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**THESIS**

**THE HEIRS OF ANGKOR: AN ANALYSIS OF  
KHMER ROUGE VIABILITY**

by

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June, 1995

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AN ANALYSIS OF KHMER ROUGE VIABILITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
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from the

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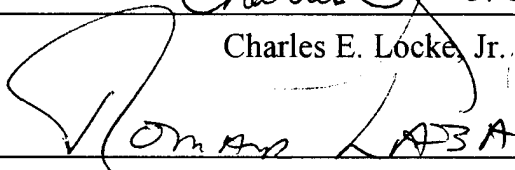
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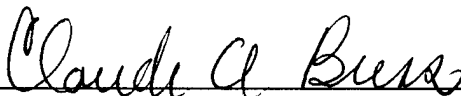


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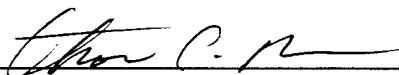
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to address the question: "What accounts for Khmer Rouge viability?" One approach, which will be used in this thesis, is to analyze the Khmer Rouge through their "self-definitions"--located in their myths, rituals, and symbols--to better understand how they perceive themselves, their cause, and their future and how those perceptions can be used to defeat adversaries.

This study focuses on insurgent activity as a battle of ideas using the Khmer Rouge as a case study. To analyze the application of this plane to insurgent viability, this study looked to the "symbolic dimension," a medium of political exchange that defines reality through symbolic means. To provide a linkage between symbols and viability, the symbolic actions of the Khmer Rouge are applied to five elements of insurgent viability: legitimacy, popular support, organization, external support, and defeating adversarial response. All five elements are covered from the origins of the insurgency in the 1950s, through their victory in 1975 and demise in 1979, concluding with their actions today.

This thesis demonstrates that the Khmer Rouge insurgency relies on symbolic activity as one means of viability. Using ethnic discrimination myths and nationalist rituals, the insurgents swept to power in a rural based movement. However, fanatical beliefs in myths of common blood ties and racial purity drove the regime to destruction. To resurrect the movement, the Khmer Rouge play on the weakness of the present government utilizing democratic symbols as well as former racist themes to replace the malevolent image of their governing years with an image of their perception as heirs to rulership.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to address the question: "What accounts for Khmer Rouge viability?" One approach, which will be used in this thesis, is to analyze the Khmer Rouge through their "self-definitions"--located in their myths, rituals, and symbols--to better understand how they perceive themselves, their cause, and their future and how those perceptions can be used to defeat adversaries.<sup>1</sup>

Organized in 1951, the Communist Party of Kampuchea won a striking victory in Cambodia. The communists, fighting under the title of "Khmer Rouge" ("Red Khmer"), an epithet given them by the reigning Cambodian monarch, seized the country by 1975. For 44 months, Khmer Rouge authority in Cambodia became symbolized by the "killing fields"--execution areas complete with shallow graves for those designated enemies of the revolution. By 1979, the revolution was over. More than one million dead lay as testimony to the revolution's destructive power and failed policies.

Today, fifteen years after their fall from power at the hands of invading Vietnamese forces, the Khmer Rouge continue to reign over almost a quarter of Cambodian territory. But the "killing fields" are becoming overgrown, concealed under fresh images sown by the insurgency to fit their new circumstances. Although responsible for committing national genocide, the insurgency continues to seek authority over the remaining population. By systematically undermining the newly elected Cambodian government, just as they methodically eliminated opponents of their regime years before, the Khmer Rouge remain a viable and deadly opponent.

This study contends the symbolic activity of the Khmer Rouge lends viability to the movement because insurgency is a battle not only on the corporeal plane but the incorporeal plane as well. Political scientist J. Bowyer Bell likens the insurgent to a "dreamer," who "pursue[s] the armed struggle and shapes his world through perception into an ecosystem that

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<sup>1</sup>Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 126.

allows the dream to persist, expand, contaminate the many, and drive the war."<sup>2</sup> The ecosystem Bell suggests can be related to Murray Edelman's examination of symbolic actions. Edelman suggests that shared values allow insurgents to seek a difficult objective like control of the state. "Participants in a guerrilla movement normally share common values and cognitions respecting their cause to a high degree and can be counted on to use their faculties to realize their common objectives . . . ."<sup>3</sup> By appealing to these "common values and cognitions," the resistance seeks to overcome limited material resources and win the battle of perceptions, thereby giving viability to their movement. Symbolic actions are the means to wage the battle of perceptions.

The basis for symbolic actions would concentrate on the influence of politics, focusing not on "who gets what, when, and how,"<sup>4</sup> but on "what they want, what they fear, what they regard as possible, and even who they are."<sup>5</sup> Symbolic signalling is the very foundation of politics. "The medium of political exchange has always been symbolism," explains sociologist David Kertzer, "it is an exchange that not only redistributes political rewards, but that also builds our political understandings. If symbols and rituals are used to build political reality, it is because, as humans, we can do it no other way."<sup>6</sup>

To answer the question, "What accounts for Khmer Rouge viability?" the symbolic activity of the insurgency was analyzed from their origins in the 1950s, through their demise in 1979, to their actions today. Research focuses on the symbolic actions and language of the Khmer Rouge as published in FBIS, government documents, histories, journals, and newspapers as well as unpublished sources such as captured documents and defector

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<sup>2</sup>J. Bowyer Bell, "Revolutionary Insurgency: The Threat to This Generation--Waiting for the Fat Lady to Sing," (New York: International Analysis Center, n.d.), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Murray Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence, (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), p. 140.

<sup>4</sup>Harold D. Lasswell, Politics: Who gets What, When, How, (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958).

<sup>5</sup>Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power, (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1988), p. 95.

interviews.<sup>7</sup>

Following an introductory chapter, Chapter II discusses insurgency as symbolic action. Using authors versed in symbolic studies, this chapter provides the linkage of symbolic actions to insurgency. Symbolic activity will be related to five aspects of insurgency that are necessary for viability: legitimacy, popular support, organization, external support, and defeat of adversarial response. These five aspects of viability have relevance to any insurgency study and are analyzed through the symbolic actions of the Khmer Rouge in the following chapters.

Chapter III looks for the sources of symbolic actions in the historical and cultural roots of Cambodia. The insurgency's adopted myths, rituals, and symbols will reflect the influence of a culture over two thousand years old and include the authoritarianism and brutality that underlay the country's history.

Chapter IV analyzes the Khmer Rouge as insurgents attempting to seize Cambodia's state and society. It covers their origins during the 1950s to their victory in 1975. The chapter relates the application of ethnic discrimination myths, nationalist rituals, and symbolic alliances with the monarchy and the Vietnamese to gain victory.

Chapter V analyzes the Khmer Rouge as rulers of Cambodia. After victory in 1975, the insurgency used a combination of brute force and symbols derived from ancient Khmer mythology and rituals of blood purity in an attempt to create a new nation. This chapter

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<sup>7</sup>Eight translated documents, which were the secret agenda of the CPK, form the basis of this study during the 1975-1979 period as published in David P. Chandler, et al., eds., Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988). Importantly, the editors note only a dozen or so Party documents are thought to have survived. From 1979 to the 1995, captured Khmer Rouge documents form the foundation of the discourse to include two unpublished sources graciously provided by Laura Summers. The first document is a 21 page address probably by Pol Pot entitled: "What is the Virtue, the Quality, the Reality and the Responsibility of Democratic Kampuchea in the Past, Present, and Future?", obtained from a KR defector under military leader Ta Mok. The document is dated 2 December 1986 and according to Summers was translated on 29 February 1988 by the Central Intelligence Agency. The second document is a 48 page address to KR women cadre attributed to Pol Pot by context. The document is titled: "What is the Current Situation in Kampuchea? What Will It Be Like in the Future?". Translated by Steve Header, the document is dated December 1988. Defector interviews were provided by Steve Header and Lt. Colonel Ed Waller who conducted interviews with some 100 self-demobilized NADK combatants between July 1992 and August 1993 as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Clandestine radio broadcasts are published in FBIS.

concludes with a discussion of the contribution of symbolic acts to the fall of the revolution in 1979. It demonstrates that the fixation on ritual purification ultimately encouraged the Vietnamese invasion and the Khmer Rouge fall from power.

Chapter VI examines the Khmer Rouge as outlaws of Cambodia. Although repudiated by parliamentary measures, this chapter demonstrates how myths, rituals, and symbols used in the 1970s were reshaped to fit the realities of the 1990s through five important myths that promote a new public image, domestic popularity, enemy incursion, heirs to national resources, and invincibility.

Chapter VII provides an epilogue of the future viability of the Khmer Rouge in relation to the state of Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leadership understands insurgency is a fight of ideas. Myths, rituals, and symbols of the Khmer Rouge were a means not only of establishing and then reconstructing the insurgency, but provide a resource for continued viability in the future.

In summary, this thesis demonstrates that the Khmer Rouge insurgency relies on symbolic activity as a means of viability. Using ethnic discrimination myths and nationalist rituals, the insurgents swept to power in a rural based movement. However, fanatical beliefs in myths of common blood ties and racial purity drove the regime to destruction. To resurrect the movement, the Khmer Rouge play on the weakness of the present government utilizing democratic symbols as well as former racist themes to replace the malevolent image of their governing years with an image of their perception of heirs to rulership.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Deep in the steaming forests of northwest Cambodia, statues of powerful deities sit muted beside temple ruins in the scorching Asian sun. These ruins are quiet now, no longer part of the daily rituals of the Khmer kingship when millions of suppliants padded through the stone temples that comprised the Angkor empire, an empire stretching

westward to the South China Sea, encompassing southern Vietnam and the Mekong Delta; to the north over southern Laos . . . and touching China; to the east encompassing Thailand and parts of Burma; and to the southeast down to the isthmus of Kra, which connects Thailand and Malaysia.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, despite national activity having moved south to the modern city of Phnom Penh, the complex of ruins at Angkor still has a disquieting influence on the nation of Cambodia. Angkor connects Khmer in a "psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all other people in a most vital way."<sup>2</sup> The five towered image of Angkor Wat, although constructed in the 12th century, continues to grace the flag of not only the

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Becker, When The War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Walker Connor, Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 92.



modern nation of Cambodia, but that of the Khmer Rouge who conquered it.<sup>3</sup>

A yellow representation of Angkor fluttered on a field of red as the national flag of the reigning Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Organized in 1951, the CPK won a striking victory in Cambodia fighting under the epithet "Khmer Rouge" ("Red Khmer"), given them by the reigning Cambodian monarch.<sup>4</sup> The CPK seized a nation of over 7 million with an army of 60,000 on 17 April 1975. For 44 months, Khmer Rouge authority in Cambodia became symbolized by the "killing fields"-- execution areas complete with shallow graves for those designated enemies of the revolution. By 1979, the revolution was over. More than one million dead lay as testimony to the revolution's destructive power and failed policies.

Today, sixteen years after their fall from power at the hands of invading Vietnamese forces, the CPK, now renamed the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK), continue to reign over almost a quarter of Cambodian territory. Significantly, the

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<sup>3</sup>So important was Angkor's place in the Khmer national consciousness, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia banned its use as a party symbol during the May 1993 elections in Cambodia. Patrick Smyth and Michael Foley, "Pandemonium in the Land of Rumour," The Irish Times, June 12, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>The label "Khmer Rouge" was never used by the movement to describe itself according to Chandler. See David Chandler, Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot, (Thailand: Silkview Press, 1993), fnt. 1, p. 207.

"killing fields" are becoming overgrown, concealed under fresh images sown by the PDK to fit their new circumstances. Although responsible for committing national genocide when acting as the governing body of Cambodia, its image is now that of a contending "democratic" party which continues to seek greater authority. Its repudiation in national elections in 1993 and newly acquired status as an outlaw organization by decree of the national legislature in 1994, to say nothing of its continued existence over four decades raises many important questions: Who are the Khmer Rouge?; What are their objectives?; What obstacles concern them?; and What do they perceive the future to hold? This study will undertake to answer those questions to grapple with the main point of this study: What accounts for Khmer Rouge viability?

#### **A. BATTLE OF PERCEPTIONS**

Insurgent activity is a battle not only on the corporeal plane but the incorporeal plane as well. Political scientist J. Bowyer Bell likens the insurgent to a "dreamer," who "pursue[s] the armed struggle and shapes his world through perception into an ecosystem that allows the dream to persist, expand, contaminate the many, and drive the war."<sup>5</sup> The ecosystem Bell suggests can be related to the examination of

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<sup>5</sup>J. Bowyer Bell, "Revolutionary Insurgency: The Threat to This Generation--Waiting for the Fat Lady to Sing," (New York: International Analysis Center, n.d.), p. 4.

symbolic actions in the political realm. Symbolic action is where insurgents give form to their political dreams, ideology, propaganda, and information. "[S]ymbols did not simply express political positions;" explained Hunt,

they were the means by which people became aware of their positions. By making a political position manifest, they made adherence, opposition, and indifference possible. In this way they constituted a field of political struggle.<sup>6</sup>

Edelman suggests that shared political symbols and values allow insurgents to seek a difficult objective like control of the state. "Participants in a guerrilla movement normally share common values and cognitions respecting their cause to a high degree and can be counted on to use their faculties to realize their common objectives . . . ." <sup>7</sup> By giving form to these "common values and cognitions" through symbolic actions, the resistance seeks to overcome limited material resources and win the battle of perceptions thereby giving viability to their movement. Thus, symbolic actions are the means to wage the battle of perceptions.

The relevance of a symbolic study of the Khmer Rouge will

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<sup>6</sup>Lynn Hunt, Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>7</sup>Murray Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence, (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), p. 140.

have applicability to insurgency studies in every part of the world. This study contends all insurgents use myth, ritual, and symbols to create a "psychological contagion" for their leaders, followers, and the population they seek to influence. A symbolic study will analyze the Khmer Rouge from the perspective of their "self-definitions,"<sup>8</sup> how they perceive themselves, their cause, and their future and how that perception can be used to neutralize or defeat adversaries.

#### **B. SYMBOLIC STUDIES**

The Khmer Rouge have been examined in many important contexts.<sup>9</sup> However, this study will analyze the Khmer Rouge along the "symbolic dimension."<sup>10</sup> Symbolic studies gained relevance with social scientists in the 1980s, "much as group theory prevailed during the 1950s, structural functionalism in the 1960s, and 'policy studies' in the 1970s," according to historian John Armstrong.<sup>11</sup> However, a symbolic study, as

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<sup>8</sup>Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 126.

<sup>9</sup>See select bibliography

<sup>10</sup>See Chapter 2 for a fuller explanation of the methodology and definition of terms. The term comes from Laba's study of Solidarity, p. 126.

<sup>11</sup>John A. Armstrong, "Myth and History in the Evolution of Ukrainian Consciousness," in Peter J. Potichnyj, ed., Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter, (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992), p. 125.

Armstrong makes clear, "implies new ways of looking at familiar data rather than discovery of fresh bodies of evidence."<sup>12</sup>

As a political and military organization, the basis for a symbolic study of the Khmer Rouge would concentrate on their use of politics, focusing not on "who gets what, when, and how,"<sup>13</sup> but on "what they want, what they fear, what they regard as possible, and even who they are."<sup>14</sup> Symbolic signalling is the heart of politics. "The medium of political exchange has always been symbolism;" explains sociologist David Kertzer, "it is an exchange that not only redistributes political rewards, but that also builds our political understandings. If symbols and rituals are used to build political reality, it is because, as humans, we can do it no other way."<sup>15</sup>

### C. METHODOLOGY

In asking the question, "What accounts for Khmer Rouge viability?" five concepts lend themselves to any study of insurgent viability: legitimacy, popular support,

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<sup>12</sup>Armstrong, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup>Harold D. Lasswell, Politics: Who gets What, When, How, (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1958).

<sup>14</sup>Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), p. 20.

<sup>15</sup>David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 95.

organization, external support, and defeating adversarial response.<sup>16</sup> This study will analyze the myths, rituals, and symbols of the Khmer Rouge and their application to the five concepts of viability from the origins of the insurgency in the 1950s, through their demise in 1979, to their actions today. This will provide the linkage between symbolic actions and insurgent viability.

Because Cambodia can be characterized as an "oral civilization," the majority of discourse analyzed will take verbal form drawn from ancient eras, Buddhism, and the Khmer culture.<sup>17</sup> According to one secret Party document, little art was promulgated during the Party's reign so as not to "disturb the productive forces raising production."<sup>18</sup> However, by using the verbal discourse the Khmer Rouge communicate to their

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<sup>16</sup>These five concepts were adapted from a study of insurgency by Bard E. O'Neill, Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare, (Virginia: Brassey's, Inc, 1990).

<sup>17</sup>Ponchaud was a practicing priest in Cambodia for 10 years. He witnessed the victory of the KR in 1975 and is a keen observer of Cambodian culture. He described Cambodia as an "oral civilization. See Ponchaud, "Social Change in the Vortex of Revolution," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 158, 159.

<sup>18</sup>David P. Chandler, et al., eds., Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), p. 114.

cadres through Party documents<sup>19</sup> as well as the revolutionary songs, folk tales, and speeches communicated to the population, it will become clear how symbolic actions served insurgent viability.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the Khmer Rouge insurgency relied on a melding of cultural values found in their mythology, ritual, and symbols to shape perceptions both inside and outside the organization

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<sup>19</sup>Eight translated documents, which were the secret agenda of the CPK, form the basis of this discourse during the 1975-1979 period as published in David P. Chandler, et al., eds., Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988). Importantly, the editors note only a dozen or so Party documents are thought to have survived. Further citations will be referred to as Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p.( ). From 1979 to the 1995, captured Khmer Rouge documents form the foundation of the discourse to include two unpublished sources graciously provided by Laura Summers. The first document is a 21 page address probably by Pol Pot entitled: "What is the Virtue, the Quality, the Reality and the Responsibility of Democratic Kampuchea in the Past, Present, and Future?", obtained from a KR defector under military leader Ta Mok. The document is dated 2 December 1986 and according to Summers was translated on 29 February 1988 by the Central Intelligence Agency. Future references to it are entitled, "Virtue." The second document is a 48 page address to DK women cadre attributed to Pol Pot by context. The document is titled: "What is the Current Situation in Kampuchea? What Will It Be Like in the Future?". Translated by Steve Header, the document is dated December 1988. Future references to it are entitled "Current." Defector interviews were provided by Steve Header and Lt. Colonel Ed Waller who conducted interviews with some 100 self-demobilized NADK combatants between July 1992 and August 1993 as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Clandestine radio broadcasts are published in FBIS.

as another means of accounting for their viability. Importantly, this same analysis has applicability to any insurgency due to these movements' limited material resources and dependence on symbolic signalling to battle the vast resources of the state.

**D. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Following an introductory chapter, Chapter II discusses insurgency as symbolic action. Using authors versed in symbolic studies, this chapter provides the linkage of symbolic actions to any insurgency. Symbolic activity will be related to five aspects of insurgency that are necessary for viability: legitimacy, popular support, organization, external support, and defeat of adversarial response. These five aspects of viability have relevance to any insurgency study and are analyzed through the symbolic actions of the Khmer Rouge in the following chapters.

