

Cambodia Miscellanea

Electrical grid in Phnom Penh - Infrastructure.



With poverty always present or near the door, there are signs of frugality. I may have written it elsewhere but Bev and I noticed that each time we left our hotel room we believe the hotel owners shut off our electricity (air conditioners.) I am not complaining. It was noticeable, however, when each evening we had to cool our room down from nearly 90 degrees. We shut it off completely when leaving after that first day we noticed the pattern. This shutdown explains why the mother of the family pursued me as I left one afternoon to ask if my wife was still upstairs. Since Bev was elsewhere I said, “No” and the room was hot as usual that evening when we returned.

To add another dimension to this, Father Dittmeier wrote the following on his website.

There isn't enough electricity to go around in Cambodia--not even in Phnom Penh--but that isn't the full extent of the problem. The existing wiring is largely installed by non-electricians, people who are trying to save as much money as possible. The problems start on the street where the utility poles have boxes containing a breaker for each house on the street. Some of the boxes have doors on them to keep out the weather; others do not. And because few houses have fuses or circuit breakers in them, people are constantly climbing the poles on the street to throw the breakers back on to restore the current.

I remember puzzling over a scene that I was not able to photograph. We drove by a woman who was standing on the seat of a motodup that was leaning against a power pole. I saw that she was working on one of the boxes as shown above. I wondered if she could be requiring something. Now I suspect that she was working with the breakers.

Infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure.

Stairs - Infrastructure

We've been a lot of places, but this is the first place where I have been where it seemed as if there are few or strange building standards. (I don't want to say – no standards.) Stairways in Cambodia seemed none standard. In our hotel stairs for example, I kept wondering why I kept hitting me toe near the top of one flight. I thought I was getting tired by the time I reached that last of 6 flights. Finally after multiple missteps, I took a good look and it turned out that the last or second to the last step was just a bit higher

than the rest. Likewise, other places stairs seemed strangely unfriendly. Maybe the steps were all rather tall. Great exercise. Sometimes steep stairs had rather narrow steps. Some places all the steps were uniform, but an additional small one was added to make it to the next floor. So it might have been a lack of uniformity in the height of a storey.

Highways - Infrastructure.

While I am on infrastructure, consider a quick comment on highways. We have heard



that Cambodia is behind Thailand in highways. I took only a couple pictures flying into Bangkok. Here is a shot of a highway interchange in Thailand as we landed.

We saw no expressways in Cambodia. I believe that all the major highways meet in traffic circles. Roads didn't seem to have potholes, but we saw nothing to show that Phnom Penh had a road structure better than that of a third class city in the U.S. Phnom Penh still has some dirt streets. (The road in front of the Maryknoll center in Phnom Penh was just being paved when we were there.) Heaven help Cambodia in the rainy season.

Walls – From Residential to Governmental Grand Plans

Maybe we don't understand the uniqueness of our urban landscape. In general, we drive down most residential streets in a U.S. town and we see lawns and related houses set back from the street by 30 or 40 feet. In Palestine, El Salvador, and now Cambodia, such landscaping just doesn't seem to exist. The very poor in urban areas are housed in residences that are clustered together – possibly tenements. Shacks are erected in the gullies of San Salvador. Squatters erect their shacks where they can --- even in the middle of streets – in Phnom Penh. Their homes are close enough that they may as well share walls.

What seems common to all these third world countries is the presence of walls. Wherever one has the money to build a house of any value, the entire property upon which the house is built is bordered with a wall --- generally 6-8 feet high. The picture on the left was taken at a lunch spot where we ate one noon outside of downtown Phnom Penh. The house across the street is walled in as was the multi-purpose structure that housed our host. Theirs was about 6 foot, but ours seems higher.



Here is another shot of the nicest house we visited for yet another lunch. Again,

this was inside a compound formed by a high wall with gates.

As I wrote in another report documenting March 9 when we traveled out to the displacement village, I noticed at least a couple places where large tracts – of the size suitable for the structures in the last photos – were being walled in by sturdy cement or stucco walls. No houses yet. Just walls on land next to the highway.

Near the Phnom Penh’s municipal dump --- between the village of the dump workers and the current dump --- there was land ready for sale. I wish I had photographed that area. It was former dump land now covered with a few inches of top soil. Even there, several potential building sites were enclosed with low red brick walls.



In March 2006, we saw that most of the better homes in San Salvador (capital of El Salvador) had walls surrounding them. Like the one at the right, the top of the walls were decorated with stainless razor wire.

