be be the case in her earlier tours of inspection. In December 1933 she writes of the remarkable progress in Cambodian schools over the last 18 months. When she revisited the

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school in Kandal (not far from Phnom Penh in the direction of Saigon) Karpelès distributed books and images to pupils as prizes for responding to simple questions like how many is two times two. She was overjoyed to find that the school was now educating 17 girls along with 100 boys and that there were double the numbers of pupils in the school over the previous year (Karpelès Extract, 7 December 1933).

But for Karpelès it was not just the doubling of numbers of pupils that was significant. In her account of this inspectoral visit she writes of the enthusiastic welcome she received that was usually reserved for the "venerable"; and she describes the beautiful crown plaited from blades of rice straw by a local woman with which she was presented. She also sent her mother via sea-mail a copy of the speech written by one of the higher ranking teachers (Karpelès Extract, 7 December 1933). Read in French by a pupil this speech included a range of sentiments, including "long live Mme Suzanne Karpelès", which the pupils repeated. The speech was framed around temporal notions of progress and gratitude: "Us poor pupils at the pagoda school …. didn't know anything and have to thank you for your visit and your kindness. We present you with a small speech to testify to our gratitude and our devotion. Yes, Mademoiselle, since 1929 our forefathers and parents continued in obscurity. Happily in our time we are enlightened through your light. You have shown us the way of science, you have given us many goods … Your kindnesses are are very immense … Despite the long and tireless journey, you visit us once each year to encourage us to work. For our part we promise you to work seriously to fulfil your desire and to satisfy our teachers who are your representatives". Pupils showed their feelings, notes Karpelès, by applauding and banging on anything they could see (Karpelès Extract, 7 December 1933).

The cyclic round of pagoda school inspection constituted a temporal practice that worked to synchronize the "intercultural mimesis" between Khmer modernists and the French administration in and through education. Jordheim (2014, 509) points to a whole spectrum of experiences and practices, from technologies to political programs and historiography, which he argues worked to synchronise the complexity of the "temporal regimes" that coexist and compete within a society or between societies and operate as sets of practices of power.[5] The notion of progress embraced in Karpelès' cyclic round of pagoda school inspection constitutes a temporal regime that plugs into a grid of forward temporal movement (of different speeds) that is also embraced in the speech in honour of Karpelès. The speech works to spatialise the pagoda-school in relation to the French administration through the declaration that pupils are being "raised from obscurity to enlightenment". In a matrix of power relations between coloniser and colonised that are determining but not necessarily determinate, such temporal practices, as Jordheim (2014, 509) notes, constitute forms of governmentality working to adjust coexisting temporalities and to regulate the rhythms of individual pupils and teachers and of the social group. Jordheim maintains that "time is also a question of power, the power to control movements, to decide about beginnings and endings, to set the pace, to give the rhythm"; and it works to adjust different times and different temporal regimes to one another to create temporal standard that is the same everywhere and for everyone. Cast through Bergson's differences in kind, synchronisation facilitates practices of comparison that bolster the power of the French through the spatio-temporal hierarchies with which comparison is associated.

[5] Here I work within Jordheim's critique of Hartog's (2015) notion of "regimes of historicity"

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In Karpelès' account of her reception at this pagoda school power is cast as productive - as desire on the part of the teacher compiling the speech to fulfil (in turn) Karpelès' desire to see progress in a reform of pagoda education that is valorised through the power relations of the French civilising mission and articulated in Karpelès' letter through relations of the gift. But what counts as progress in this temporal frame could be differently interpreted by different groupings in Cambodia. Karpelès' work in encouraging reform of pagoda schools was resented by some members of the Francophone Cambodian elite and royalty, who saw her work as an obstacle to the whole hearted adoption of the French education system. As Edwards (2004, 77) notes, this group of elites were united by a prejudice against her promotion of the Khmer language which they saw as (temporally) outmoded in relation to French and Siamese.

Conclusion: Reflecting on (the limits of?) thinking through the "temporal turn"

My temporal journey with Karpelès was prompted by Bevernage's and Lorenz's (2013) argument that historians need to elucidate the basic assumptions that underpin their notions of time. But doing so is far from straightforward. From a temporal perspective, it is not only a question of the temporal dimensions that I "observe" Karpelès to be mobilising in her letters. Such "observations" are entangled in a performative stance through which as researcher I also create and re-create temporal distinctions. In unpacking Karpelès' letters I reinscribe them and produce them anew by "cutting" past, present and future performatively. Just as Karpelès drew on diverse temporal understandings as she corresponded, as a researcher reading her letters I also "cut" relations between past, present and future performatively in diverse ways. Reading through literature on Western temporalities and associated notions of past, present and future brings to the fore particular temporal "cuts". Reading through literature on Buddhist cosmologies and Buddhist practices brings to the fore another set of temporal "cuts". These temporal cuts entangle to produce a "thickness" made up of strings that are themselves variously threaded through mimesis, co-existence and collision, imposition and synchronisation. But how to imagine the meshwork through which these variously threaded and intertwined strings sometimes touch or cross one another as an assemblage to form the "social shape of the past" (Zerubavel 2000) with consequences for lives (Jordheim 2014, 508) remains an open question.

In a Buddhist cosmology in which time is inseparable from things as ever-changing and temporalities emphasise impermanence (Abe 1997, 164) Gallois (2007, 220) concludes that to speak of Buddhist forms of history, historiography, or a Buddhist philosophy of history is to use words and concepts that are antithetical to the Buddhist tradition, which offers an evaluation of causality, time, being, experience, reality and meaning that are "broken down … their logic interrogated and ultimately rejected" (219). Gallois warns of the inadequacies of speaking of Buddhist forms of history, historiography or of a Buddhist philosophy of history. HIs warning resonates with Baker's (2007) discussion of the rupture between a "classical" theory of time and conceptions of temporality like those of Serres (1997), with its mobile metaphors that understand time like weather as it folds, twists, dances. In discussing Serres' approach to temporalities Baker warns that out of the most radical critiques of linearity, time and asymmetry could emerge the most ahistorical of analyses in which the orientation to time makes history unrecognisable as a discipline" (37). Baker also argues that assertions of alternative orientations to time are mired in techniques of historiography and in tensed language. I, too, recognise that my "cuts" of Karpelès' correspondence are "lured" by

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the pull of linear time from my Western-centric location. But in focussing on the intricate temporal patterns that Hunt (2012, 212) argues are not erased by the emergence of larger patterns, something of the texture of the "uncanniness of mixed temporalities" (Harootunian 2007, 486) begins to move out of the temporal shadows to resist the linearalities that the imperialization of time works to smooth out and straighten. But as they move out of the shadows multiple temporalities and their entanglements provoke more questions than answers.

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