Chapter III looks for the sources of symbolic actions in the historical and cultural roots of Cambodia. The insurgency's adopted myths, rituals, and symbols will reflect the influence of a culture over two thousand years old and include the authoritarianism and brutality that underlay the country's history.

Chapter IV analyzes the Khmer Rouge as insurgents attempting to seize Cambodia's state and society. It covers their origins during the 1950s to their victory in 1975. The



chapter relates the application of ethnic discrimination myths, nationalist rituals, and symbolic alliances with the monarchy and the Vietnamese to gain victory.

Chapter V analyzes the Khmer Rouge as rulers of Cambodia. After victory in 1975, the insurgency used a combination of brute force and symbols derived from ancient Khmer mythology and rituals of blood purity in an attempt to create a new nation. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the contribution of symbolic acts to the fall of the revolution in 1979. It demonstrates that the fixation on ritual purification ultimately encouraged the Vietnamese invasion and the Khmer Rouge fall from power.

Chapter VI examines the Khmer Rouge as outlaws of Cambodia. Although repudiated by parliamentary measures, this chapter demonstrates how myths, rituals, and symbols used in the 1970s were reshaped to fit the realities of the 1990s through five important myths that promote a new public image, domestic popularity, enemy incursion, heirs to national resources, and invincibility.

Chapter VII provides an epilogue of the future viability of the Khmer Rouge in relation to the state of Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge leadership understands insurgency is a fight of ideas. Myths, rituals, and symbols of the Khmer Rouge were a means not only of establishing and then reconstructing the insurgency, but provide a resource for continued viability in

the future.



## II. INSURGENCY AS SYMBOLIC ACTION

Insurgencies have one overriding goal: political control of the state. And like politicians dominating the prevailing government, the insurgent employs a host of political actions to gain that control. "Political actions," Murray Edelman explains, "chiefly arouse or satisfy people not by granting or withholding their stable substantive demands, but rather by changing the demands and the expectations."<sup>20</sup> An essential means of changing expectations is by employing the power of myth, ritual, and symbolism to politics. Symbolic actions legitimate the ruling power and also foster "what people can be led to expect of the future."<sup>21</sup>

In fact, the title of this chapter is borrowed from Murray Edelman's classic study, Politics as Symbolic Action. Published over twenty years ago, Edelman describes how "perceptions and misperceptions about political threats and issues are crucial in political behavior."<sup>22</sup> Insurgents create and manipulate perceptions and misperceptions as part of their quest for political power. Manipulation of perceptions is also critical to viability since the insurgent is in a

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<sup>20</sup>Murray Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence, (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

position of weakness compared to the resources of the state. To overcome state power, insurgency employs symbolic actions to create a viable identity for its leadership and its followers. Sociologist David Kertzer explains the process:

Lacking the formal organization and the material resources that help perpetuate the rule of the elite, the politically deprived need a means of defining a new collectivity. This collectivity, created through rituals and symbols, not only provides people with an identity different from that encouraged by the elite, but also serves as a means to recruit others to their side. An insurgent force that lacks its own distinctive symbolism and rites is not likely to get very far.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, creating an identity and manipulating expectations and perceptions become essential to gain control of the state or at the margin, retain viability.

Importantly, symbolic actions create a psychological contagion that inspires leaders, infects followers, and demoralizes adversaries. The insurgent is attempting to influence states of mind and manipulate the population's perceptions of the insurgency through symbolic discourse. Not only are perceptions manipulated, symbolic discourse can supplement the insurgents' use of force as well as help incorporate force in the symbolic message.

Sociologist Bruce Lincoln explains that society is held together as well as dissolved by force and "discourse," a

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<sup>23</sup>David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 181.

combination of myth and ritual.<sup>24</sup> Lincoln describes discourse as "ideological persuasion" which can take not only verbal forms but "also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like . . . to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order."<sup>25</sup> "Together, discourse and force," Lincoln concludes, "are the chief means whereby social borders, hierarchies, institutional formations, and habituated patterns of behaviors are both maintained and modified."<sup>26</sup> As Lincoln applied "discourse" to society, this study will apply it to insurgency.

As Lincoln explained, ruling powers cannot rely on force alone. Force may protect established interests but does not ensure social stability. Lincoln points out that force, in all its forms "remains something of a stopgap measure: effective in the short run, unworkable over the long haul."<sup>27</sup> Society's elites employ discourse to promote social harmony and their own legitimacy thereby reducing the reliance on force. The insurgent, on the other hand, would use force and symbolic actions to "demystify, delegitimize, and deconstruct

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<sup>24</sup>Bruce Lincoln, Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination."<sup>28</sup> Insurgents thus, resort to symbolic forms not only as a necessary means to political power but as an essential tool for viability.

#### A. SYMBOLS DEFINED

Lincoln described symbolic action as "discourse," both verbal and symbolic. Yet other definitions are useful. According to Kenneth Boulding, "A symbolic image is a kind of rough summation or index of a vast complexity of images or roles and structures."<sup>29</sup> He explains they "summariz[e] an extremely complex network of alternatives and situations."<sup>30</sup> Mankind has "no direct means of transcribing sensations, emotions, or feelings except through the crowded channels of symbolic representation."<sup>31</sup> Importantly, he reveals "human imagination can only bear a certain degree of complexity. When the complexity becomes intolerable, it retreats into symbolic images."<sup>32</sup>

Kertzner looks at the essence of symbolic forms and finds

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>29</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1961), pp. 109, 110.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

three distinct properties: (1) "Condensation," the ability to unify a diverse variety of meanings; (2) "Multivocality," the variety of meanings attached to the same symbol; and (3) "Ambiguity," the lack of precise meaning.<sup>33</sup> Each property is essential for insurgent viability. "Condensation" overcomes the diversity of interests an insurgent body would face when confronting a united adversary. This would be especially important in societies where interests are split by ethnic, racial, religious, and village loyalties. As Edelman explains, "It is through their power to merge diverse perceptions and beliefs into a new and unified perspective that symbols affect what men want, what they do, and the identity they create for themselves."<sup>34</sup> "Multivocality" allows different individual interests to see the same symbol but to see it in different ways, thereby protecting what is essentially important to individual identities. The uncertainty of "ambiguity" would ensure that a variety of interest groups see in the symbol what is most appealing to them.

Effectively utilized, symbols exercise enormous influence over the imagination and can help defy material reality. As Kertzer reveals: "People have the unsettling habit of

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<sup>33</sup>Kertzer, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 6.



willingly, even gladly, dying for causes that oppose their material interests. . . ." <sup>35</sup> In the face of an enemy with greater material strength, insurgent viability would hinge on that fact.

Symbols interweave two other important vehicles for insurgent viability, mythology and ritual. Mythology as defined by Edelman is "a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning; it is typically socially cued rather than empirically based." <sup>36</sup> Jerome Bruner describes myth as "liv[ing] on the feather line between fantasy and reality. It must be neither too good nor too bad to be true, nor must it be too true." <sup>37</sup>

Myth is critical for insurgency because it simplifies a complex world, helps men accept strain and deprivation, promotes conformity to a certain idea, and furthers quiet acceptance to elites' views. <sup>38</sup> An effective myth causes people to act, which could be embodied in notions of describing one side as "unjustly oppressed" and the other as "hateful." <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Kertzer, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup>Jerome S. Bruner, "Myth and Identity," in Henry A. Murray, ed., Myth and Mythmaking, (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1960), p. 279.

<sup>38</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 157.

<sup>39</sup>Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization,

Myth not only compels men to act, men will come to identify with it. "It is not simply society that patterns itself on the idealizing myths," Bruner explains, "but unconsciously it is the individual man as well who is able to structure his internal clamor of identities in terms of prevailing myth. Life then produces myth and finally imitates it."<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, myth can be used by the insurgency to fit the circumstances of the moment because as Joseph Campbell makes clear: "There is no final system for the interpretation of myths, and there will never be any such thing."<sup>41</sup>

Ritual has a more rigorous interpretation than myth according to Steven Lukes. He defines it as "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance."<sup>42</sup> Kertzer echoes Lukes by defining ritual "as standardized, repetitive symbolic action."<sup>43</sup>

Ritual is valuable to insurgency for a number of reasons

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 153.

<sup>40</sup>Bruner, pp. 282, 283.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, (New York: Bollinger Foundation, Inc., 1949), p. 381.

<sup>42</sup>Steven Lukes, Essays in Social Theory, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 9. 54.

<sup>43</sup>Kertzer, p. 128.

articulated by Kertzer:

ritual fulfills important organizational needs, it helps provide legitimacy at the same time as it mystifies actual power relations, it facilitates popular solidarity even where consensus is conspicuously absent, and it leads people to conceive of their political universe in certain ways.<sup>44</sup>

Since ritual is not just repetitive action but require symbols to give it its "psychological underpinnings,"<sup>45</sup> insurgent symbols are not random slogans, signs, and images. The insurgent leadership must carefully chose its symbols to elicit the desired response from their following, which in many cases is to act in ways that lead to an insurgent's irrevocable ritual: death.

#### **B. SYMBOLIC SOURCES**

Considering the gravity of symbolic action in insurgency, where do we look for its sources? "[C]ultural patterns, according to Clifford Geertz, are "extrinsic sources of information," and are a good starting point to get some understanding of where insurgency would draw the necessary mythology, ritual, and symbols to give viability to the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

movement.<sup>46</sup> But symbolic analysis must take into account that culture is not static. "Culture is a process, part of the historical flux," writes sociologist Sami Zubaida, "and cultural patterns are not fixed but reproduced at every generation in relation to different situations and conjunctures."<sup>47</sup> Symbols will emulate this process and be reproduced by the insurgent to fit his circumstances.

### C. APPLICABILITY TO INSURGENCY

The challenge for the insurgent leadership is to find that moment from the past or image of the future that will best serve as inspiration and activator for society. Nationalist movements, for instance, will utilize symbols that glorify their perception of themselves. They will have a "quality of self-reference" according to Breuilly.

Nationalists celebrate themselves rather than some transcendent reality, whether this be located in another world or in a future society, although the celebration also involves a concern with transformation of present reality.<sup>48</sup>

Symbolic activity, or what Lincoln described as "discourse,"

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<sup>46</sup>Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), p. 92.

<sup>47</sup>Sami Zubaida, Islam, The People and The State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East, (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1993), p. 123.

<sup>48</sup>John Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 64.

communicate these individual beliefs and understandings to shape insurgents, their potential followers, as well as their adversary's perceptions.

Symbolic activity can be applied to insurgent activity in five important ways: (1) to legitimate the leadership, (2) to broaden domestic popular support, (3) to promote organizational cohesion, (4) to elicit foreign external support, and (5) to defeat adversarial response.

For purposes of this study, it is assumed that each of these five elements form a necessary condition of insurgent viability. The insurgency seeks to adapt symbolic activity to each of the five concepts to solidify their meaning. A weak cognition would entail a breakdown in insurgent viability. Accordingly, viability is defined as the ability of the insurgency to remain in continuous existence as an alternative governing structure. The relationship of symbolic activity to each of the five concepts is discussed below.

#### **D. LEGITIMACY**

Legitimacy will be defined in this study as the establishment or adoption of the symbolic representation of rulership. For example, one symbolic representation of the right to rule is the possession of a royal bloodline. An insurgent, lacking the royal blood, would attempt to co-opt the ruler's bloodline to the movement through alliance. In doing so, he seeks legitimacy.

## E. POPULAR SUPPORT

Having attained legitimacy, the insurgent will seek to reinforce the symbolic representation of the right to rule by achieving popular support. He attempts to "go about inventing political symbols that will express accurately the ideas and principles of the new order."<sup>49</sup> New symbols require rituals to make the created political environment sacred to its following. The leadership will attempt to find symbols that give it a "semi-divine" status so that the following accepts the ruler as "beyond the realm of human caprice."<sup>50</sup>

Another important way to broaden support is to reach into the past and find a unifying symbol for society. Social scientist Bruce Lincoln describes how tribal societies unite under a common ancestor and "the more remote a given ancestor, the larger will be the social group that is made up of his or her descendants."<sup>51</sup> These ancestors must be "called into being" through "allusions, gestures, narratives, displays of emblematic objects or designs, and so forth."<sup>52</sup>

Thus, broad public support is won by employing symbols

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<sup>49</sup>Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 54. Hunt applies symbolic analysis to the French Revolution.

<sup>50</sup>Kertzer, p. 38.

<sup>51</sup>Lincoln, *Discourse*, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid, pp. 19, 20.

that are not perceived to be culturally limiting to the target population. To adopt a narrowly perceived symbol would alienate ethnic groups or religious factions within the society, thereby limiting potential popular support for the insurgent cause. The insurgency may attempt to exclude certain groups to fuel popular hatreds, yet even these groups can be recruited initially and disposed of after power is won.

Universal appeal can be made through iconographic media, such as monuments, posters, flags, and badges.<sup>53</sup> Or they can offer culturally limited material such as dress and facial hair to establish group credibility with the local public.<sup>54</sup> Language communicates important images and can be a unifying factor. For instance, language that emphasizes the image of racial superiority holds powerful individual appeal despite its logical absurdity.<sup>55</sup>

#### **F. ORGANIZATION**

Insurgent cohesion, like social cohesion depends on

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<sup>53</sup>Laba, p. 132.

<sup>54</sup>See Kaplan's study on the credibility dress and beards offered the Mujahidin in Afghanistan in Soldiers of God: With the Mujahidin in Afghanistan, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990).

<sup>55</sup> "The image of racial superiority . . . is logically absurd," contends Kenneth Boulding. "It nevertheless exhibits deplorable persistence because, perhaps, it is able to repair the rather tattered value image of the individual holding it." See Boulding, p. 168.

conformity within the organization. Insurgencies employ the same notions formulated by Durkheim for societies: "It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be in unison."<sup>56</sup> The means of building organizational solidarity are found in cultural ritual. As Kertzer makes clear, ritual is used "to nourish their image of common identity and mutual obligation."<sup>57</sup> Rituals of initiation and loyalty oaths are obvious examples of symbolic actions. "People can communicate their inner mental states only through the use of such symbols, and the way that they can best express their solidarity is by participating as a group in symbolic action," explains Kertzer.<sup>58</sup> Recalling Lincoln's argument, another important organizing principle is by invoking ancient origins which can maximize potential recruits under the umbrella of shared ancestors. Because symbols mean different things to different individuals, the solidarity does not need consensus as Kertzer explains. "It is the very ambiguity of the symbols employed in ritual action that makes ritual useful in fostering solidarity

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<sup>56</sup>Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, as quoted in Kertzer, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup>Kertzer, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 62.



without consensus."<sup>59</sup>

#### **G. EXTERNAL SUPPORT**

For the insurgent to exist on the battlefield consideration must be given to external support. The insurgency attempts to convince an external partner to support the insurgent cause. The insurgency must generate the perception that it will win in the end; in other words, create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Foreign assistance would attempt to propel this perception by realigning existing power relationships with external aid.

The goal of the insurgent is to create a sense of joint action and alliance with the external partner according to Edelman.<sup>60</sup> The insurgent elicits the supporting external power to lend support through "metaphoric definition," an attempt to have the external power see the insurgent as similar in "values and modes of behavior."<sup>61</sup> The end result the insurgency seeks is material support to follow perceived support.

#### **H. DEFEATING ADVERSARIAL RESPONSE**

But just as external support is important to viability, so too the internal war of symbols that takes place between

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>60</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

the insurgency and the government. Because the insurgent is weak in relation to the government, the insurgent must attempt to establish symbolic links to the population to garner support and legitimacy. The significance of that message comes in the interpretation, not in the act itself. The goal in the words of Kertzer is to "delegitimize the established political order and inspire popular solidarity around a new series of political symbols."<sup>62</sup> Yet another important goal, Edelman explains, is to "immobilize large groups of people who might otherwise be expected to use their political resources in common for an instrumental objective."<sup>63</sup>

Elections would be one way of "immobilizing" the insurgents' political resources. The government can use elections as a tool for influencing the populations' state of mind. Lukes explains elections as a ritual process:

Participation in elections can plausibly be interpreted as the symbolic affirmation of the voters' acceptance of the political system and of their role within it. The ritual of voting draws their attention to a particular model of 'politics', of the nature of political conflict and the possibilities of political change. Moreover, it both results from and reinforces the belief, in which there is normally little truth, that elections give them an influence over government policy.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Kertzer, p. 161.

<sup>63</sup>Edelman, Politics as Symbolic Action, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup>Lukes, p. 72.

Political rituals, such as elections, are part of the "'mobilization of bias'--that 'set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals [sic] and constitutional procedures ("rules of the game") that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others'."<sup>65</sup> Thus, elections can also be used by insurgents following their victory at the expense of the fallen government.

If victory remains elusive, the insurgent attempts to create a myth of invincibility. If successful, the government is forced into a series of negotiations. For the insurgent, negotiations are a means of "legitimizing and perpetuating the political paradigms" of the insurgency.<sup>66</sup> Importantly, negotiations are supplemented by other forms of symbolic warfare against the government. This could include symbolic acts of terrorism, as well as propagating images to dehumanize and vilify their adversaries. By manipulating images, the insurgents have "prepared its members to kill the out-group."<sup>67</sup>

## I. CONCLUSIONS

Myth, rituals, and symbols communicate insurgent dreams

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 72,73.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>67</sup>Laba, p. 144.

and expectations as well as create a distinct psychological contagion for their audience. By manipulating notions of reality, symbolic actions can promote strength where there is weakness and provide unity where there is faction. Myth, ritual, and symbols thus become not metaphors of power, "they [are] the means and ends of power itself."<sup>68</sup>

Symbolic actions are also an important part of understanding insurgent viability. In an attempt to understand how these symbols are translated into action, they can be applied to five distinct areas critical to insurgent viability: (1) to legitimate the insurgent leadership, (2) to broaden domestic popular support, (3) to promote organizational cohesion, (4) to elicit foreign external support, and (5) to defeat adversarial response.

Each of these five themes will come out in the study of the Khmer Rouge insurgency. But most important, the Khmer Rouge success and failure in the use of symbolic activity will be critical to its viability.

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<sup>68</sup>Hunt, Politics, p. 54.



### III. THE ROOTS: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SOURCES OF KHMER ROUGE SYMBOLIC ACTIONS

The Khmer Rouge are woven into the fabric of Cambodia's rich historical and cultural past. To understand where the insurgency would draw their myths, rituals, and symbols requires an understanding of the inheritance bestowed on the insurgency by two thousand years of history.

As writer Elizabeth Becker makes clear, "The touchstone of Cambodian history, of Cambodia's identity, is the temple complex at Angkor.