If asked, the home owners would certainly justify the wall as being for security. Maybe the history and politics of these countries (even more

than ours) gives the people of means a concern that causes them to see the walls as protection for their families and their possessions. At least in El Salvador it struck me that after the civil war, there must have been trumpeted concerns for public safety that assisted in the creation of the several security firms that were staffed by former government soldiers. Not only were richer houses in El Salvador walled compounds, some residences employed the same security forces as did many commercial enterprises in El Salvador. They employed solemn-faced uniformed security officers with sawed-off shotguns to stand guard in front of their homes. (No Honeywell and Brinks Security Systems!)

Cambodian walls were just as sturdy although I didn't see any razor wire. Just occasionally, I saw broken bottle glass cemented onto the top of the walls. So the homes gained an additional measure of security. Having these barriers, the feared intruders would not be able to easily break in, steal, or even see whatever wealth was being protected. Further, the home owners could also create an environment within the compound that was isolated from whatever was "going on out there."

So the home owners live behind the walls for a certain portion of their day. They probably consider it quite the way things should be. They are not incarcerated. They have the ability to leave their compound when they wish. They may consider that their walls are just a feature of their houses that is more versatile than having drapes. They don't have to look at sights and traffic outside their barrier and they get the benefit of open windows, streaming sunlight, and a view of their gardens or whatever they have within the walls.

So as I considered these walled residences, I began thinking about wall building in general. We often refer to the adage: "Don't build walls, build bridges." Generally that remark is expressed in speaking of one's personal relations. Yet the adage provides meaning in a social context because it conjures up physical notions of confining walls as opposed to bridges that support free-flowing two-way traffic. Communication and sharing ideas is enhanced when people cross bridges that span their differences.

Living behind walls can be more "secure" for the inhabitants of the compound, but the resulting interior environment has been sterilized. In fact, the physical wall is pretty low tech. More may be shut out than the wall owner may really desire or imagine. However, the domain within the walls is less full in possibilities. Life within the walls has undergone a self-imposed sanitizing. *One can only speculate if those who are meant to be excluded by the walls may live a life with a fuller set of possibilities – the fuller set of experiences.* Further, the need to live behind walls may signal issues experienced by the home owners beyond just the concerns for security. Class consciousness and racism come to mind. Finally, *can the walls convey negative messages to those who see the walls from the outside? Can the isolation of living within walls convey negative messages to those who experience the walls year after year from the inside?*

So what is the status of wall-building in our culture?

The walled residences mentioned above are in countries where there are a large “lower class” and a very small elite. The United States doesn’t seem to fit this mold unless we consider the presence of the wealthy who live in a growing number of gated communities or exclusive high-rises with suited doormen. Their walls may not surround individual dwellings, but the entrances to the community and high-rises are guarded; and, in the case of the gated community, the entire community may be surrounded by walls, hedges, or picket fences. In the U.S., there are a small elite (just read the salaries of corporate executives, sport stars, etc.) and the rest of us.

It seems that the walls and gates serve as implicit announcements to poorer classes that someone with more resources --- maybe many more --- lives there. It implies that the people who build the walls do not trust those others out there beyond their fortifications. I might be going out on a limb, but I believe John Dominic Crossan, as he writes in *God and Empire*, might consider the feelings of insecurity that spawn wall-building to be another result from the normalcy of civilization and hierarchies it creates.

Here in the U.S., we are all welcomed to join with those airy classes or, at least, partake in their expressions of insecurity. There is certainly more money to be made perpetuating fear than perpetuating peace and sharing. Middle class homeowners fortify their homes with deadbolts on all exterior doors, window locks, and even locks on interior doors. These are minimal protections against being burgled by those bad guys out there. Beyond that, Brinks, Honeywell and others sell a host of security products and services. Unlike a kinder gentler period maybe 40 years ago, these security measures are now considered common sense precautions in our urban communities.

In many ways, we have learned more subtle means than using bricks and mortar in our wall building. We build walls in our social organizations and communal living associations by requiring one-time fees that are high enough that less desirable applicants just can’t get over the financial barrier. Further, we may not be able to build walls around our residential communities, but we can still raise our voices against “affordable” housing in our community. Those city council protests attempt to build a wall of city ordinances and urban development plans to keep the others – referred to as riff-raff – from our neighborhood. Also, we can look the other way and the help of our local police in keeping our neighborhood clear of riff-raff when we condone the practice of racial profiling.