Those massive stone wonders are to modern Cambodians what the Parthenon is to today's Greeks -- architectural masterpieces and solid, visible reminders that Cambodia was once the premier state and culture of the region."<sup>69</sup>

Although the Khmer ruled from Angkor, the capital of the empire for 600 years (802 A.D. to 1432), the presence of the Khmer people in the area of modern Cambodia can be traced back to the 1st century A.D. when small remnants of Khmer existed on the borders of the empire of Funan which was centered in present day southern Vietnam.<sup>70</sup> The Khmer overran Funan in the

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<sup>69</sup>Elizabeth Becker, When The War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 46.

<sup>70</sup>Russell Ross, ed., Cambodia: A Country Study, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 1990, p. xxv.

6th century and created the polity of Chenla. Chandler explains the modern word Cambodia came from this period. "Chen-La was inhabited by Khmer, and the founder of the Khmer dynasty, according to legends, was Kambu Svayambhuva. 'Kambuja'--hence the French 'Cambodge' and the English 'Cambodia' is traceable to his name."<sup>71</sup>

Chenla would be developed by a series of rulers into the Angkor empire, the strongest empire in Southeast Asia during its peak in the 13th century. Angkor would form the seat of the empire and Angkor Wat, its largest religious temple, would be its symbol of greatness.

The walls of Angkor are carved with kings at war, dancers at play, and fierce Hindu gods who demand prostration from the earthly population that toiled for Angkor. Angkor was also the home of the gods, "a microcosm of the universe."<sup>72</sup> A poem written in the Sanskrit language of the era described, "a city enclosed in immense walls like the mountains that girdle the great world."<sup>73</sup> Angkor is the key to Khmer culture and pride; it cradled a civilization that believed in its racial superiority and majestic arts. The massive towers of Angkor Wat will grace every flag of modern Cambodia, including that

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<sup>71</sup>David P. Chandler, A History of Cambodia, (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>72</sup>Becker, p. 48.

<sup>73</sup>Becker, p. 48.

of the Khmer Rouge, and its ancient kings who reigned as "deva-raj" or "god-king" will influence every Cambodian notion of leadership to the modern day.

India had exported the "god-king" concept to the Khmer, along with other beliefs to include Hindu philosophy, the Sanskrit language, and Theravada Buddhism. The Angkorean emperor Jayavarman VII (1181-1218) is a good example of how these Indian concepts became translated into political realities for the population of ancient Cambodia. Jayavarman VII accepted the tenants of Theravada Buddhism as did most of his empire, but obedience still fell to the king. Believing in the racial superiority of the Khmer over neighboring countries, Jayavarman devoted his reign to numerous wars of expansion. Additionally, he demanded levees of people and war slaves to build elaborate irrigation systems and prodigious construction projects like roads and temples. In conscripting thousands of Khmer to build an ethereal world, Jayavarman and the kings of Cambodia created a world of ritual and symbols which reinforced not only the obedience of the people, but brought glory to the king.

#### **A. BRUTALITY FROM THE PAST**

Significantly, a current of brutality underlay this obedience. Kings mutilated brothers and decapitated rivals to prevent any secessionist plot. Justice was just as brutal in the Angkorean era. Chou Ta-Kuan, a Chinese envoy to Angkor



wrote: "People accused of serious crimes were buried alive in ditches dug outside the capital's west gates. Lesser crimes were punished by cutting off toes, fingers, and arms."<sup>74</sup> Chandler quotes the same Chinese source to summarize the authoritarianism of the empire: "'even though it is a kingdom of barbarians,'" Chou Ta-Kuan wrote, "'these people certainly know what a ruler is.'"<sup>75</sup>

#### **B. ANGKOR REDISCOVERED**

With successive kings demanding more resources for their personal glory, Angkor began a slow decline with the exhaustion of its people. Foreign armies from bordering Siam (Thailand) and Vietnam competed to carve up the weakened empire for the next 600 years. Angkor was abandoned as the capital moved south to benefit from increased trade with China as well as to consolidate territory. Yet Angkor's traditions of a "god king," a belief in cultural superiority, and a current of brutality survived through the passage of symbols and rituals with the help of the French.

France stepped into Cambodian history in the 19th century to prevent the Khmer nation from being swallowed by another European power. Cambodia, exhausted from 600 years of border encroachment could do nothing to prevent a French protectorate

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<sup>74</sup>Becker, p. 84.

<sup>75</sup>Chandler, History, p. 75.

being established in 1863. France had hopes of tapping into China's vast trade and wanted to control Cambodia as a southern route to the Chinese interior, however, the Khmer fell increasing under French exploitation. The French allowed the Khmer to keep their king, but actual governance would be a French concern. Although Cambodian peasants revolted against foreign rule for two years in the Uprising of 1885, they received no support from the monarchy. The king did not want to lose his place symbolic place of power for fear that the French would replace him if he supported rebellion.

Ironically, France not only ruled Cambodia but uncovered the rich historical past of the Khmer people. French scholars revealed the rituals and symbols of the numerous Angkorean temples discovered during their rule. Becker explains French efforts:

During one century of painstaking labor, French archaeologists, historians, and linguists resurrected Cambodia's buried history and revived the Khmer sense of nationhood. Around Angkor the French rebuilt seventy-two stone temples, including Angkor Wat itself....<sup>76</sup>

The temples of Angkor had been abandoned for 600 years, but the French scholarship effort revived the Khmer sense of national consciousness embodied in Angkor. The Khmer spirit

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<sup>76</sup>Becker, p. 54.

had been beaten down by foreign invasion, but French efforts made them proud of their past and more intent on reclaiming their future.

For the French, the future lay with the Vietnamese not the Khmer. The French felt the Vietnamese were the race to back. "The French had decided," Becker explains, "that the Vietnamese were the industrious race of the future and the Khmer a lazy doomed people grown decadent on Buddhism and the rule of their opulent monarchs."<sup>77</sup>

### **C. ETHNIC MAKEUP**

Cambodia was (and remains) essentially ethnically homogeneous being more than 90 percent Khmer. The majority of Khmer had little social mobility and worked in rice farming and civil service. The remaining population included Chinese, Cham (Islamic Khmer), Khmer Loeu (Highland Khmer that include Shan and Kula), Khmer Krom, and Vietnamese. The Chinese, the largest ethnic minority, usually work as moneylenders and in commerce. The Cham, who originated from Vietnam are an Islamic people (probably due to Malay contacts), and worked in trade and farming communities. The Khmer Loeu are highland tribes who lived in scattered villages and raise dry rice in the mountains of central and north Cambodia. The Khmer Krom lived in areas conquered by South Vietnam but later migrated

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<sup>77</sup>Becker, p. 52.

to the Mekong Delta region of Cambodia. The Vietnamese arrived with the French as middlemen and service workers.

Animosity existed between the Vietnamese and Khmer due in part to the cultural and religious divide between them which manifested as continuous warfare between nations. The Vietnamese were influenced from China and took much of the Chinese cultural habits, whereas the Khmer looked to India for their cultural and religious past. Cambodian folk tales put this ancient hatred in perspective:

According to ... legend, Vietnamese soldiers took three Cambodians captive long ago and buried them alive up to their necks with just their heads sticking out of the ground. Then the Vietnamese made a fire between the heads and set a kettle on top of the heads as cookstones.<sup>78</sup>

Despite these legends, Vietnamese communities continued to grow during the French occupation. Yet, the cultural divide between Vietnamese and Khmer did not close. Racial superiority myths continue to fuel animosity. According to Cambodian author Haing Ngor,

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<sup>78</sup>Haing Ngor, A Cambodian Odyssey, (New York: Warner Books, 1987) p. 39. Whether this event actually happened or not can probably never be proved, but as political scientist Walker Connor makes clear, "it is not what is, but what people believe is that has behavioral consequences." See Walker Connor, Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), p. 75.

[a]t the bottom of our differences is race. 'Pure' Khmers have dark brown skins. Vietnamese and Thais have pale yellow skins. To most Asians, including our neighbors, the lighter the skin color, the higher the status. They look down on Cambodians for having darker skins than themselves. Cambodians, who are shy by nature, sometimes outwardly appear to accept a lower status while inwardly resenting it.<sup>79</sup>

#### D. CULTURAL TIES

The French did nothing to close this divide between peoples but allowed the perceived differences to solidify. For the majority of Khmer this reinforced the traditional reliance on family ties and the village structure. Respect for authority and old age, deference to women, and attention to the tenets of Buddhism remained fundamental to the social fabric. Folk tales helped knit this fabric together. Like the legend of the cookstones, the tales are passed down in this oral culture from generation to generation.

Cambodian children learn their culture through the telling of Khmer folk tales--stories rich with ribald, often black humor, with a taste for sensuality and for great food. The world of these fables is peopled with all-powerful ministers of the king, greedy crocodiles, wise rabbits, and ordinary Cambodians who allow their violent passions to overrule

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<sup>79</sup>Ngor, p. 384.

common sense.<sup>80</sup>

Violent passions lay deep in the Khmer soul and often take the form of revenge according to Ngor:

To outsiders, and often even to ourselves, Cambodians looked peaceful enough.... But inside, hidden from sight the entire time, was *kum*. *Kum* is a Cambodian word for a particularly Cambodian mentality of revenge--to be precise, a longstanding grudge leading to revenge much more damaging than the original injury. If I hit you with my fist and you wait five years and then shoot me in the back one dark night, that is *kum*.... It is the infection that grows on our national soul.<sup>81</sup>

Khmer society has one other legacy, "a minor tradition of torture,"<sup>82</sup> explained Ngor. He does not relate where the tradition comes from but folk tales and ancient images of bodies buried to their heads outside the Angkor gates provide some clues.

#### **E. FOREIGN INVASIONS**

Falling back on cultural ties, the majority of Khmer remained cooperative natives for their French masters. There would be a change in conquerors when the Japanese took control of Southeast Asia during World War II, but even then, Vichy

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<sup>80</sup>Becker, p. 82.

<sup>81</sup>Ngor, p. 9. Italics added.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

France was allowed to supervise the Cambodian population. In these circumstances, Thailand saw an opportunity in 1941 to gather territory from an impotent Cambodia and struck the northwest provinces. "In one stroke, Cambodia lost one-third of its territory and nearly half a million citizens."<sup>83</sup> With each foreign incursion, the country became only more bitter and resentful of outsiders. The Khmer turned to the king in this time of weakness, the traditional symbol of strength and authority, but the monarchy remained impotent against the foreign incursions. It would be left to France, as a victorious ally in World War II, to regain the lost territory taken from Thailand while consolidating its rule in Cambodia. In an attempt at greater control, the French placed an eighteen-year-old prince on the Cambodian throne named Norodom Sihanouk. Yet, France misjudged the prince, and soon had to contend with Sihanouk as he sought and won Cambodian independence in 1953.

#### **F. THE COUP**

By 1970, however, Sihanouk looked for new allies having been deposed in a coup by General Lon Nol. "I call on all my children," Sihanouk bellowed from exile in Peking, "both military and civilian, who cannot stand to remain under the traitor's [General Lon Nol] power, and who are courageous and

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<sup>83</sup>Becker, p. 59.

determined to liberate the fatherland, to fight our enemy."<sup>84</sup>  
One gathering who answered the monarch's call were a throng of rural peasants lead by disciplined cadres he named the "Khmer Rouge".

#### G. CONCLUSIONS

The Khmer Rouge were not the first to bring authoritarian rule and brutality to Cambodia. In fact, for the last 2,000 years, the historical and cultural roots of the country were emersed in anything but popular notions of democracy and individual justice.

But foreign incursions had many important impacts. Incursions by the French did not heal the split between Khmer and Vietnamese cultures, but France did prevent Cambodia from further territorial losses to the Vietnamese and Thais. French scholarship efforts reawakened Cambodian nationalism with images of Cambodia's former greatness unearthed at complexes like Angkor Wat. Significantly, the imposition of French rule and other foreign encroachments also upset traditional notions of monarchy due to its impotence in the face of incursions. Into these resentments stepped insurgency.

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<sup>84</sup>Ngor, p. 47.





#### IV. THE INSURGENTS: THE KHMER ROUGE FROM ORIGINS TO 1975

Cambodia was ripe for insurgency as early as the 1940s. Serge Thion, a Cambodian scholar, explains the monarchy had already begun to suffer a loss of legitimacy under French rule. "The gradual loss of substance suffered by Khmer kingship under French rule," Thion explains, "is the obvious reason for the waning of cultural constraints which impeded the growth of a new concept of political change."<sup>85</sup> Traditionally, the patron-client system governed Cambodia and was ingrained in the population through their oral culture. Chandler explains,

The rectitude of these intransitive, graded relationships has been drummed into everyone from birth. Cambodian proverbs and didactic literature are filled with references to the helplessness of the individual and to the importance of accepting power relationships as they are.<sup>86</sup>

The absence of "intermediate structures" helped "predispose" the Cambodian people to those who wielded absolute power or

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<sup>85</sup>Serge Thion, "The Cambodian Idea of Revolution," in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>86</sup>Chandler as quoted by Thion, "The Cambodian Idea," p. 12.

sought to wield it.<sup>87</sup> One group seeking that power were the Khmer Rouge. These insurgents relied on symbolic actions to maintain viability in opposition to the power of the state. Their symbolic discourse addressed five elements: legitimacy, popular support, organization, external support, and defeating adversarial response. Each of these concepts will be examined in turn to understand the Khmer Rouge bid for continued survival as insurgents in Cambodia.

#### A. LEGITIMACY

Sihanouk had not acted alone in opposing the French colonial presence. Armed groups called the Khmer Issarak ("*Liberated Khmers*") fought against the French with the aid of Thai backing or as fugitives fleeing French justice.<sup>88</sup> Organized in 1940, this movement grew throughout the 1940s until forced to Vietnam to escape French repression.<sup>89</sup> In

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<sup>87</sup>Francois Ponchaud, "Social Change in the Vortex of Revolution," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 152.

<sup>88</sup>See Chandler, Brother Number One, p. 24. The Issarak also used symbols from Cambodia's past to legitimate the movement. One resistance tract explained, "'the Cambodian race, Cambodian blood, and Cambodian nationality are all the children of his majesty Jayavarman, the builder of Angkor Thom and Angkor Wat. Rise up, open your eyes, get back onto the proper path!'" Quoted from Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History, p. 34.

<sup>89</sup>See Serge Thion, "Chronology of Khmer Communism," in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), p. 291.

Vietnam, some members of the Issarak joined forces with the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) led by Ho Chi Minh. Out of the ICP would emerge the first Cambodian communist party, the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), created on 30 September 1951.<sup>90</sup> In 1960, the KPRP was reorganized as the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK). By 1963, Pol Pot became its acting secretary.

Pol Pot, the nom de guerre of the future leader of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, was born in 1928 in Kompong Thom province in north central Cambodia with the given name Saloth Sar. Although the son of well-to-do farmers, Pol Pot, was in fact propelled to a position of privilege due to his family connections to the royal palace in Phnom Penh. Pol Pot would not only have the opportunity to visit the palace, but he would be introduced to the rudiments of Buddhism and the "high Khmer" language through the temple school. This instruction must have improved his awareness of the history behind Khmer symbols for state and religion. These same privileged connections would lead to a Paris scholarship where he and other future cadres, who included Ieng Sary, Son Sen, and Khieu Samphan would be exposed to French communist intellectuals.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>91</sup>All four of these future leaders studied in Paris in the 1950s. Chandler states Pol Pot became a member of the

From Marxist instructors, Pol Pot and his cadre, learned the importance of analyzing society and its classes to further the revolutionary struggle.<sup>92</sup> Significantly, the "Khmer students' time in Paris coincided with the last years of Stalin's life and the apotheosis of the cult of personality surrounding him."<sup>93</sup> This also was the point when France's communist party "was considered the most Stalinist party outside eastern Europe."<sup>94</sup> Pol Pot would become a member of this party, spend a month as a volunteer worker for Tito's communist Yugoslavia, return to Cambodia in 1953, and "become one of the first French-trained Cambodian communists to join the Vietminh at the front in the war for independence against France."<sup>95</sup>

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French Communist Party around 1952. See David Chandler, Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot, (Thailand: Silkview Press, Thailand, 1993), p. 28. This period of scholarly interest by the Cambodian communists would indicate phase A of the Hroch model of national movements. Miroslav Hroch, Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 25.

<sup>92</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 152.

<sup>93</sup>David P. Chandler, Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot, (Thailand: Silkview Press, 1993), p. 27.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p.27.

<sup>95</sup>Elizabeth Becker, When The War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 81.

Although exposed to foreign communist movements, Pol Pot had developed his own notions of communism. In 1952 he published his first known political work, "Monarchy or Democracy?" under the pseudonym "Original Khmer." In this diatribe Pol Pot outlined his hatred for the monarchy, held at this time by Norodom Sihanouk since 1941. Although dynastic rule was no stranger to Cambodia, according to the perceptions of Pol Pot the people are "'like animals, kept as soldiers . . . or slaves . . . made to work night and day to feed the king and his entourage . . . .'"<sup>96</sup> Ironically, Pol Pot's own future period of power followed this same description.

**"ORIGINAL KHMER"**

Writing as "Original Khmer," Pol Pot was creating a foundation myth for himself that would legitimate his desire to overthrow the monarchy. Aware of monarchy's hold on Cambodia, Pol Pot sought to throw off colonialism first in Vietnam and then enlist Vietnam's aid to throw off monarchy in his own country. Chandler points out that, "Saloth Sar himself was assiduously pro-Vietnamese in all his activities before 1967 and retained Vietnamese confidence until the 1970s."<sup>97</sup> But writing under the pseudonym "Original Khmer," gives an early glimpse of his belief in ethnic mythology. Pol

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<sup>96</sup>Chandler, Brother, pp. 39,40.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

Pot, is defining the qualities that make up a true Khmer--namely himself--one who would reject all past Cambodian history and culture to begin anew.

The future leader of the Khmer Rouge had by 1966 experiences in North Vietnam witnessing the tactics of a small country fighting a larger foreign power as well as experience in China during the mobilization of the masses in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>98</sup> Both experiences play a part in his own revolutionary implementation. One result of his experiences was to change the WPK into the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) in the early 1960s and direct its move from sanctuaries in Vietnam to northeast Cambodia.

#### ***FOREST SPIRITS***

Moving the communist resistance to the forests of northeast Cambodia was an important factor in influencing the Khmer population through popular mythology and symbols. Dark, inaccessible forests were traditionally places where powerful spirits dwelled. By locating resistance leadership here, the communists:

were conforming to heroic stereotypes in Hindu and Buddhist mythology--stereotypes embedded in Cambodian popular thought--whereby bandits, exiled princes, and religious ascetics stored up arcane wisdom, merit, and martial skills while living isolated in the forests, only to emerge later as

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 64

invulnerable leaders.<sup>99</sup>

Pol Pot and his communist following used the forests to organize covertly from government authorities, and probably refined ideas to motivate poor tribal minorities living in remote communities to enlist in his planned revolution.<sup>100</sup> Controlling the countryside was key to Pol Pot's grab for power. As he later remarked, "'in order to take the whole place, it is necessary first to seize the whole countryside.'"<sup>101</sup>

#### B. POPULAR SUPPORT

Yet the late 1950s and early 1960s were the wilderness years for the communists. They themselves perceived them as a time of lost identity. As a later CPK broadcast in 1976 related: "In this period, we lost all sense of national soul and identity."<sup>102</sup> CPK leaders had returned to Cambodia with a

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>100</sup>The period marks the beginning of patriotic agitation or Phase B of the Hroch model of national movements for Pol Pot's cadre. See Miroslav Hroch, Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 25.

<sup>101</sup>Nayan Chanda, "Making Money," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 156, iss 5, February 4, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>102</sup>David Chandler, "Seeing Red: Perceptions of Cambodian History in Democratic Kampuchea," in David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan, eds., Revolution and Its Aftermath in



foreign education, yet were blocked from participation in government due to the strength of the state.

Repudiated in national elections in 1955,<sup>103</sup> the communist leaders of the CPK formed their plans without popular support as well. In Pol Pot's words:

The people were unable to elect progressive figures [communist political candidates] because the power-holding class had guns, weapons, laws and courts, as well as other institutions with which to oppress the people.<sup>104</sup>

#### ***A NEW BIRTH DATE***

In an attempt to cover this period of communist illegitimacy, a foundation myth for the CPK was created by Pol Pot. The communists had to eliminate notions that there were other popular forces who had resisted the colonial powers in the 1940s and 50s. The Khmer Serei (Free Khmer) who had opposed Sihanouk's grab for power were condemned by Pol Pot as creations of a "Japanese fascist clique and the American CIA

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Kampuchea: Eight Essays, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983), p. 41.

<sup>103</sup>A 1976 document in the CPK journal *Tung Padevat* emphasized the same notion: "We know that popular opinion throughout the country supported [radical candidates] by 99 percent but state power lay in enemy hands.... The lesson of 1955 was that we lack the means to win an election. Only by fighting a revolution could we defeat the enemy." Chandler, "Seeing Red," p. 41. This same lesson appears to have been perceived in the 1993 elections.

<sup>104</sup>Chandler, "Seeing Red," p. 41.

. . . ."<sup>105</sup> The Vietnamese who had assisted, trained, and fought for the CPK were removed from Khmer Rouge history by changing the birth of the party. "Set the birth of the Party at 1960 instead;" reads a secret party document, "so that we are not close to others--make a clean break."<sup>106</sup>

#### **"LEADERLESS PEASANTS"**

The members of the CPK were also shrouded in myth. The CPK were not Vietnamese trained cadres but "anonymous, leaderless peasant masses which . . . fought long and courageously against the French."<sup>107</sup> According to Pol Pot these "leaderless peasants" had no taint of Vietnamese influence nor were they backed by any fascist regime. But as Chandler makes clear: "There is no evidence that such a movement ever existed . . . ."<sup>108</sup>

#### **"MISERABLE" MINORITIES**

Yet Pol Pot needed followers because his was but one of three communist groups operating inside Cambodia during the 1960s. Two other factions challenged his future leadership of

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>106</sup>Taken from a secret 1976 Central Committee document. See David P. Chandler, et al., eds., Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>107</sup>Chandler , "Seeing Red," p. 40.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

the communist revolution: a faction dedicated to Vietnamese socialism from the old Indochinese Communist Party operating in the eastern provinces between the Mekong river and Vietnam; and another faction with a strong Maoist loyalty operating in the south and southwest between the Elephant and Cardamom mountains.<sup>109</sup>

Consigned to the forests of northeast Cambodia, the CPK looked to the indigenous forest population for support. Revolutionary appeals to the majority of peasants who worked in the south would have been rejected. These peasants "shied away from any involvement in a complete overturning of their world (and cosmic) order."<sup>110</sup> The Khmer Rouge looked instead to the minority populations for man power: the Khmer Loeu, Shan and Kula, as well as Thai. According to Pol Pot, minorities formed the basis of his support. "'My backing base was in the regions of the national minorities, that is the Northeast region. I knew perfectly these national minorities. They were very miserable . . . .'"<sup>111</sup> He further explained, they

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<sup>109</sup>Kathleen Gough, "The Situation in Kampuchea," Contemporary-Marxism, 6, Spring, 1983, p. 210.

<sup>110</sup>Thion, "The Cambodian Idea," p. 23. Just as Hroch explained in Phase B, "the agitation of the patriots sooner or later influenced a growing number of members of the oppressed nationality." Hroch, p. 23.

<sup>111</sup>Kenneth Quinn, "Explaining the Terror," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 236.

were "'completely illiterate people who did not have even the slightest idea of cities, automobiles and Parliament [but who] dared to fight under the guidance of The Party . . . .'"<sup>112</sup>

The CPK cadre probably emphasized the policies of discrimination displayed by the present government and the minority population's important role in the future regime. The CPK could also emphasize the myths of racial discrimination the minority populations perceived coming from the more urban south. Sociologist Frank Smith confirms the discrimination myths that separate the Cambodian dark skinned rural population from the light skinned urban population.

Dark skin has long been associated in Cambodia with poverty and manual labor, light skin color with prosperity and the cities.... By association, dark skin is also seen as indicative of a low moral character, since economic prosperity is in many ways indicative of a higher degree of stored Buddhist merit....<sup>113</sup>

Ponchaud felt the cadre exploited an area where Buddhism was not a strongly held belief which helped recruitment.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>113</sup>Smith, Frank, "Interpretive Accounts of the Khmer Rouge Years: Personal Experience in Cambodian Peasant World View," Center for Southeast Asian Studies, No. 18, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989, p. 29. Smith interviewed numerous Cambodian peasants who had dealt with the KR. One described the insurgents as "'black bastards.'" p. 29. Another said, "'... those people just came out of the forest; they couldn't read; they had no manners; they were just like animals.'" p. 30.

<sup>114</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 171.

The Khmer Rouge recruited the Khmer Cham, an Islamic minority, whose religion sanctioned fighting ferociously in a just cause.<sup>115</sup> Cadres manipulated and inspired Cham notions of future revenge against their Buddhist oppressors.<sup>116</sup> The Cham "hoped the communists would win and reverse the longstanding policies of benign discrimination practiced by the central authorities in Phnom Penh. . . ." <sup>117</sup>

#### ***CHENLA VS. FUNAN***

Additionally, Ponchaud explains the Khmer Rouge played up the historic tensions between two ancient empires that preceded the Angkor period: the Chenla region, the middle area of Cambodia along the Mekong, against the region of Funan, found in the southern delta. Communicating myths of Sambaur's greatness as the capital of the ancient Chenla empire, Pol Pot and his cadre recruited heavily in provinces that had traditions of rebellion against their historic enemies in the south.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>The Cham had migrated from the former kingdom of Champa on the Vietnamese coast to escape the encroachment of Vietnamese settlers in the 16th century. See David Hawk, "The Photographic Record," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 212.

<sup>116</sup>Francois Ponchaud, Cambodia Year Zero, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1977), p. 132.

<sup>117</sup>Becker, p. 262.

<sup>118</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 159, 160. The author notes the state's repression of peasants in this region

### **THE "NEGLECTED"**

Despite all these symbolic actions for support, the majority of the population was not won over to the insurgency. Sihanouk, who resided in Khmer Rouge camps after his fall in the 1970 coup, summed up the Khmer Rouge popular support as: "Poor peasants, mountain people, the inhabitants of forest regions, and the most remote villages, those most 'neglected' by the old regime . . . ." <sup>119</sup> Although a minority movement, the Khmer Rouge recognized the importance of organization in a fractured nation.

#### **C. ORGANIZATION**

##### **ORGANIZING RITES OF PASSAGE**

Appeals to the marginal elements of society resulted in "trusted bodyguards, messengers, and party members." <sup>120</sup> To organize these recruits into an effective insurgency required rituals of membership or rites of passage. The young were favored recruits, easy to train and with the least stake in society. Sihanouk noted that twelve-year-old youth were taken in and taught rituals of violence. The monarch watched the young "'constantly take pleasure in tormenting animals . . .

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during the Samlaut rebellion in 1966 and uprisings in 1968-69 fueled recruitment.

<sup>119</sup>Quinn, "Explaining," p. 237.

<sup>120</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 80.

.'" <sup>121</sup> He further describes how the rituals became ingrained notions of behavior:

Torture games became their principal training tool. Young recruits began 'hardening their hearts and minds' by killing dogs, cats and other edible animals with clubs or bayonets. Even after their April 17, 1975 victory, the Khmer Rouge kept in practice with a game consisting of throwing animals into 'the fires of hell,' since they had no human victims handy.<sup>122</sup>

One revolutionary song lent credence to this viewpoint. Entitled, "The Beauty of Kampuchea," the second and third stanzas glorify the children's butchery of enemies:

Pity our friends who shoulder arms. Thorns pierce their feet; they do not complain; this is an accomplishment of Khmer children struggling until blood flows out to cover the ground.

They sacrifice themselves without regret, they chase the Lon Nol bandits, with swords and knives hacking at them, killing them, until the Lon Nol bandits are destroyed.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>Quinn, "Explaining," p. 237.

<sup>122</sup>Quinn, "Explaining," p. 238. Sihanouk felt the youth were addicted to violence. He explained KR on the Vietnamese border "'would rape a Vietnamese woman, then ram a stake or bayonet into her vagina. Pregnant women were cut open, their unborn babies yanked out and slapped against the dying mother's face. The Yotheas [youth] also enjoyed cutting the breasts off well endowed Vietnamese women. Vietnamese fisherman who fell into the hands of the Khmer Rouge were decapitated.'" Quinn, "Explaining," p. 238.

<sup>123</sup>Translated by David Chandler in Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981, (London: Zed Press, 1982), p. 327.

### *ORGANIZING RITUALS FOR THE LIBERATED*

Rituals in the liberated areas organized the population. Life constituted a rigid work schedule with early rising and hard labor. All efforts of the population served the military campaigns against the government, even food production. One song proclaimed:

This is the sowing season: we toss corn and beans in front of us. We strive to work, so as to supply the army, holding on and struggling at the front.

Individualism, which could disrupt organization, was removed by establishing collective rituals in liberated areas. Not only would collectives form the economic base, they purified any taints in class background. Pol Pot made the collective's role in the movement clear in a secret speech in 1976:

We will follow the collectivistic path to socialism. If we do this, imperialism can't enter our country. If we are individualists, imperialism could enter easily. Thus, eating will be collectivized, and also clothing, welfare, and houses will be divided up on a collective basis.<sup>124</sup>

The collective reinforced the ritual of autarky. "Every region, every district, if not every village, had to be self-sufficient," as Thion describes the 1970 situation, "not only in food, but in other commodities, such as cotton,

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<sup>124</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 156.



handicrafts, and so on." <sup>125</sup> Trade was also limited to prevent the "seeds of capitalism" from corrupting the peasants' morality.<sup>126</sup>

Another important ritual came in moving the people to the forest. The cadres burned villages so there would be nothing to return to. Moving the population to forest areas also helped "regenerate" the population according to Ponchaud, "plunging them back into a universe from which they should have never strayed."<sup>127</sup>

By eliminating resisters in the forest, a ritual followed consistently after victory, the Khmer Rouge also conformed to ancient folktales which helped justify the liberators' brutal methods. Ponchaud explains how murder in the forests conformed to these ancient stories:

In the folktales, the act of murder ... is not conceived as an evil and uniquely reprehensible act: it assumed a revelatory function, either in the sense that it was a prelude to a rebirth, or in that it triggered acts of salvation, exemplifying the divine or Buddhistic cosmic order....<sup>128</sup>

### **BLACK CLOTHES**

Although many inhabitants fled liberated areas to zones

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<sup>125</sup>Thion, "The Cambodian Idea," p. 24.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>127</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 161.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

controlled by the government,<sup>129</sup> others were convinced greater opportunities lay in the future and accepted the organizing rituals demanded by the Khmer Rouge.<sup>130</sup> One important symbol of acceptance must have been wearing black clothes. Black peasant clothing came to symbolize the virtues of the peasant. "Among all persons in society," Quinn explains, the peasants, "alone were believed to least embody the most exaggerated aspects of individualism--ambition, achievement, wealth, and avarice."<sup>131</sup>

#### **ORGANIZING THE MIND**

By glorifying the myth of the peasants and minority populations through organizing rituals and black clothing, the Khmer Rouge attempted to win minds to the organization. In 1972, Ieng Sary, the future Foreign Minister of Democratic Kampuchea, could rightly conclude: "Man is the determining factor in the victory, and his political conscience is the

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<sup>129</sup>More than 30,000 went to government areas in February 1974 according to Carney. See Timothy Carney, "The Unexpected Victory", Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.  
p. 30.

<sup>130</sup>Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 21.

<sup>131</sup>Kenneth M. Quinn, "The Pattern and Scope of Violence," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 194.

decisive weapon."<sup>132</sup>

Psychological rituals thus became an important means of controlling the political conscience as Thion explains:

Because class consciousness could not be considered to be the main source of revolutionary dynamics, the need to create such consciousness was soon embodied in a set of ethical rules, which were based on two main principles: the rectification of the self and the integration and subordination of the individual to the collective unit. The implementation resulted in a system of intense psychological pressures on collective meetings, where individuals had to tell their life-stories again and again in order to criticize their own bad 'trends' and to relinquish any control over their own behavior."

By reinforcing these psychological rituals through labor and the fear of execution, Thion concludes that the KR were able to "complete the psychological isolation of the individual, making him suspicious of everyone, totally identified with, and dependent upon his group and its leaders."<sup>133</sup>

#### **ORGANIZING "ANGKA"**

To organize the CPK in the time afforded by Vietnamese fighting, Pol Pot had many revolutionary models. Since the Soviet/Chinese Communist bloc had been split in the 1950s, Pol Pot appears to have leaned to the Chinese model that "championed the dictatorship of the masses--meaning the

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<sup>132</sup> Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 108.

<sup>133</sup> Thion, "The Cambodian," p. 29.

peasants instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>134</sup> Chandler feels "Mao Zedong's notions of autonomous revolution, voluntarism, and continuous class struggle . . . freed him [Pol Pot] from the domination of the Vietnamese and provided a model for Cambodia's transformation."<sup>135</sup> This transformation would see "the elimination of exploitive social classes and the old social order, along with the collectivization and communalization of agriculture," whereby all of these changes "were supposed to unleash the productive power of the peasantry."<sup>136</sup>

Depending on the mass peasant population to be the "productive power" would also fit Cambodia's current situation. Cambodia had a population of approximately 7 million people and was considered one of the poorest countries in the world.<sup>137</sup> Over 90 percent of the population was ethnic Khmer and worked as peasant labor in rice farming. Importantly, for the CPK, the peasant population viewed Phnom

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<sup>134</sup>Lek Hor Tan, "Cambodia's Total Revolution," Index On Censorship, 8, 1, January-February, 1979, p. 5.

<sup>135</sup>Chandler, Brother, p.6.

<sup>136</sup>David R. Hawk, "International Human Rights Law and Democratic Kampuchea," The Cambodian Agony, ed. by David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood, (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987), p. 138.

<sup>137</sup>Mya Than, "Rehabilitation and Economic Reconstruction in Cambodia," Contemporary Southeast Asia, 14, 3, December 1992, p. 270.

Penh and other provincial capitals as "symbols of oppression."<sup>138</sup> These cities were viewed as places from which former colonizers like Vietnam or France abused the Khmer, where an aristocratic minority dominated the poor, and where Chinese and Vietnamese minorities controlled the private money sectors. In these circumstances, recruitment increased with peasants who would not object to the revolution's abolition of cities and private wealth since few Cambodians drew benefits from them.<sup>139</sup>

Having little urban infrastructure to draw upon, it must have been clear to Pol Pot that he had no workers to lead a Marxist-style revolution so they were supplanted by a mythical workers' vanguard. A 1977 document bears this out:

Concretely, we did not rely on the forces of the workers. The workers were the over [cover?] vanguard, but in concrete fact they did not become the vanguard. In concrete fact there were only the peasants.<sup>140</sup>

The Party justified this myth by explaining, "we did not copy anyone," thus emphasizing the uniqueness of the Khmer revolution.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Tan, p. 5.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>140</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 219.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

In fact, the Party was and remained the vanguard. As Pol Pot's exclaimed: "The Party is the decisive factor."<sup>142</sup> The Party had two distinct advantages compared to other Khmer institutions--secrecy and discipline. The Party remained a secret from its formation in 1951 until revealed publicly in 1977, well after the April victory. Even the Party Secretary was unknown to the world, as Pol Pot enjoyed hiding his high status.<sup>143</sup> The Party was organized as a collective leadership called "Angka" (the organization). Although the Party leadership may have promoted a myth of equality, Pol Pot became "Brother Number One" which calls to mind Kertzer's admonition: "Through rites of egalitarian interaction the leader can symbolically express his adherence to the democratic ideal at the same time his powers belie it."<sup>144</sup>

Discipline required by "Angka" remained total. A breach of discipline meant execution which would be refined throughout the Party's history.<sup>145</sup> Yet the Party did not neglect the importance of Asia's tradition of family ties that

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>143</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 103.

<sup>144</sup>David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 56.

<sup>145</sup>Despite their discipline, communist cadre trained by the Vietnamese were eliminated since 1973. See Karl D. Jackson, "The Ideology of Total Revolution," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 45.

connected leaders through marriage and kinship.<sup>146</sup> The party may have broken up the traditional families of the liberated areas but tightened the organization's leadership through blood ties, as common blood would become increasingly important as the revolution progressed.

#### **ORGANIZING UNDER THE MYTH OF ANGKOR**

Nor did the party ignore its connection to the glorious Khmer empire at Angkor. Social scientist Bruce Lincoln describes how societies unite under a common ancestor and "the more remote a given ancestor, the larger will be the social group that is made up of his or her descendants."<sup>147</sup> These ancestors must be "called into being" through "allusions, gestures, narratives, displays of emblematic objects or designs, and so forth."<sup>148</sup> Pol Pot not only utilized remote ancestry in recalling Angkor, he invoked it for its mobilizing effect after the revolution had come to power. "If our people were capable of building Angkor," said

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<sup>146</sup>Pol Pot's wife is the sister of his foreign minister, Ieng Sary. Son Sen is related to Pol Pot and became his minister of defense. Son Sen's wife became the minister of culture and education. Jackson, Karl D., "Intellectual Origins of the Khmer Rouge," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 242.

<sup>147</sup>Bruce Lincoln, Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 19.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., pp. 19,20.

Pol Pot, "we can do anything."<sup>149</sup> Chandler explains,

[t]he kings [of Angkor] themselves are never mentioned by name, and while their motives are derided, and the 'slavery' of the ordinary people is bemoaned, Angkor's place in the DK historiography is a model of exemplary behavior, a reminder of Cambodia's grandeur.<sup>150</sup>

The CPK encouraged the idea that Angkor's past glory would soon become a present reality. Angkor Wat was the most important symbol they could use. Pol Pot encouraged the idea of past glory and gave the symbol of Angkor "concrete expression" which offered the regime not only a symbol from popular mythology but a means of "transmitt[ing] the most important facts about the movement to its adherents. . . ."<sup>151</sup> That is why the Khmer Rouge put a modern representation of the three towers of Angkor Wat on the national flag of Democratic Kampuchea.