The world over, people can assert their power and build walls – physical, financial, and/or social. As in the cases mentioned above, they choose to live within their walls where they control their environment. They tend to force others of less repute (per their opinion) to live on the other side of their walls.

As a variation on that theme, the border of the U.S.S.R. was once referred to as the Iron Curtain and contained as just part of its substance, the infamous Berlin Wall. Over the years of its existence, Westerners derided the Iron Curtain as a separation device that, like a physical wall, impeded the flow of people into and out of Soviet territory. The Iron Curtain was there to promote the Communist ideology by controlling the environment of

the Soviet people and keep out Western ideas. So that wall/Curtain separated ideologies and its presence caused years of hostility, fear, and suspicion among the inhabitants on opposite sides of the barrier. Now that the Iron Curtain has fallen, the opposing ideologies continue such that a wall of sorts still remains although it may be more of --- in drapery terms – a sheer.

Even in the face of history of the Berlin Wall barely fading, Israel chose the building of a wall – sometimes referred to as the Apartheid Wall – as part of its plan to support its occupation of the West Bank. According to the Israeli authorities the fence/wall is "*a defensive measure, designed to block the passage of terrorists, weapons and explosives into the State of Israel...*" So this is a wall which was built for a defensive function according to official accounts. A defensive or protective wall fits the paradigm where the wall builders live on one side of the wall and the wall is constructed so that another group of people considered bad or less desirable politically, financially, or socially are forced to live on the other side. The wall builders have the benefit of living in the environment that they create behind their wall. The wall that Israel is completing seems to violate that paradigm. The fact that the wall is built by the powerful group, the Israelis, to separate its people from the poorer Palestinians fits the normal paradigm of wall building. Yet

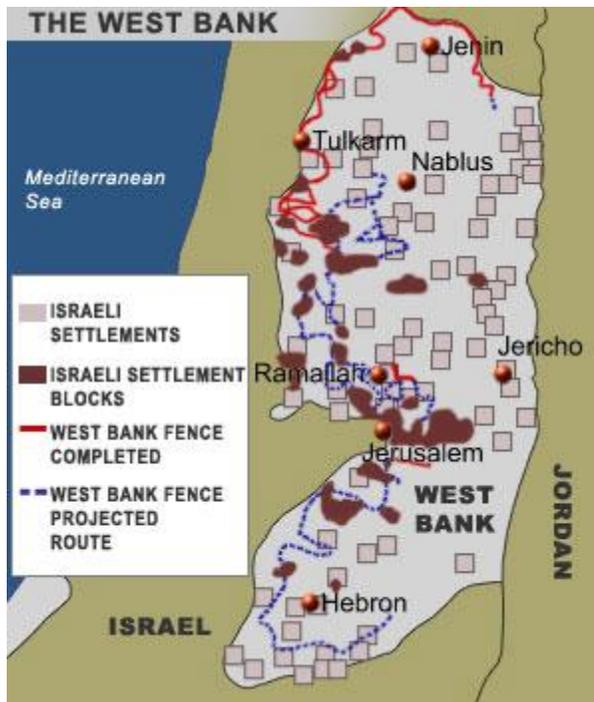


unlike the Soviet “wall”, Israel’s defensive purpose for its new wall is to enclose the Palestinians -- not themselves -- and to thereby control the environment – not within Israel’s border – but on the other side of the wall – the Palestinian side.

I took the photo here in 2004 near the town of Abu Dis just outside of Jerusalem. The wall was approved to be 436 miles long. Its concrete portions are 8 meters high.

Israel has militarily occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War in violation of UN Resolutions and Geneva Conventions. Throughout the occupied area, hundreds of Israeli soldiers at hundreds of checkpoints restrict the movement of Palestinians within the West Bank.

This wall has several unique characteristics. One unique aspect is the fact that most of the wall is built on the Palestinian land. That is not the mode of residential wall builders. No one would be able to build their wall on someone else’s property. The fact that Palestinian land is used for the building of the wall shows the power differential between Israel and Palestine. Even more interesting is the fact that the wall moves deep into the West Bank territory away from the dictated U.N. border. It is built inside Palestinian territory anywhere from 200 meters to as much as 20 kilometers (12+ miles). The purpose of the incursion is in order to lace around some of the over 250 Israeli



settlements built on Palestinian land and include those settlements on the Israeli side of the wall. (It amounts to annexing Palestinian land.) “Some 54 Israeli settlements in the West Bank and 12 in East Jerusalem are located on Palestinian land which is being cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the fence/wall. In total, more than 320,000 Israeli settlers ... will be living on the western side of the fence/wall, thereby enjoying more direct territorial contiguity with Israel.”