One can picture the sweating communist cadres emerging from the malarial infested forests with the symbol of Angkor Wat emblazoned on a red banner. Calling the people out of their huts to the village wat, a small Buddhist temple often used by the monks or village elders to pass along important

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<sup>149</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 13.

<sup>150</sup>Chandler, "Seeing Red," p. 35.

<sup>151</sup>Laba, Roman, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 126.



news, the cadres would explain how the banner they carried had a yellow, three-towered structure in the middle which symbolized "national tradition and the people of Kampuchea, who are defending and building the country to make it ever more glorious."<sup>152</sup> The cadres explained how the red background symbolized "the revolutionary movement, the resolute and valiant struggle of the people of Kampuchea for the liberation, defense, and construction of the nation."<sup>153</sup> The Khmer Rouge appealed to the population's pride and future place in the new nation. As Connor noted, nationalistic appeals were the means to gain the support of the masses, "despite the philosophical incompatibility between communism and nationalism. . . ." <sup>154</sup> The Party's manipulation of images offered something for everyone.

Senior and mid levels drew from the anti-French dissidence that the Vietminh had nourished. Others had joined the movement during the Sihanouk years, some reacting to the prince's personal rule and corruption of Khmer society or to individual injustices. Others were educated in leftist ideology by teachers or close relatives. After 1970, an influx of peasants and even of pro-Sihanouk city dwellers entered the party's united-

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<sup>152</sup> Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea, taken from Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 204.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Connor, p. 199.

front structure.<sup>155</sup>

Importantly, this "was the first time in Cambodia's history that the rural people were being asked to play a significant role in a social movement, and the effect was profound."<sup>156</sup>

#### D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

##### *ALLIANCE WITH THE KING*

Just as the Khmer Rouge strengthened the internal organization, they called for temporary alliances to strengthen the external organization as well. Sihanouk, in an attempt to win back power established the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (RGNUK) in May 1970. Although Sihanouk led the union, CPK cadre Khieu Samphan became vice-premier. With Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia threatened by the government troops of Lon Nol, the Khmer Rouge were given time to organize as the Vietnamese bore the brunt of the fighting. Additionally, they used an important symbol of external legitimacy--they allied with the monarch. By aligning the movement with Sihanouk after the 1970 coup, the Khmer Rouge claimed the national symbol of monarchy with a heritage going back to the Angkorean era.

##### *ALLIANCE WITH THE VIETNAMESE*

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<sup>155</sup>Timothy Carney, "The Organization of Power," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 95.

<sup>156</sup>Becker, p. 151.

Khmer had fought beside their communist brothers in the east since the early Issarak movement joined the Indochinese Communist Party in the 1940s. According to Chandler, Pol Pot never diminished this Vietnamese connection. "The Vietnamese were certainly resented later on, and their guidance spurned," Chandler explains, "but before the late 1960s and probably not before 1972-1973 the Cambodian Communist Party never adopted an independent line."<sup>157</sup> The success of the symbolic discourse of the Khmer Rouge can be measured in one important respect: "a full-fledged military alliance with the Vietnamese" by 1970.<sup>158</sup>

#### **E. DEFEATING ADVERSARIAL RESPONSE**

##### ***AMERICAN YOUTH***

Reliance on the symbolic power of the king and the military power of the Vietnamese only grew as the Americans and their material resources entered the war in 1969.<sup>159</sup> To rally support against American efforts, the Khmer Rouge used an important symbol: American youth. The Party called on "'progressive American youth,'" in their broadcasts, "to fight against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, and all

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<sup>157</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 62.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>159</sup>US bombing began secretly on 18 March 1969 and ended on 15 August 1973. Ground forces augmented the bombing from 1 May to 30 June 1970. See Carney, "The Unexpected Victory," p. 30.

reactionary forces."<sup>160</sup>

#### **FEARS OF VIETNAMESE HEGEMONY**

With American withdrawal from the Vietnam war in 1973, the Vietnamese called for a halt in fighting until Hanoi's revolution was won. The Khmer Rouge rejected Hanoi's request prompted by the Paris Peace. Suspicious of the Vietnamese, skirmishes broke out between Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese units as Hanoi tried to remove their equipment from Cambodia.<sup>161</sup>

Pol Pot communicated to his cadre the historic hegemony of Vietnam in their actions to stop his revolution. He feared the Vietnamese would capture Saigon and then turn on a weakened Cambodia. By promoting fears of the Vietnamese, Pol Pot gave his revolution no respite; Lon Nol's forces were collapsing as the Americans withdrew and the Khmer Rouge insurgency would fill the vacuum.

#### **F. CONCLUSIONS**

With the loss of cultural constraints on obedience to monarchy following the fall of colonialism, the Khmer Rouge were given an opportunity to enter the patron-client relationship in Cambodia. Symbolic actions formed an important aspect of this entrance.

As "Original Khmer," Pol Pot attempted to legitimate not

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<sup>160</sup>Carney, "The Organization of Power," p. 91.

<sup>161</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 100.

only himself but the resistance to monarchy. This foundation myth was augmented by forest myths to help legitimate his movement, the Communist Party of Kampuchea, over the other forces fighting for power.

Without a popular majority, the CPK relied instead on minority populations and other "neglected" peoples of Cambodia to form the base of the movement, all the while playing on the discrimination myths and historic grievances of those divested of power.

Organization rituals and rites of passage promoted through violent symbolic acts and songs molded the insurgent's minds and helped further their military efforts against the governing regime. Importantly, the liberated population underwent rituals aimed at strengthening the organization by eliminating individualism and promoting only collective efforts. By manipulating cultural symbols and ethnic grievances, the CPK established an organization that offered something for everyone.

Although filling the ranks furthered the Khmer Rouge cause, external support was still required to defeat the established government. Despite Pol Pot's rejection of monarchy, the Khmer Rouge used the important symbol of kingship that traced its lineage to the Angkorean era in aligning with Sihanouk. And by evoking a formal symbolic alliance with the Vietnamese, the CPK could gather strength

for its final victory.

Defeating the government response, however, required not only the symbolic support of the king and Vietnamese, but as American power entered the war, the Khmer Rouge called on the symbol of American youth itself to give momentum to their insurgency. As the insurgency came closer to victory, fears of the Vietnamese were invoked to defeat the perceived adversary in the east.

Symbolic activity in all five areas proved vital to not only maintaining insurgent viability, but by 1975, were an important factor in the insurgent forces of Pol Pot transitioning from insurgents of Cambodia to its rulers.



## V. THE RULERS: THE KHMER ROUGE FROM 1975 TO 1979

Democratic Kampuchea was born on April 17, 1975 when Phnom Penh surrendered to the Khmer Rouge.<sup>162</sup> The revolution led by Pol Pot claimed to be uniquely Khmer, drawing on no foreign inspiration. Ieng Sary, Pol Pot's chief lieutenant, and the Communist Party of Kampuchea's (CPK) future Minister of Foreign Affairs proclaimed: "The Khmer revolution has no precedent. What we are trying to do has never been done before in history."<sup>163</sup> Yet, the Khmer Rouge did embrace many of the same revolutionary rituals of communist movements in the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam.

Despite the proclaimed uniqueness of the revolution, it is best described as a nationalist revolution, with an important corollary: a common blood theme based on the myth of Khmer racial superiority over all other people and for that matter, all other communist movements. For Pol Pot, this was not only a revolution fought as he explained, "'in conformity with the genuine nature of the working class,'" but to "'ensure the perennality of the Kampuchean race.'"<sup>164</sup> It

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<sup>162</sup>Saigon fell to the Vietnamese 13 days later.

<sup>163</sup>Hurst Hannum, "International Law and Cambodian Genocide: The Sounds of Silence," (Human Rights Quarterly, 11, 1, February 1989), p. 85.

<sup>164</sup>Elizabeth Becker, When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and its People, (New York: Simon



would be his same perception of racial superiority that ultimately toppled the regime when he applied it against his communist brothers to the east, Vietnam.

As the new rulers of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge utilized symbolic actions in an attempt to legitimate their rule, win popular support, organize a nation, encourage external support, and defeat adversaries.

#### **A. LEGITIMACY**

##### ***THE MYTH OF SELF-RELIANCE***

Pol Pot conveniently forgot all Vietnamese help in attaining victory and perpetuated a new myth of self-reliance. He told the country, "Only the Cambodian nation, Cambodian people, Cambodian revolutionary army, and the Kampuchean Communist Party have managed to liberate their own country and people completely, definitively and clearly."<sup>165</sup> Buoyed by their confident commander, Khmer Rouge forces even occupied islands claimed by Vietnam in an attempt to prove their superiority.<sup>166</sup>

The CPK became increasingly captured in the myth of self-reliance that they helped create. For them, victory was

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and Schuster, 1986), p. 256.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>166</sup>David Chandler, Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot, (Thailand: Silkview Press, 1993), p. 111.

accomplished without the external assistance of Vietnamese and other communist countries or the vacuum created by the abrupt departure of American aid and the Lo Lon Nol government.<sup>167</sup> Even Sihanouk was retired.<sup>168</sup> The Party explained,

We must understand the true nature and results of our revolution. When we won the victory over the U.S. imperialists, did we have any planes?... We were victorious over the U.S. imperialists ... leaders of imperialists in the world. Did we have any planes then? No, and we had neither naval vessels nor armored vehicles.... This army had no planes, tanks, or artillery pieces and was short of ammunition; however, our fight was crowned with success.<sup>169</sup>

This would not be the first myth that blinded the leadership of the CPK. Myth not only had the power to create perception but could encourage misperception as well.

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<sup>167</sup>"Even though Lon Nol's best fighting units were destroyed between 1970 and 1972 in battles with North Vietnamese regulars, official Kampuchean accounts refuse to acknowledge Vietnamese assistance and insist that international assistance was 'only supplementary.'" See Karl D. Jackson, "The Ideology of Total Revolution," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 40.

<sup>168</sup>Cadre documents stated: "Sihanouk's position is ripe now. He has run out of wind. He cannot go any further forward. Therefore we have decided to retire him, according to the wishes of others." David P. Chandler, et al., eds., Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea, 1976-1977, (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), pp. 6-7.

<sup>169</sup>FBIS as quoted in Jackson, "The Ideology," p. 40.

## B. POPULAR SUPPORT

### *KHMER ROUGE PERCEPTIONS OF POPULAR SUPPORT*

As was done in all past occupations of territory, the Khmer Rouge carried out their ritual of emptying populated areas into the forests and countryside, to include Phnom Penh and all other provincial cities. "A new Cambodia would therefore start from zero in an empty city."<sup>170</sup>

With a force of 60,000 largely illiterate peasants, Pol Pot now ruled a country of over 7 million.<sup>171</sup> Those who had not taken part in the revolution were "new people," enemies not to be trusted. Although the revolution was intended to destroy classes, three political classes developed, those with full rights (the party), candidates (those working for the party) and depositees ("last on distribution lists, first on execution lists").<sup>172</sup> Creating classes appears to be a contradiction to notions of Marxist-Leninist thought but the "Khmer Rouge never translated a single text of Marx,

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<sup>170</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 108.

<sup>171</sup>Karl D. Jackson, "The Khmer Rouge in Context," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 9. Tan cites KR strength at 70,000. See Lek Hor Tan, "Cambodia's Total Revolution," Index on Censorship, 8, 1, January-February, 1979, p. 4.

<sup>172</sup>May Ebihara, "Revolution and Reformulations in Kampuchean Village Culture," The Cambodian Agony, ed. by David A Ablin and Marlowe Hood, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987), p. 25.

Lenin, or Mao."<sup>173</sup> Like classes, both man and society would be recreated through revolutionary means to obtain popular support. As one Party document explained, "technology is not the decisive factor; the determining factors of a revolution are politics, revolutionary people, and revolutionary methods."<sup>174</sup> Perceptions of each held important rites for the population.

#### **PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLITICAL STATE**

Khmer Rouge politics emphasized stripping Cambodians toiling in the year zero of all notions of their former identification of the state. The cadre explained to the population that their former lives in the old state gave the illusion of prosperity. As one document explained: "Formerly, in the old society, it was as if there was plenty; there was sufficiency. But the country was enslaved, indebted to others."<sup>175</sup> The CPK turned provinces whose names held centuries of historic tradition into zones whose names were now based on the directions of a compass. Basic institutions of the country were dismantled or erased including notions of "the family, village, and wat," because

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<sup>173</sup>Marlowe Hood and David A. Ablin, "The Path to Cambodia's Present," The Cambodian Agony, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987), p. xxxvi.

<sup>174</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 48.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

each of these institutions "would have competed with the state for people's loyalties and labor."<sup>176</sup> "The important aim," a 1976 Central Committee document relates, "is to replace one state with another."<sup>177</sup>

#### ***PERCEPTIONS OF WINNING THE PEOPLE***

In creating revolutionary people, the Khmer Rouge attempted to replace the individual consciousness of the Khmer they controlled. "We must create the resources and character to leap forward," explains one Party document.<sup>178</sup> The Party did not see the need to wait to build this new character over time, as they believed the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese communist regimes were forced to do. The Party could explain, "We have leaped over the neo-colonial, semi-feudalist society of the American imperialist, the feudalists and capitalists of every nation, and have achieved a socialist society straight away."<sup>179</sup> All because in the Khmer Rouge perception of the world: "we have a different character from them."<sup>180</sup>

#### ***PERCEPTIONS OF METHOD FOR POPULAR SUPPORT***

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<sup>176</sup>Ebihara, p. 23.

<sup>177</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 6.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., pp. 45,46.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

Rituals in the form of regimes were established to ensure the new man they sought. The CPK Four Year Plan established: "The People's Eating Regime;" "The Working and Resting Regime;" and "the regime for studying culture, science and technology to nurture politics and consciousness."<sup>181</sup> Revolutionary man needed only "Three rest days per month. One rest day in every ten."<sup>182</sup> But, leisure time was not forgotten. "According to our observations," Pol Pot explained to cadre in 1976, "working without any rest at all is bad for the health."<sup>183</sup> Pol Pot's view of the people's work could be summarized in the stanza of one revolutionary song:

the workers are happy in their hearts, working  
night and mornings, with no fear of getting tired.

A new man required a new educational ritual. Education would be instilled through the collective where "there are no examinations and no certificates."<sup>184</sup> The collective would destroy individualism and in its place build revolutionary consciousness. In the CPK view, solely obtaining political consciousness would overcome all obstacles. Even a lack of

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid., pp. 111, 112.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

aviation training required only a new consciousness for the potential pilot. One Party document explained to cadres: "Formerly to be a pilot required a high school education--twelve to fourteen years. Nowadays, it's clear that political consciousness is the decisive factor."<sup>185</sup>

A new cultural ritual accompanied political consciousness. The old culture had to be destroyed. The Party explained cadre must continue attempts to "abolish, uproot, and disperse the cultural, literary, and artistic remnants of the imperialists, colonialists, and all the other oppressor classes."<sup>186</sup> The new culture required the cadre to:

Continue to strengthen and expand the building of revolutionary culture, literature and art of the worker-peasant class in accordance with the Party's proletarian standpoint. . . . Especially the strengthening and expanding of songs and poems that reflect good models in the period of political/armed struggle in the revolutionary war for national and people's liberation, in the period of national-democratic revolution, and songs that describe good models in the period of socialist revolution and the building of socialism.<sup>187</sup>

The ritual means to implement the educational and cultural instruction was supplemented by a four part process in the

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

Four Year Plan:

A. Radio Broadcasting: organize general listening sessions using loud speakers for all important places and mobile work brigades.

B. Films: of the revolutionary movement's present and past, especially the present. Organize many groups to produce many films to show to the people in general.

C. Art: Step-by-step (a little is enough) in order not to disturb the productive forces raising production.

D. Newspapers: pictorial magazines, political magazines and general knowledge.<sup>188</sup>

Revolutionary methods entailed the replacement being done quickly, probably to encourage the revolutionary consciousness that underlay the Party's psychological hold on cadre and society. "We want to build socialism quickly," one 1979 document reveals, "we want our country to change quickly, we want our people to be glorious quickly."<sup>189</sup> The accelerated pace of change may also have been due to the perceived weakness of the CPK position vis-a-vis the vast population they attempted to control.<sup>190</sup> External enemies were also feared, "[b]ecause enemies attack and torment us,"

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>190</sup>One 1979 document relates that the Party had 4,000 people throughout the country. See Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 24. Chandler says that the Party membership in 1970 was only 1500 in footnote p. 322.



the Party believed. "From the east and west they persist in pounding and worrying us. . . ." <sup>191</sup>

Significantly, there is a looming sense of increased paranoia after the obtained victory that carries through to the regime's downfall. In March 1976 the Central Committee gave authority to "'smash'" enemies both inside and outside the Party. <sup>192</sup> By 1979, the Party is emphasizing "continuous non-stop struggle between revolution and counter-revolution." <sup>193</sup> The Party not only wanted the struggle to continue, the very myth of struggle was to be encouraged. "We must nurture this standpoint," one document demanded, "that there will be enemies in ten years, twenty years, thirty years into the future." <sup>194</sup>

Revolutionary politics, people, and methods had five ultimate goals in the Four Year Plan of 1976:

1. Independence, mastery, self-reliance, and control over one's own destiny
2. Revolutionary patriotism and revolutionary pride in one's nation, revolution, people, and Party.
3. Complete faith in one's Party, revolution, collective worker-peasant people, and

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<sup>191</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 126.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

revolutionary armed forces.

4. Spring up the great revolutionary movement of the masses with the speed of a Super Great Leap (Forward).

5. Always save up, improve, and think up new ideas to win the fight and spring forward bravely. Use little capital, which is the nation's important natural resource, but produce numerous good quality results.

As important as these goals were to the success of the Party, Pol Pot reminded his cadres that ideas were the most important facet of the revolution. "[W]hat is important about the Plan is not the numbers," the Party's leader explained, "but the ideology behind it . . . ." <sup>195</sup>

### C. ORGANIZATION

Communist symbols and rituals reinforced the Party's perceptions of the new revolutionary politics, man, and method. New myths would be crafted for notions of the state, economy, religion, and the individual Khmer.