Next the remaining roughly 175 settlements will reside “east” of the wall. That means the walled-off Palestinians live in an area riddled by Israeli settlements built by the wall

builder, the government of Israel. That means that the confined walled-in area still contains other citizens of the wall-builder nation who demand and receive infrastructure such as highways to access the west side of the new wall. The Palestinians cannot use or cross those special highways, yet the roadways have been built on still more confiscated West Bank land. The presence of these settlements east of the wall results in a need for even more Israeli soldiers, checkpoints, and restrictions upon Palestinians.

Finally a residential wall builder usually builds an economical wall. If the lot is rectangular, the wall is rectangular and stands on the boundary of the lot. However, the wall built by Israel to protect itself from the West Bank occupants will be more than twice the length of the border of the West Bank. (It seems like the wall has more than just a *defensive* function.)

One last point about the Apartheid Wall. The U.S. is probably the closest ally of Israel. The U.S. has repeatedly vetoed Security Council resolutions of U.N. (11 since 1989) that complain about Israel’s actions related to its conflict with Palestine. Financially, approximately a third of the entire U.S. foreign aid budget goes to Israel, "even though



Israel comprises just...one-thousandth of the world's total population, and already has one of the world's higher per capita incomes." As part of that aid and for each of the years from 1991 to 2006, Israel received 1.8 to 3.2 billion dollars worth of state of the art military hardware (Money that goes to U.S. arms manufacturers.) for their test under battle conditions. These are reasons why the U.S. is considered a questionable partner in the quest for peace between Palestine and Israel. Unlike U.S. citizens, the people of Middle Eastern nations are very aware of these facts as noted in the graffiti we saw on the wall in Abu Dis. U.S. aid to Israel enables the Israeli occupation.

U.S. citizens will also be funding the creation of another wall. This will be a physical wall/fence system that will be built along our border with Mexico. The purpose of the wall is to stop the flow of immigrants from Latin America – the infamous “illegals” ---- who come north as a result of poverty and the results of CAFTA.

As we build the wall to keep out these poor, we, as Americans, have to qualify our slogan that says this is the “Land of Opportunity” as well as ignore the valuable labor force that the Latin American immigrants provide our economy. If Congressional actions can be a bellwether of U.S. opinion, it seems as if we are willing to do both. In 2006, Congress voted to authorize the Secretary of Homeland Security to construct the fence. It authorized spending \$1.2 billion for the enterprise. The double fence will be 700 miles long from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico. ([The Secure Fence Act of 2006](#))

Besides the fence, there must be personnel to patrol that fence.

From May 31, 2007 O'Reilly Factor interview with Senator John McCain –

O'REILLY: Are you going to guarantee me that border is going to be secured, locked down so these people can't come across? Are you going to guarantee it, put your good name on it?

MCCAIN: I guarantee you that we'll hire 20,000 new **Border Patrol**. We will build 300 miles of fences. We'll use **UAV**'s and sensors and etcetera.

That number repeats the report on Fox News on March 9, 2007 saying:

An intelligence overhaul that Congress passed in late 2004 recommended adding 2,000 more agents a year over five years, to boost the Border Patrol to about 20,000 agents.

(It all sounds like another TSA force needed for our protecting our border. And who is calling for smaller government?! Security, security, security! Fear, fear, fear!)

This wall has the some differences as compared to the wall in Israel. It will not be built on the Mexican side of the border. Unlike Palestine, Mexico can point to its sovereignty to keep the U.S. from building the wall on Mexican soil. Unlike the Palestinian wall, the Security Fence will only stretch for the length of the border and will not chop off sections of Mexico. However, there may be a similarity with the Israeli wall. We Americans will build the wall, but we will spend our time on both sides of that wall. We wealthy U.S. citizens enjoy the prosperity of our country with its many hardworking illegal aliens, but we reserve the right to visit the many resort regions of our neighbors to the south. We go

there as if the Mexicans and Latin Americans should be glad we can come, soak up their climate, and look for low priced bargains.

Again, are the people we seek to keep out of our country the possible source of a vibrant new birth for this “land of opportunity”? Do the people outside of the walls, both private and national barriers, have the fuller life and have the potential to teach valuable lessons to those who create the walls?