#### **ORGANIZING THE STATE**

The secret documents of the CPK leadership suggest many symbols to transform the state. A "Hero's Monument" would be built to symbolize the "the national struggle" and "the class struggle" as well as the struggle against the

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

"aggression of American imperialists." <sup>196</sup> New Holidays were proclaimed to commemorate historical events: Independence (17 April 1975); births of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (17 January 1968) and the Constitution (5 January 1976); defeats inflicted on the enemy to include the defeat of the American air war (15 August 1973), the defeat of the Nixon Doctrine to make Khmers fight Khmers (1 April 1975) and the defeat of the American Imperialists' war of aggression (12 April 1975); as well as the creation of new organizations like the Democratic Youth (5 February 1970), the Women's Organization (10 July 1961), the Trade Union (1 November 1955) and the Peasant Co-operative (20 May 1973). <sup>197</sup>

Newly established elections provided important legitimizing myths to the outside world. "[T]he world has seen that the political situation in our country is good," in the words of one document, "for we have been able to prepare such good elections." <sup>198</sup>

Useful traditional symbols of the state remained intact or were transformed to serve the revolution. A foreign journalist traveling in Cambodia noted that the old symbols

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid., p. 4. There is no evidence that the Monument got built.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., pp. 4,5. See the complete list of new holidays in text.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

of authority embodied in the temples of Angkor were not only spared but dutifully maintained.<sup>199</sup> Reaching into the ancient past of Angkor, the Khmer Rouge gave Cambodians a new god-- "Angka"--an omnipresent force that would guide and oversee every Cambodian's action. Ponchaud likened "Angka" to "the kings of Angkor Wat, who were divinities incarnate . . . to which the people are to devote themselves body and soul."<sup>200</sup>

#### **ORGANIZING THE ECONOMY**

The CPK structured the economy to look like the new national emblem of Democratic Kampuchea: an emblem that consisted of a network of dikes and canals with a representative factory.<sup>201</sup> The economy was released from any

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<sup>199</sup>Journalist Dragoslav Rancic noted that religious shrines were attacked but the Angkor Wat complex was maintained as a "national shrine." See Kenneth M. Quinn, "The Pattern and Scope of Violence," in Karl D. JACKSON, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 191. Vickery confirms this reverence for Angkor. He stated, "The ancient temples of Angkor were also undamaged, and their intact state is directly contrary to stories current in KID [Khao I Dang (KID) refugee camp] in 1980. In particular, I was told by refugees that on the so-called 'Giants' Causeway,' the main entry to the walled city of Angkor, all the dozens of images had been decapitated. In fact there is no change from its prewar condition; and as we can see from an unnoticed remark by one of the child artists in 1980, there was some effort by DK authorities to prevent deterioration of the Angkor edifices." Michael Vickery, Cambodia: 1975-1982, (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 187,188.

<sup>200</sup>Francois Ponchaud, Cambodia Year Zero, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1977, p. 88.

<sup>201</sup>Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea, taken from Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 204.

reliance on foreign influences, money was abolished, and the state turned into an agricultural collective. Districts were pushed to increase production because "average yields in the 1960s had hovered around one ton per hectare," noted a 1979 confidential report.<sup>202</sup> Those collectives that met the required goal of three hectares were rewarded with visual symbols. A 1976 Central Committee document stated: "Choose as models, districts which have increased production to three tons per hectare so that they can fly the flag of the 'Great Leap Forward'."<sup>203</sup> The red flags would symbolize not only those who had achieved the Party's goals, but served to draw attention to those that had not.

According to the Party: "We stand [rely] on agriculture in order to expand other fields; industries, factories, metals, oil, etc. The basic key is agriculture. Self reliance means capital from agriculture."<sup>204</sup> The revolution owed many of these economic ideas to Khieu Samphan. Khieu had been among the Cambodians educated in Paris in the 1950s and earned a Ph.D. with a paper on The Economy of Cambodia and its Problems of Industrialization.<sup>205</sup> Advocating

<sup>202</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 9.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., p. 3. Chandler notes a photograph of the flags over DK worksites in his "Democratic Kampuchea is Moving Forward, Phnom Penh, August 1977, p. 198. This same symbol was used in China during their Great Leap Forward.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

economic isolation from the international economy, Khieu had written that "over 80 per cent of city dwellers were unproductive and only served the elite."<sup>206</sup> He wanted all people transferred to agriculture to expand the economic base in preparation for industrialization.

To support agriculture, the people were ordered to dig a massive system of canals, dikes, and reservoirs. Just as the Angkor period mobilized the population in large hydraulic projects, the revolution called for an equally demanding effort. Revolutionary songs proclaimed:

We raise embankments, and these form a network,  
like spider-webs, everywhere. We dig canals,  
small and large, long and short, bringing water  
and loam to pour on to our fields.<sup>207</sup>

As a result of implementing Khieu Samphan's arguments in hundreds of canals and collectives around Cambodia, thousands starved due to inefficient production methods based on slave labor. Canals simply collapsed when the monsoons destroyed fragile projects built without any

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<sup>205</sup>Obviously the revolution made an exception for Khieu in its proclamation: "a diploma can't get anything to eat." The slogan comes from Tan, p. 3. Other revolutionary slogans are collected in a French document by Henri Locard, The Slogans of Angkar, Phnom Penh: Phnom Penh University, 1994.

<sup>206</sup>Tan, p. 3.

<sup>207</sup>Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981, (London: Zed Press, 1982), p. 326.

thought to hydraulic engineering.<sup>208</sup>

Collectivization and group projects were rituals to replace society's traditional notions of individualism.<sup>209</sup> Collectives broke individual loyalties adverse to the revolution, while mass relocations to work them severed children from parents, parents from relatives, and all Cambodians from their familiar kinship based on the village. Revolutionary songs recited by the collective promoted what became a myth of solidarity:

O solidarity group, you are a new kind of family,  
special, beautiful and unique. Our happiness is  
enormous, and we struggle to expand and solidify  
it, even more.<sup>210</sup>

#### **ORGANIZING RELIGION**

To further solidarity, the Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea gave religion symbolic freedom. Article 20 declared: "Every citizen of Kampuchea has the right to

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<sup>208</sup> Refugees stated not one canal held up in the rainy season of 1976. See Charles H. Twining, "The Economy," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 130.

<sup>209</sup> As Gerhard Simon points out in his study of Soviet policy in the Ukraine: "The purpose of collectivization was to undermine the economic foundations of clan and tribal loyalty." Gerhard Simon, Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), p. 98.

<sup>210</sup> Kiernan, Peasants, p. 327.

worship according to any religion," but this fact was manipulated by another ritual. The Constitution prohibited "all reactionary religions that are detrimental to Democratic Kampuchea and the Kampuchean people. . . ." <sup>211</sup> Buddhism, with its historic links to the Khmer had to be erased. According to Ponchaud, the word for "race" and "religion" were the same in Cambodia, in other words, Khmer meant Buddhism. <sup>212</sup> In attempting to purify the race, the Khmer Rouge had to remove religion from its associations with Khmer.

The Khmer Rouge understood the challenge religion might someday offer the revolution. Hannum explained, "Buddhism in Cambodia embodied and transmitted culture, and many Cambodians speak of Buddhism as the 'soul' or 'core' of Khmer culture and civilization." <sup>213</sup> Buddhism could trace its lineage to the Angkor empire when the god-kings of Angkor defended its tenants from foreign invaders like the Thais or Vietnamese. Historically, Buddhist monks also defended the land from foreign domination as demonstrated in their rebellion against the French colonizers in the 19th century. The Khmer Rouge Constitution allowed the facade of religion

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<sup>211</sup>Constitution of Democratic Kampuchea, taken from Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 205.

<sup>212</sup>Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 126.

<sup>213</sup>Hannum, p. 87.



but denied its practice since religion endangered revolutionary authority. Thus, a methodical annihilation of the symbols of Buddhism followed that saw the destruction of almost 3,000 pagodas, the defacement of sacred statues and the torch put to written religious scripture.<sup>214</sup> Although 60,000 monks practiced before the revolution, only 1,000 would live to return to their work.<sup>215</sup>

Importantly, Ponchaud points out the CPK adopted Buddhist rituals to supplement their own control of society. The asceticism of the monkhood would be echoed in the abandonment of the family unit by the working population. Rituals of internal purification were the highest goals of Buddhism and the same purification rites that rejected individual concerns and desires were to be pressed on the revolutionary society.<sup>216</sup> The Khmer who followed the Party's path would obtain Buddhist peace and tranquility. One stanza in a revolutionary song confirmed that fact:

The Khmer are happy now, no longer feeling tired,

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<sup>214</sup>Becker, p. 265. In Chandler, Pol Pot Plans has cadre demand a "Christian Cathedral" be demolished. The document explains: "The method must be such that this does not affect other buildings." p. 4.

<sup>215</sup>Hannum, p. 88.

<sup>216</sup>Francois Ponchaud, "Social Change in the Vortex of Revolution," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 174, 175.

striving to clear the road to peace. All the Khmer children are happy, for the revolution guides Khmer and Khmer towards solidarity.<sup>217</sup>

#### **ORGANIZING THE INDIVIDUAL**

With religion removed, the Khmer Rouge filled the vacuum in the Khmer soul with new revolutionary images that embodied their communist ideas in the guise of traditional Khmer symbols. All people were dressed in black to symbolize the peasant. Dress with color was eliminated due to its correlation with the corruption of the West. Short hair was maintained to symbolize that worn in the countryside. The regime associated long hair with moral depravity and laziness.<sup>218</sup> The revolution emphasized the link with the peasant through songs as well:

The rain falls in pisakh [April-May]. There's a cool breeze. Dear friends, the rain falls now and then. We hear roosters crowing everywhere, and our brothers the peasants join together to increase production.<sup>219</sup>

As an oral civilization, the regime also transformed the Khmer language because its present structure reinforced what the revolution sought to destroy. Before the revolution, Cambodia had been a hierarchical society, and

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<sup>217</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, p. 328.

<sup>218</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 157.

<sup>219</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, p. 328.

the Khmer language reflected this hierarchy:

For example, instead of names and personal pronouns as modes of direct address, appellations were used which emphasized the ties of blood, age, social rank, whether one was a member of the royal family or the Buddhist clergy, the quality of the person speaking and of the person spoken to. The language was imbued with rank, class, place in the society, and it reinforced respect for these values.<sup>220</sup>

Power was also granted to the "'smooth talker,'" in a civilization where "silence was an absolute rule for subordinates."<sup>221</sup>

The Party now promoted a new hierarchy and ritually communicated it over loudspeakers in the rice fields, through the written words of the party organ "Padevat" (Revolution),<sup>222</sup> or over the public radio station. Soldiers and citizens of the regime daily repeated ritual offerings to "Angka" in oral form:

1. Thou shalt love, honor, and serve the people of the laborers and peasants.
2. Thou shalt serve the people wherever thou goest, with all thy heart and with all thy mind.
3. Thou shalt respect the people without injury to their interests, without touching their goods or plantations, forbidding thyself to steal so much

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<sup>220</sup>Tan, p. 6.

<sup>221</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," p. 158.

<sup>222</sup>Tan, p. 9.

as one pepper, and taking care never to utter a single offensive word against them.

4. Thou shalt beg the people's pardon if thou hast committed some error respecting them. If thou hast injured the interests of the people, to the people shalt thou make reparation.

5. Thou shalt observe the rules of the people, when speaking, sleeping, walking, standing, or seated, in amusement or in laughter.

6. Thou shalt do nothing improper respecting women.

7. In food and drink thou shalt take nothing but revolutionary products.

8. Thou shalt never gamble in any way.

9. Thou shalt not touch the people's money. Thou shalt never put out they hand to touch so much as one tin of rice or pill of medicine belonging to the collective goods of the state or the ministry.

10. Thou shalt behave with great meekness toward the laboring people and peasants, and the entire population. Toward the enemy, however, the American imperialists and their lackeys, thou shalt feed they hatred with force and vigilance.

11. Thou shalt continually join in the people's production and love thy work.

12. Against any foe and against every obstacle thou shalt struggle with determination and courage, ready to make every sacrifice including thy life for the people, the laborers and peasants, for the revolution and for the Angkar, without hesitation and without respite.<sup>223</sup>

Just as the Khmer language was transformed, the CPK

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<sup>223</sup>Ponchaud, Cambodia, pp. 117,118. The author explains he heard this recitation daily from KR soldiers outside the French embassy after the 1975 victory. Refugees escaping KR zones in 1973 knew them as well. p. 117.

transformed Cambodian culture. Traditionally, Khmer culture moved through two vehicles: high culture, practiced for the royal coterie in the form of intricate dance and music which also served to transmit centuries of Buddhist thought; and folk culture, which was utilized by the masses to transmit ideas of love, revenge, and feckless pleasures through folk tales.<sup>224</sup>

Probably believing that dance and folk tales bore "the imprints of a nation's soul,"<sup>225</sup> the Khmer Rouge could not allow the religious themes to be promulgated in dance, nor could they tolerate the unpuritanical nature of folk tales, so they replaced both vehicles with dance that had Chinese warlike rhythms<sup>226</sup> and oral patriotic discourse to glorify and mythicize the revolutionary struggle.

One secret party document emphasized revolutionary songs and poems in the new culture. It called for "[e]specially the strengthening and expanding of songs and poems that reflect good models . . . ."<sup>227</sup> Revolutionary songs used existing folk-tunes but rather than being sung by individuals, these songs were sung in unison, praising the

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<sup>224</sup>Tan, p. 5.

<sup>225</sup>As quoted by Anatol Lieven, The Baltic Revolution, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 113.

<sup>226</sup>Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 125.

<sup>227</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 113.

rituals of the group.<sup>228</sup>

Songs from the revolution assisted the destruction of the old culture. One song, entitled "Cultural Group," brings out the struggle between old and new culture with the eventual triumph of the new revolutionary culture:

We press our palms together, and bow our heads,  
respecting all of you, our friends, who have come  
together for this evening meeting.

We come tonight to show our talents, and our  
popular, revolutionary culture--to entertain you,  
our young friends.

In the cause of cultural struggle, and in the name  
of the beautiful art of the ancient Khmer, please  
correct and improve our performance. Please help  
us to root out corrupt and rotten culture.

If what we do is right or wrong, please, friends,  
correct and refine the detail helping us,  
constructively, to fit in with old traditions, and  
to achieve a revolutionary culture.<sup>229</sup>

Revolutionary songs also emphasized rites of passage. Those who fought before the April 1975 victory became what James Billington describes as a "forest fraternity:"<sup>230</sup>

We took the jungle as our home,

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<sup>228</sup>The explanation of songs was taken from Chandler. See Kiernan, Peasants, pp. 326-328.

<sup>229</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, pp. 327, 328.

<sup>230</sup>James H. Billington, Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1980), p. 130.

Sunlight never reached us:  
Only mosquitoes and land  
leeches,  
Weak with malaria, we are tree vines,  
All bones and white, but our  
hearts are bright red.<sup>231</sup>

The regime did not tolerate traditional myths and symbols transmitted by religion, language or culture, because these might rekindle forgotten values of the people and threaten the revolution's authority. By replacing language and culture with new symbols, the revolution continued to dismantle Cambodian society and most importantly the individual Khmer notion of himself.

#### ***SANCTIFYING ORGANIZATION THROUGH BLOOD MYTH***

Pol Pot's goal was to "be the best in the world, the best in Cambodian history, the best communists . . . ." <sup>232</sup>  
Yet, in order to be the "best" communists the Khmer Rouge had to purify the country of everything that was not Khmer as the revolution defined Khmer. Implicit in this purification of Cambodia was the necessity to purify the people: to create a new nation based on the myth of Khmer racial superiority. Ponchaud remarked on the purification aspects of the revolution.

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<sup>231</sup>John Barron and Paul Anthony, Murder of a Gentile Land: The Untold Story of Communist Genocide in Cambodia, (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1977), p. 209.

<sup>232</sup>Becker, p. 45.

The new revolutionary culture aims to be absolutely, exclusively national, purged of all foreign impurities--even ones that are centuries old. How far back are the Khmers supposed to go, one wonders, to recover their true identity?<sup>233</sup>

Just as political scientist Walker Connor asserts the importance of the "myth of common descent," for binding peoples into nations, the notion of pure Khmer blood would give the revolution a powerful cognitive bond between the people and the regime.<sup>234</sup>

Purity of blood was based on a myth supplied by the revolution, not fact. "The Cambodian people," Becker points out, are a mixture of racial stocks--largely, the earliest Negroid, Australoid, Malay, and northern Mongoloid racial families and including the later wave of migrations by Europeans, Chinese, and Vietnamese."<sup>235</sup>

The revolution created a national myth in an attempt to solidify a new nation and a loyal following, based no longer on the traditional Cambodian hierarchy. The nation would be based instead on a common kinship traced through a pure, revolutionary bloodline. Although other revolutionary songs

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<sup>233</sup>Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 6.

<sup>234</sup>Walker Connor, Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>235</sup>Becker, p. 253.



demonstrate the importance of Khmer blood, the National Anthem of Democratic Kampuchea, "The Glorious Seventeenth of April," best illustrates the fixation on blood:

Bright red Blood which covers towns and plains  
Sublime Blood of workers and peasants,  
Sublime Blood of revolutionary men and women  
fighters!  
The Blood changing into unrelenting hatred  
And resolute struggle,  
On April 17th, under the Flag of the Revolution  
Frees from Slavery!<sup>236</sup>

Connor explained "political leaders . . . have been mindful of the common blood component of ethnonational psychology and have not hesitated to appeal to it when seeking popular support."<sup>237</sup> Pol Pot emphasized the essential bond of blood in the anthem and the revolution in his thoughts reported over the BBC on 5 October 1977:

Our national anthem was not composed by a poet. Its essence is the blood of our entire people, of those who fell for centuries past. This blood call has been incorporated into the national anthem. Each sentence, each word shows the nature of our people's struggle. This blood has been turned into class and national indignation. This led us to the great victory on 17 April 1975 and still calls for us to defend the people's state power, protect the fatherland and build a prosperous and glorious

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<sup>236</sup>Becker, p. 219.

<sup>237</sup>Walker Connor, Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), p. 202.

Cambodia at a great-leap-forward pace.<sup>238</sup>

"Blood" became the fuel for a new engine of the revolution: "national indignation." Blood themes would also become increasingly prevalent as external support failed to materialize.

#### D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

##### A "LIGHT" TO INSPIRE OTHERS

Pol Pot must have felt not only superior to his former Vietnamese ally, as his successful revolution proved, but equally sure he could set an example for the rest of the world as a kind of guiding light. As one song exclaimed:

The new nation of Kampuchea is a glittering, glowing, sparkling kind of light. We strive to work harder and harder, to expand and complete the revolution.<sup>239</sup>

##### RITUALS FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The "light" was encouraged to shine within the international community. Despite public claims of autarky and lack of external assistance, the confidential documents reveal a concern for developing international relations to prevent Democratic Kampuchea's isolation. The Four Year Plan developed in 1976 exclaims:

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<sup>238</sup>Tan, p. 8.

<sup>239</sup>Kiernan, *Peasants*, p. 327.

We must have international friends to help and support us, especially in the field of politics and consciousness, to prevent outside enemies from being able to isolate and suppress us.<sup>240</sup>

As Party Secretary, Pol Pot personally explained to his cadres the importance of external support in August 1976. He summed up the four main points of the Four Year Plan as: the Party, the workers and peasants, defense, and "many loyal friends throughout the world."<sup>241</sup> By December 1976, a document probably read by Pol Pot for top cadres saw a concern for foreign relations again emphasized:

We have expanded our friendship with a number of Marxist-Leninist parties.... We can [also] make friends in countries where there are no allied Parties.... We have also extended relations to a number of capitalist countries, showing them that our revolution is not isolated. In political terms, this shows that we have considerable power outside our country.<sup>242</sup>

Although public discourse emphasized self-reliance, the

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<sup>240</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, pp. 41,42. One international friend convinced of KR sincerity was US Representative Tom Hayden. In 1975, after contact with their representatives, Hayden testified to the KR's desire for "amnesty and reconciliation" as they consolidated power. See The Vietnam Cambodian Emergency, 1975, Part Two, Hearings Before the Committee on International Relations and Its Special Subcommittee on Investigations, House of Representatives, 94th Congress, First Session, March-April, 1975. p. 520.

<sup>241</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 161.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., pp. 208,209.

Party's private fears at becoming isolated are evident. External alliances were sought and perceived to be found.

So certain that the revolution was an inspiration to others and had external support, less restraint was placed on aggressive international posturing. Successful border raids in 1977 only bolstered the Party's perceptions. Raids into Vietnam were full scale massacres where thousands of civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands were driven from their villages.<sup>243</sup> Intoxicated with success and sure of the viability of the revolution, Pol Pot publicly proclaimed for the first time his country was communist in 1977.

#### **E. DEFEATING ADVERSARIAL RESPONSE**

##### **PROMOTING FEARS THROUGH THE BLACK BOOK**

But his was a communism fueled by racial hatred as characterized by the Livre Noir or Black Book, published by the regime in 1978. This French language document of 112 pages explained the "'facts and proofs of Vietnamese acts of aggression and annexation against Kampuchea.'"<sup>244</sup> The document asserted, "Democratic Kampuchea seeks to maintain goodwill

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<sup>243</sup>Stan Sesser, "Report from Cambodia," The New Yorker, 68, May 18, 1992, p.46. Kiernan writes part of the 3rd Brigade under the nominal command of Son Sen massacred almost 300 civilians on the night of 24 September 1977 during these raids. See Kiernan, "Wild Chickens," p. 172.

<sup>244</sup>Milton Osborne, Aggression and Annexation: Kampuchea's Condemnation of Vietnam, (Canberra, Australia: The Strategic and Defence Studies Center, 1979), p. 1.

with all nations."

But Vietnam which has always had the aim of annexing and swallowing Kampuchea and of exterminating the Kampuchean race by means of its sinister strategy for an 'Indochinese Federation' has carried out the most perfidious activities for dozens of years to gain its objective.<sup>245</sup>

The Black Book explained there were "fundamental contradictions between the Kampuchean and the Vietnamese revolutions," so for Pol Pot negotiation with Vietnam must have been out of the question. This is not to overlook the importance of outside influences on the Khmer Rouge as well. Pol Pot could have been encouraged by the Chinese to punish the Vietnamese. China would desire to see Vietnam humbled, since the Vietnamese had sought solidarity with the Soviets. In sum, Pol Pot would encourage fears of the Vietnamese to defeat his adversary through the Black Book.

#### ***DISPOSABLE POPULATION***

Another means of defeating adversaries was with a disposable population. Despite the revolution promoting the myth of classless society, Pol Pot's public discourse reflects Vietnam would be overcome, by the lowest classes. As he proudly proclaimed on the 10th Anniversary (17 January 1978) of the Founding of the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea: "'We are not worried that the source of our army would become

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<sup>245</sup>Osborne, Aggression, p. 3.

exhausted for the people of the lowest classes are very numerous.'"<sup>246</sup> Pol Pot mobilized 19 of his 23 divisions-- 95,000 men--on the frontier with Vietnam in December 1978.<sup>247</sup> That same month three Khmer Rouge divisions plunged into Vietnam to take the village of Tay Ninh.<sup>248</sup> Pol Pot had taken the important step in November 1978 of asking the Chinese for "volunteers," but the "Chinese counseled self-reliance and increased their material assistance."<sup>249</sup>

#### **RITUALS OF PURIFICATION**

Pol Pot never lost faith in self-reliance. Yet, to achieve this on a national level required the country be ritually purified as he defined Khmer. All challenges to his regime therefore became "enemies" of the revolution. Shedding this blood would liberate the nation he sought to create. As one song proclaimed:

Glittering red blood blankets the earth--blood  
given up to liberate the people: blood of workers,  
peasants and intellectuals; blood of young men,  
Buddhist monks and girls.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>246</sup>Ben Kiernan, How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930-1975, (London: Verso, 1985), p. 420.

<sup>247</sup>Gough, Kathleen, "The Situation in Kampuchea," Contemporary-Marxism, 6, Spring, 1983, p. 217.

<sup>248</sup>Gough, "Situation," p. 217.

<sup>249</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 161.

<sup>250</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, p. 326.

According to Pol Pot's estimates on 28 September 1977, over Phnom Penh radio, only "one or two per cent of the population [classified] as enemies of the state."<sup>251</sup> Yet out of a population of 7 million Khmer and other minorities, one study cites at least 2 million were killed through policies perpetrated by the regime.<sup>252</sup> Enemies had become critical for the revolution. "The existence of enemies was necessary for class warfare," Chandler explained. "Contradictions among the people impelled the party forward. To maintain momentum, instability was essential."<sup>253</sup>

#### **THE "KING OF DEATH"**

Pol Pot not only propelled the party forward with his search for enemies, he had the power of the "King of Death," a mythological figure in folk tales that essentially controlled life and death.<sup>254</sup> He could be likened to a fierce

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<sup>251</sup>Tan, p. 9.

<sup>252</sup>Hannum, p. 94.

<sup>253</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 157.

<sup>254</sup>"In Cambodian folk religion one of the main mythological figures is known as the King of Death. He is judge, the one who assigns souls to heaven or hell, and he knows all about everyone's good and bad deeds. Nothing is hidden from him. The souls he sends to hell become pret, spirits of the damned, the victims of gory and everlasting tortures brought upon them by their own misdeeds." Haing Ngor, A Cambodian Odyssey, (New York: Warner Books, 1987), pp. 240, 241.

god depicted on a "bas-relief at Angkor Wat" as writer Kathleen Gough saw it, "meting out punishments to the wicked."

The scenes include several reproduced by Pol Pot: throwing people to crocodiles, tearing them limb from limb, burning them alive, disemboweling them, and drowning them upside down in vats.<sup>255</sup>

Pol Pot's brutality came to resemble the justice outside the gates of Angkor, passed down through decades of precedent in the Cambodian penal system whereby "political criminals or 'traitors' and their whole families are executed together."<sup>256</sup> Not to be overlooked in examining Pol Pot's justification for enemies was the logic of the revolutionary theory that people were not accused of treason because they were thought to be traitors, they were accused of treason because they were marked for liquidation.<sup>257</sup>

#### ***SYMBOLIC WARFARE***

The revolution characterized enemies of the revolution as sub-human forms who came to be "symbolically dehumanized and vilified."<sup>258</sup> Peoples names were given the prefix "contemptible" or "wicked;" women were called "she-animals;"

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<sup>255</sup>Gough, "Situation," p. 218.

<sup>256</sup>Tan, p. 9.

<sup>257</sup>Hannum, p. 89.

<sup>258</sup>Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 144.



and the word used for death was not for people who die but the word that described an animal's death.<sup>259</sup> Symbolically defeating an adversary follows closely with the description of slaves in the Angkor period where the toiling masses were called "'dog,' 'cat,' 'detestable,' and 'stinking.'"<sup>260</sup> In the Angkor era, dissent was not possible under the "god-kings" nor did the Cambodians dissent under their Khmer Rouge yoke. Historically, the Khmer tradition was to follow the absolute authority of their rulers. There were no accounts of uprising among the Khmer despite the untold suffering of their kind.<sup>261</sup>

Revolutionary songs helped justify in the Khmer mind the necessity of defeating adversaries by echoing this search for enemies of the revolution:

Intertwined, as one, our anger shoots out at the imperialists--the Americans, and their reactionary lackies, killing them until they disappear.<sup>262</sup>

#### **DEFEATING THE "NEAK TA"**

The CPK had to defeat not only human enemies but the "Neak Ta," (ancient spiritual beings) who were omnipresent in

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<sup>259</sup>Hannum, p. 89.

<sup>260</sup>Becker, p. 84.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid., p. 263. Death may have been ameliorated by the doctrines of Buddhism which preached the doctrine of reincarnation.

<sup>262</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, p. 328.

the peasant world view. Ponchaud provides an insightful reason for dominating this incorporeal world through new rituals.

[T]he revolutionaries had to confront the invisible masters who before them, at least in the minds of the peasants, governed over the welfare of the villages. In their will towards a total control over fate and creation of man by man, they had to suppress the 'ancestors.' It is probably in light of this that one should view the relentless shifts of population since 1975. Beyond economic necessity, these constant shifts destroyed the religious environment surrounding peasant life, thus breaking the vital link between villagers and celestial powers, and obviating all spiritual references connected to the soil.<sup>263</sup>

Ponchaud explains peasants who spoke of "Neak Ta" would elicit from the Khmer Rouge responses like: "'Where is he, I'm going to shoot him.'" Yet when Khmer Rouge trucks broke down after ancient statues were moved or cadre became sick after urinating on a pagoda, the domination of "Angka" may have been far from complete--even members of the Khmer Rouge would secretly make offerings.<sup>264</sup>

#### **DESTROYING MINORITIES**

Another force perceived to be opposed to Khmer Rouge authority were the minorities. The races who had migrated to

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<sup>263</sup>Ponchaud, "Social Change," pp. 167, 168.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., p. 169. The author relates the Issaraks fighting the French did not alienate the people by attempting to destroy the Neak Ta, they simply created new ancient beings that served their cause. p. 169.

Cambodia did not share the same historic traditions of the Khmer but were given a clear choice: accept the Khmer Rouge revolutionary dictums and become part of the new nation or be "kamtech," a word that is literally translated "smashed to bits."<sup>265</sup> The regime decreed that all minorities would only speak Khmer and that the minority populations no longer existed.<sup>266</sup>

When the revolution claimed victory in 1975, the Khmer Rouge had divided the 7 million people of Cambodia into "old" and "new" people. Approximately 4.5 to 5 million "old" people had lived in the Khmer Rouge occupied areas and were accustomed to collectivization and the loss of their ethnic distinctions. The 3.5 million "new" people were forced to adopt the leveling of society and become slaves of the state. By 1977, however, the distinction between "new" and "old" was disappearing and all non-Khmer were being targeted for physical annihilation.<sup>267</sup>

Minority populations like the Cham (numbering 500,000 to 700,000 in the 1970s), who had helped the revolution with the expectation that their belief in Islam would be tolerated

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<sup>265</sup>Hannum, p. 89.

<sup>266</sup>This would not be unlike Stalin's attempt to dismantle the Soviet policy of nation-building (korenizatsiia) in an attempt to promote Russian nationalism over the ethnic minorities. Simon, p. 13.

<sup>267</sup>Gough, "Situation," pp. 211, 212.

under the new regime were now considered a "specialized religion" and targeted for destruction. The regime published a decree to emphasize the symbolic defeat of minorities:

There is one Kampuchean revolution. In Kampuchea there is one nation, and one language, the Khmer language. From now on the various nationalities [listed according to province] do not exist any longer in Kampuchea. Therefore [Cham] individuals must change their names. The Cham mentality [Cham nationality, the Cham language, Cham costume, Cham habits, Cham religion] are abolished. Those who do not abide by this order will reap all consequences.<sup>268</sup>

The Cham minority, who believed in one God and the tenants of Islam, had traditionally lived apart from the Khmer as their special dietary laws and faith required. Now the Khmer Rouge forced Cham to violate their religious custom and eat pork at gunpoint and witness the destruction of their faith. Cham families were broken up and their villages burned. But the Cham fought back.<sup>269</sup> Islam justified fighting

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<sup>268</sup>David R. Hawk, "International Human Rights Law and Democratic Kampuchea," The Cambodian Agony, ed. by David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood, (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1987), pp. 127, 128.

<sup>269</sup>Ponchaud tells a sad story of a Cham father who meets with his two sons who have joined the Khmer Rouge. The father was told of their efforts for the revolution to include killing Khmers and eating pork. They asked their father to join the revolution but the father did not answer, he just killed his sons with a cleaver. The villagers were taken back but the father explained: "'they are enemies of our people and our religion and so I killed them.'" Emboldened by the father's actions, the village killed all the Khmer Rouge living in their community, only to be

for the faith so the Khmer Rouge were quick to extinguish this reactionary minority. "[F]ully one half or even more did not survive Khmer Rouge rule."<sup>270</sup>

Other minorities who had also helped the regime come to power were also purified or purged. Ethnic minorities like the Shan or Kula and other Khmer Loeu populations "were forbidden to wear distinctive dress . . . or speak even a phrase of any non-Khmer language, on pain of death."<sup>271</sup>

Cambodia's minority Chinese were not allowed to speak their native language or practice their native culture. Ironically, the regime was assisted by over 4,000 Chinese technicians from mainland China.<sup>272</sup> Any attempts by the Cambodian Chinese to communicate their persecution to their mainland kin were stopped by the Khmer Rouge escorts or resulted in their being turned in to the regime by their Chinese brothers.<sup>273</sup> It is estimated that roughly half of the

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surrounded the next day by Khmer Rouge troops who killed everyone in the village. Ponchaud, Cambodia, p. 133.

<sup>270</sup>Hannum, p. 87. Hawk notes Cham were symbolically buried upside down away from Mecca as part of the symbolic warfare waged against the Moslem minority. See David Hawk, "The Photographic Record," in Karl D. Jackson, ed., Cambodia 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 213.

<sup>271</sup>Gough, "Situation," p. 212.

<sup>272</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 110.

<sup>273</sup>Becker, p. 255.

urban Chinese died during the revolution.<sup>274</sup>

Ethnic Thais were also executed without compunction.

Becker notes their destruction:

The swift purge of the Thai was so unexpected it caught the ethnic Thai members of the Khmer Rouge by surprise. As many as one-third of the ethnic Thai community in Koh Kong [a province on the Gulf of Siam] were killed.<sup>275</sup>

Khmer Rouge treatment of minorities has many parallels to the Soviet treatment of the Ukraine and the north Caucasus minorities during the period 1928 to 1933. However, the parallels do not stop with the destruction of ethnic minorities. Like Stalin, Pol Pot began a ritual purge of his own party cadre that beckoned a direct comparison to the Soviet show trials of the 1930s; where the Party "destroyed its own elites."<sup>276</sup>

#### **DEFEATING THE "MICROBES"**

Party discourse communicated through songs proclaimed success:

O solidarity group, working in unison, happy and self-assured! Dry-season rice, wet-season rice, light and heavy varieties of rice: our husbandry is

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<sup>274</sup>Hawk, "International," p. 129.

<sup>275</sup>Becker, pp. 260,261.

<sup>276</sup>Simon, p. 155.

successful everywhere.<sup>277</sup>

Songs reinforced plenty:

We are overjoyed to be increasing the output of village and district. Our economy has made great steps forward, now we have surpluses to put into granaries and to supply the revolution.<sup>278</sup>

The economic facts proved otherwise.<sup>279</sup> The policies of collectivization and economic restructuring resulted in the collapse of the national economy and increasing famine. Documents from the Party demonstrate increasing concern that some were questioning the collectivist agenda. When the problem of feed grains for animals came up for example, one document explained: "At first glance it seems as if the socialist system is inferior to the private (one)."<sup>280</sup> A later secret address, probably by Pol Pot, explained the real reason for the death of draft animals: "Enemies within and enemies

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<sup>277</sup>Kiernan, Peasants, p. 327.

<sup>278</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>279</sup>The party called for a Four Year Plan to produce three tons of rice per hectare, which entailed more than doubling the current yields. For the plan see Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 37. For a discussion of the KR economy see Charles Twining's essay on "The Economy." Twining says Radio Phnom Penh reported: "'Enemy running dogs of all colors planted within our cooperatives sabotaged the 3-ton-per-hectare target.'" Twining, "The Economy," p.145.

<sup>280</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 22.

without have stepped up their activities."<sup>281</sup>

Pol Pot was convinced there was, in his words, a "sickness" in the party.<sup>282</sup> "Microbes," Pol Pot announced, were at work wrecking his policies and weakening the revolutionary faith. "'We cannot locate it precisely,'" Pol Pot told his followers:

The illness must emerge to be examined. Because the heat of the people's revolution and the heat of the democratic revolution were insufficient ... we search for the microbes within the party without success. They are buried. As our socialist revolution advances, however, seeping more strongly into every corner of the Party, the army and among the people, we can locate the ugly microbes. They will be pushed out by the true nature of socialist revolution. We are encouraged to expel treacherous elements that pose problems to the Party and to our revolution. If we wait any longer, the microbes can do real damage.<sup>283</sup>

In the search for enemies Pol Pot explained to his cadre the costs of purification were small. "Don't be afraid to lose one or two people of bad background," the Party Secretary exhorted.<sup>284</sup>

To "push out" the "microbes" each of the country's 127

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 185, 186.



districts had one or more execution centers established.<sup>285</sup> The regime tortured and killed those suspected of damaging the revolution, then buried the bodies in pits containing from 40 to 100 victims.<sup>286</sup> For more important cadre, a special torture-interrogation center was established in a Phnom Penh schoolhouse called Tuol Sleng or S.21. Over 4,000 confessions exist, along with photographs of most of the center's 20,000 victims.<sup>287</sup> Guards were given detailed interrogation instructions in a 42-page manual that tersely explained: "When torturing it is necessary to examine their [the prisoner's] state of health first, and the whip. Don't be bloodthirsty that you cause the death quickly. You won't get the needed information."<sup>288</sup>

#### ***DEFEATING UNPOPULARITY***

Despite the perception of enemies in the Party, Pol Pot continued to believe the people supported his initiatives. He explained, "We have shortcomings. But even in these difficult aspects, the people remain supportive of the Party's line and act accordingly."<sup>289</sup> The Party Secretary chose to defeat

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<sup>285</sup>Gough, "Situation," p. 213.

<sup>286</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>287</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 129.

<sup>288</sup>Hannum, p. 130.

<sup>289</sup>Chandler, Pol Pot Plans, p. 205.

adversaries who undermined this popularity. "There are still a number of people escaping to Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos,"<sup>290</sup> he explained to his cadres, but they would be overcome through informers. "The task of preparing to defend ourselves secretly and efficiently against them is not yet complete," Pol Pot announced.