Got carried away with “Walls.” ☺

Cattle --- Beef/Goe

I am probably a slow learner. I probably ordered beef dishes at least twice before going over to chicken (moaun) from then on. The beef found chopped up in vegetable, rice or noodle dishes was pretty tough. I expect that the beef came from the white braham-derived cattle. They were everywhere. We did not see any other breeds.

At the Royal University of Phnom Penh when I spoke with students there, I remember hearing from one student that her folks were farmers. I



asked if they had cattle and the answer was, “Yes, four.” I live too close to Wisconsin so I asked if they were milked. “No, they are used for plowing.” (I can barely remember horses being used in plowing by the farmers north of my hometown when I was a child in the ‘40s.)



I am providing a couple pictures. These were the main beast of burden for farm use. The solitary cow was on the grounds of a hospital that we visited. You figure. The herd photo was taken on one of our many bus rides. I only saw more than just a pair of cows that once.

Hogs

I got at least one good shot of hogs – or at least the hog sty. It was not pleasant down wind of these critters.



What interests me was that the land and the adjacent houses. The pen was located on the ground and all the neighboring houses were elevated as you can see. Clearly the pen had to be moved during the rainy season - June through October, I believe. I really wonder where because so much of this land would be under several feet of water. Further, I wonder how well the water would serve to diffuse the matter that collected around the pen.

Chickens

As I probably wrote elsewhere, chickens and ducks were everywhere and one wonders if the notion of “free range chicken” is such a good thing over here. I would rather keep the birds away from some of the items that might be available for consumption.

I had to include a little shot of our favorite pair of chickens. They belonged to the proprietors of the establishment next to our hotel. These chickens were possibly a bantam breed. I know nothing about chickens, but these seemed to be very pretty and petite as chickens go. Their pen where they spend the nights is at the left of the photo.



They had the run of the lobby of our hotel as well as all the space in front of their owner’s shop and our hotel. One day Beverly went out through the small lobby. Someone had parked their motor scooter in the hallway and the two chickens had taken to nesting in the scooter’s basket. Somewhat later, when we both left the lobby the chickens were gone, but there was an egg in the basket.



Farm Fields

Rice is a cash crop. However, I don’t believe I saw any rice paddies. This was March and April tended to be one of the hottest months. Water in rivers, lakes, and streams was low. I saw a photo on the Internet that indicated that rice would be planted in August.

The picture at the left was taken from one of the Maryknoll community centers that would have to be reached by boat during the rainy season. The area out there was essentially a

lake. We viewed crops in several open areas like this. This crop here is something they called “morning glory.” We had it as a side dish at several of our meals.

If you peer beyond the electric lines(?) you will see many vertical poles out in the field. I was told that as the water rises, so the crops will move up those poles somehow. Farming on a lake. Very interesting. How are these lands allotted to farmers for use? Does someone own the area?

If you look again very closely, you can see what I was trying to include in my photo. A man in one of their long narrow boats with a fishing net had moved through the channels in the field. He ended up in the last channel just parallel to the little patch of open water we see here. Multiple uses of the land/lake. Fishing in the fields.



Above is a view from one of the many bridges. Another bridge is in the far distance. On either side of this relative trickle are small garden plots. The one on the left occupies the yellow soil just above the bridge rail. It seemed to be just new rows of something. On the right side of the river up by the bend were several workers at the far end of a newly cultivated area. So Cambodians make use of these open riverbed areas which I assume are no-man-lands. Farmers put their fields there as squatters. Again, I can hardly believe there is ownership here.

It would be very interesting to see this area in September. If you don't remember from another of my notes, the flooding of the Mekong every year is vital to the ecology of Cambodia. The Mekong flood waters back up the Tonle Sap River and fill the huge Tonle Sap Lake which then serves as a reservoir and important fishery.

The Tonle Sap Lake “is the largest freshwater lake in South East Asia and is an ecological hotspot that was designated as a [UNESCO](#) biosphere in [1997](#). The Mekong and the Tonle Sap meet at Phnom Penh. The pulsing system with the large [floodplain](#), rich biodiversity, and high annual sediment and nutrient fluxes from Mekong makes the Tonle Sap one of the most productive inland fisheries in the world, supporting over 3 million people and providing over 75% of Cambodia's annual inland fish catch and 60% of the Cambodians' [protein](#) intake. At the end of the rainy season, the flow reverses and the fish are carried downriver.”