The methods of defense must be secret. This is a different task from defending our territory. Technically, the fight must be swift and successful. Those who defend us must be truly adept. They should have practice in observing. They must observe everything, but so those being observed are unaware of it.<sup>291</sup>

Pol Pot was destroying not only the country of Cambodia but his own communist regime. An "Angka" official summarized the policy: "to rebuild our new democratic Cambodia, one million men is enough."<sup>292</sup>

#### **ATTEMPTING TO DEFEAT THE VIETNAMESE**

Just as the Angkor period saw the "god-kings" exhaust their empire with the exploitation of the people and the country's resources, Pol Pot was following the same historical precedent only at an accelerated rate. What took 600 years for the Angkor kings to exhaust, Pol Pot would do in forty-

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<sup>290</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>291</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>292</sup>Barron, p. 197.

four months. And just as these policies of the Angkor empire led to foreign occupation, so would the policies of Pol Pot.

Angkor had been captured by the Thai in 1353.<sup>293</sup> The Vietnamese followed with an annexation of much of Cambodia in the 19th century, not to mention ninety years of French occupation beginning in 1863. But racial animosity seems to run highest between the Khmer and her neighbor to the east, Vietnam.

The border between Cambodia and Vietnam is one of the greatest cultural divides of Asia. It marks the frontiers of Asia's two great cultures, China and India.... Their common border ... has been the scene of more battles than any other in Asia.<sup>294</sup>

Khmer memories were long, and a pervading myth to come out of the Vietnamese occupation in the mid-1800s was the ancient story of the quashing of a Cambodian rebellion when Khmer soldiers were buried to provide their heads as cookstones for Vietnamese pots. The period of annexation from 1841 to 1845 saw the Vietnamese introduce their dress, religion, and culture in an attempt to "eliminate Cambodia's distinctive identity."<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup>Ross, p. 12.

<sup>294</sup>Becker, p. 337.

<sup>295</sup>Milton Osborne, Before Kampuchea: Preludes to Tragedy, (Winchester, Mass: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1979), p. 166.

Whether Pol Pot felt the hatred of wounded historical pride or the intense racial superiority of the Khmer race, or a combination of both, he could accommodate the Vietnamese in Cambodia no longer. Cambodian Vietnamese had been allowed to return to Vietnam since 1975. In 1977 he evidently began to reevaluate his policy of accommodation and directed his "regional cadre to round up ethnic Vietnamese and turn them over to state security."<sup>296</sup> Pol Pot directed the Khmer Rouge eastern zones on the Vietnamese border be purged with greater intensity to root out communists with "'Cambodian bodies and Vietnamese minds.'"<sup>297</sup>

Relations between the Khmer Rouge and Vietnam communists had never been easy as evidenced by the opposing goals each side espoused in 1973 during the Paris Peace talks. Even after the communist victory in April 1975, the Khmer Rouge attacked and occupied several Vietnamese islands in the Gulf of Thailand, apparently unhappy with the border lines drawn during the French colonial period as well as their interest in the oil reserves located offshore. Although Vietnam retaliated and took a Cambodian island, the Vietnamese appeared to resist a full confrontation.<sup>298</sup> But the Khmer Rouge kept up

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<sup>296</sup>Chandler, Brother, p. 141.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>298</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

their cross border violations throughout 1975-1976.

The Khmer Rouge misperceived not only the support the Chinese would lend their cause, but their own myth of invincibility. With the collaboration of Khmer Rouge who had left Pol Pot's regime for fear of being purged, the Vietnamese answered the Cambodian invasion with their own. Fourteen divisions to include air support plunged into Cambodia on 24 December 1978 and captured Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979. Within the invasion force flew a familiar symbol, a red flag with the five yellow towers of Angkor Wat.<sup>299</sup>

The Khmer Rouge were no match for the highly disciplined and materially superior Vietnamese army. An exhausted Cambodia once again fell to foreign incursion as the Khmer Rouge melted into the forests from which they came.

#### **F. CONCLUSIONS**

Fanatical beliefs in purity of blood and race drove Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to destruction by the Vietnamese. Although their revolutionary communism had elements of foreign exposure, Cambodian communism was not essentially Marxist-Leninist nor Maoist, but nationalist, based on a common blood myth.

The Khmer Rouge utilized myth, ritual, and symbols to

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<sup>299</sup>Nayan Chanda, Brother Enemy: The War after the War, (New York: Collier Books, 1986), p. 340. Chanda notes the same style of flag was used by the Khmer Issarak in the 1950s.

legitimize their leadership, recruit rural support, organize the Party, elicit external support, and defeat adversaries. Yet, the insurgents never inspired a mass national movement, but relied increasingly on coercion. The Khmer Rouge attempt to create a new nation brought only disaster to the CPK and the people it ostensibly served. In the end, the insurgency filled a political vacuum and then destroyed it.

The Party's mythology based on superiority of race, culture, and history not only dominated the thoughts of the Khmer Rouge but led to a reign of terror and genocide that decimated not only the people the revolution was supposed to save, but based to some degree on ancient hatreds, led inexorably to a war and defeat by Vietnam. In fact, the revolution could only be fueled by finding a new enemy or hatred to propel the revolution forward, be it the Khmer people, the minority populations, the party elite, or the Vietnamese.

By manipulating as well as replacing Khmer religion, language, and culture with new revolutionary myths, rituals, and symbols the Khmer Rouge were able to dominate the ethnic Khmer as well as the minority populations who initially flocked to the revolutionary cause. Befitting an oral culture, symbolic discourse took the form of revolutionary language and songs and was further broadened by adapting Khmer notions of ancient eras, Buddhism, and traditional

culture. Thus empowered, the insurgency remained viable from its fragile origins in the 1950s to its final victory in 1975. Myths however had a two-edged quality, in one respect they hardened the revolutionary faith in ultimate mastery over any obstacle and the obtainability of self-reliance. Yet on the other hand, these myths and symbols clouded the failures of the regime in 1979, to include the lack of full popular support, economic catastrophe, reliable external support, and the enemies envisioned by its leadership.

Max Lerner, writing of Hitler's manipulation of symbols while leading the Third Reich, observed: "The power of these symbols is enormous. Men possess thoughts, but symbols possess men."<sup>300</sup> Pol Pot and his cadre may have in fact been possessed by the very symbols and myths they helped create. Ultimately, Pol Pot embodied the one symbol that has always terrified Khmer society, the "King of Death." And under the king's mantle as "Original Khmer," Pol Pot not only made Cambodia anew through destruction but his own revolution as well.

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<sup>300</sup>David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 5.

## VI. THE OUTLAWS: THE KHMER ROUGE FROM 1979 TO 1995

After falling from power in 1979, the Khmer Rouge are attempting to reconstruct the movement with new myths, rituals, and symbols in the battle of perceptions. In 1995, celebrating the 20th anniversary of their revolutionary victory, the Khmer Rouge clandestine radio emphasized the importance of mind over matter in the 1975 victory:

April 17, 1975 was a serious day for the United States which lost the war in Cambodia for the first time then.... Why did the United States lose?.... The modern weapons of America ... could not defeat Cambodia's wish. *Winning or losing is based on wish, not on modern weapons.*<sup>301</sup>

The broadcast reflects the training of Pol Pot and his leadership who emphasize to cadres the struggle is not only a battle on the material plane but a battle of ideas as well. "Through our leadership," Pol Pot explained, "we must bring up our cadres and all our ranks to a clear understanding of this war of ideology, determination, and politics so that they will

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<sup>301</sup>Italics added. The broadcast continued, "This should be a lesson for the Clinton administration, the American people and their allies who have joined hands with the current government and Yvon [Vietnamese] communists to invade Cambodian territory a second time." The Vietnamese invasion and later pullout was described as "another symbol showing that the war equipment or modern weapons cannot win over the Cambodian people's wish." See Chea Sotheacheath, "Khmer Rouge Send Warning to US President," The Cambodia Daily, 19 April 1995, n.p.



not be careless about this matter."<sup>302</sup> The Khmer Rouge promote five myths to enhance viability and give the ideological battlefield, expressed by Pol Pot, "'concrete expression.'"<sup>303</sup> The five myths are: 1) the myth of new public image; 2) the myth of popularity; 3) the myth of enemy incursion; 4) the myth of heirdom to the country's resources; and 5) the myth of invincibility. Each myth will be placed within the five elements of viability this study has utilized. By utilizing the verbal discourse of the insurgency as expressed in captured documents, interviews with defectors, and clandestine radio broadcasts, the viability offered by these myths becomes increasingly evident.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>302</sup>Unpublished document from the KR leadership entitled, "What is the Virtue, the Quality, the Reality and the Responsibility of Democratic Kampuchea in the Past, Present, and Future?", dated 2 December 1986; p. 10. The document is attributed to Pol Pot by context.

<sup>303</sup>Quoted from Roman Laba, The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 126.

<sup>304</sup>Captured Khmer Rouge documents include two unpublished sources graciously provided by Laura Summers. The first document is a 21 page address probably by Pol Pot entitled: "What is the Virtue, the Quality, the Reality and the Responsibility of Democratic Kampuchea in the Past, Present, and Future?", obtained from a KR defector under military leader Ta Mok. The document is dated 2 December 1986 and was translated on 29 February 1988 by the Central Intelligence Agency. Future references to it are entitled, "Virtue." The second document is a 48 page address to DK women cadre attributed to Pol Pot by context. The document is titled: "What is the Current Situation in Kampuchea? What Will It Be Like in the Future?". Translated by Steve

## A. LEGITIMACY

### *THE MYTH OF NEW PUBLIC IMAGE*

The 1975 to 1979 period of Khmer Rouge authority became symbolized by "Angka," an image derived from the Angkorean era myths that gave legitimacy and authority to the "organization." By the 1990s, with the dissolution of communism, fresh symbols were needed to fit the insurgents' new realities.

### *INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY*

To repair their malevolent image in the international community, the CPK publicly retired top cadres, created a new party, and adopted new political rituals. In 1985, Pol Pot publicly retired, followed the next year by the retirement of the second highest civilian and top military leader, Nuon Chea and Ta Mok.<sup>305</sup> The organization they led, the Communist Party of Kampuchea, became the Party of Democratic Kampuchea

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Header, the document is dated December 1988. Future references to it are entitled "Current." Defector interviews were provided by Steve Header and Lt. Colonel Ed Waller who conducted interviews with some 100 self-demobilized NADK combatants between July 1992 and August 1993 as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Clandestine radio broadcasts are published in FBIS.

<sup>305</sup>Christophe Peschoux, The "New" Khmer Rouge: Reconstruction of the Movement and Reconquest of the Villages (1979-1990), unpublished English manuscript of French book of same title published by Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992, pp. 32,33.

(PDK).<sup>306</sup>

But according to a deserting cadre the hierarchy of the Khmer Rouge has changed in form but not content:

the party has been dissolved but the hierarchical structure remains, I mean the real hierarchy, the secret one. But this could not be revealed outside because of what happened in the past. Thus they created a new hierarchy for official use. But if they regain power, the real hierarchy will reappear because it is where the real power is. It will reappear slowly or all at once. In the official hierarchy Khieu Samphan is number one and Son Sen number two as NADK commander-in-chief, followed by Mok, Ieng Sary, [sic] etc. As for the real hierarchy, it is led, in order, by Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Ta Mok, Ta Pauk, Ta Bit.<sup>307</sup>

As for the rituals of this hierarchy, the PDK assert they have forsaken their communist ideology and adopted a new political understanding. Pluralist democracy is embraced and was carefully explained to cadres in 1986:

Being in possession of people in the villages and then having more and more committees to lead the villages, the people will be selecting their representatives to go into parliament, what's known as the legislative organ, which means the organ that makes the laws of the state. If we have a number of popular representatives in parliament we will inevitably have some representatives in the government or in certain major ministries. Having popular representatives belonging to us in the state organs of the villages and subdistricts, where our prospects are reasonably large, will result in our

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<sup>306</sup>The PDK had been created in December 1981 in an attempt to distance itself from the Pol Pot led CPK regime.

<sup>307</sup>Peschoux, p. 35.

having persons and a voice in parliament....<sup>308</sup>

#### *DOMESTIC LEGITIMACY*

The embrace of the parliamentary style required the PDK to garner domestic legitimacy, as people were seen to be the "guarantee of victories both now and in the future."<sup>309</sup> The PDK reasoned, "[o]nly by being in possession of popular strength will we have our forces inside state jobs in the villages and subdistricts, in parliament and in the government and the ministries."<sup>310</sup> The document points out that Cambodia has 8,000 villages, and that the PDK controls 2,000 already.<sup>311</sup> One 1993 estimate confirmed the number of villages held, but put the PDK in direct control of only 5 percent of the population, "less than 200,000 civilians nearly all of whom are engaged in subsistence farming."<sup>312</sup> It was not, however, inconceivable for the remainder of the villages to be won: "We allocate them out and distribute ourselves so that we are all

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<sup>308</sup>Current, p. 17. The need for parliamentary preparation may have ended with the boycott of the 1993 national elections.

<sup>309</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>312</sup>Zachary Abuza, "The Khmer Rouge Quest for Economic Independence," Asian Survey, October 1993, vol xxxiii, no 10, p. 1019.

over the villages, and then go all out refashioning them."<sup>313</sup>

"Refashioning" meant recruiting cadres who understood the rituals of the local population but who could teach the new rituals of the Party. PDK women cadres addressed in a 1986 document were told to seek those who could integrate themselves and take on the roles of the indigenous villagers.

The fact is that those of our women who originate from peasant sources and who are now residing [sic] side-by-side with our people are already identical and virtually identical [sic] to the people by habit and custom, in their speech and all their ways of relating.<sup>314</sup>

The PDK's obstacle was to train those selected in the rituals of the Party before their infiltration.

The only problem remaining is in the area of training and nurturing these friends of ours so that they understand the methods and the procedure by which popular strength-building work is carried out ... understand the organizational line ... understanding training and testing ... understand how to select of [sic] nuclei to perform the function of acting as new cadre among the people ....<sup>315</sup>

## **B. POPULAR SUPPORT**

### ***THE MYTH OF POPULARITY***

Building and maintaining popular support is now better

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<sup>313</sup>Current, p. 18.

<sup>314</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>315</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

understood as a key to the viability of the movement. The revolutionary regime had misperceived the cowed acquiescence of the population during the 1975-1979 period as popular support. But as political scientist Jan Kubik makes clear, "the lack of visible forms of protest and the apparent passivity of the populace can by no means be interpreted as an expression of support for, even less as granting legitimacy to, the ruling elite or regime."<sup>316</sup> The Khmer Rouge are intent on spreading a myth of popularity.

#### **POPULAR SUPPORT THROUGH LAND**

To retain popular support, the PDK have attempted to use the symbols of capitalism and materialism. One important symbol is private ownership of land. Eschewing the socialist communes of the revolutionary regime, the PDK now advise cadres to distribute liberated land to the people. Cadres are asked the rhetorical question: "So, if we distribute land to the people to work in such a manner will they be happy?" The question is answered in kind: "They will be joyously pleased because Democratic Kampuchea is providing for their interests."<sup>317</sup> Land would be given to the people "without any [sic] strings attached" while additional land could be rented

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<sup>316</sup>Jan Kubik, The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>317</sup>Current, p. 30.

from the government "from which they would allocate half of the produce to the State."<sup>318</sup> Cadres are reminded the land is not to be sold by peasants interested in cash for a "spending spree."

Do whatever you can to make the people understand that this land was obtained through not a little bit of life and death struggle by our people, who joined with our National Army in the fight to seize it back from the contemptible Yuon [Vietnamese] aggressor enemy. This land is therefore never to be sold. This land must be preserved and protected eternally to promote their lives.<sup>319</sup>

Encouraging the perception of abundance to the impoverished remains the foundation of the plan. Only then could desertion from PDK areas stop. "The distribution and disbursement of land to landless people," cadres are informed, "will certainly make them cheer and please them, and they will stay with us and constitute our strategic strength."<sup>320</sup>

#### **POPULAR SUPPORT THROUGH CAPITALISM**

Having abolished money during their former reign, the PDK found another symbol to make PDK villages cheer: reestablished personal capital. Villagers are encouraged to establish personal savings accounts in PDK banks. "In the days to come

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<sup>318</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>319</sup>Ibid., pp. 36, 37. Yuon is the pejorative Khmer word for Vietnamese.

<sup>320</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

we will be setting up savings banks in various locations," cadres were informed.<sup>321</sup> Personal savings allow individuals to not only make a living but cadres were informed banks provide both a "secure" place for an investment and "earn annual interest."<sup>322</sup>

#### **POPULAR SUPPORT THROUGH MATERIALISM**

Individual desires will also be fulfilled through the material symbols of the West. Cadres were informed not to be duped by "superficials" such as whether or not a village had "motorcycles, automobiles, radios, televisions, tape recorders or other alluring externals."<sup>323</sup> Instead, cadres were to focus on "whether the people have work to do, are employed, whether they have land, water and plants in cultivation . . . ." <sup>324</sup> However, the leadership did point out the benefits of materialism will come: "As for automobiles, motorcycles, radios, televisions and all those other things, they will certainly be obtained gradually precisely as the result of such an expansion and development of the family economy."<sup>325</sup>

#### **POPULAR SUPPORT THROUGH WOMEN**

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<sup>321</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>322</sup>Ibid.

<sup>323</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>324</sup>Ibid.

<sup>325</sup>Ibid.



The development of the "family economy," the leadership explained, goes to an important symbol in Khmer society: women.

In the course of every kind of economically productive activity, as in various other ways of earning a living, women play an extremely crucial role, as important or more important than that of men, particularly in planting things and raising animals around the home, which are among the most lucrative sources of family income as well as a daily one. It is therefore imperative to figure out how to conduct a systematic reshaping of our female cadre economically and in livelihood terms.<sup>326</sup>

This address to the "Association of Patriotic Kampuchean Women" makes them the basis of the future PDK. Recognizing that men are the minority in a country decimated by decades of continuous fighting, the women cadres were told, "nation-wide female strength constitutes 60 percent of the whole population, while at the same time our Women's Association already has more than 20,000 members."<sup>327</sup>

Women were to build cadres' [by implication, men's] faith in the people, sorely lacking in the revolutionary regime when "new" people were perceived to be impure for not having joined before April 17, 1975.

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<sup>326</sup>Ibid., p. 48. Women cadres were told to select five to ten "friends" from among the Association in each "battle theatre" to become responsible for economic matters. p. 48.

<sup>327</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

It is thus nothing extraordinary that they still don't have the same faith in the people as they would in their own flesh and blood. Their faith in the people is significant still only as sentiment, as something in their souls; it's still not a practical reality in terms of their actual work.<sup>328</sup>

Women instead must encourage cadres "not to abandon or be distant from the people and do nothing whatsoever that adversely affects the people."<sup>329</sup> After the disastrous forty-four month reign, the PDK now better understood, "[t]he people are precisely the back-up base of our rank and file and our nation."<sup>330</sup>

### C. ORGANIZATION

#### *THE MYTH OF ENEMY INCURSION*

Relying now on the people demonstrates that the PDK learned an important lesson in the failure of their revolution. However, the revolution's demise was still blamed on others by encouraging the myth of enemy incursion. Cadres were informed enemies would never be able to stop the forces of Democratic Kampuchea a second time. Members were informed: "We do not allow the contemptible Vietnamese enemies, aggressors, expansionists, and mega-murderers or any group of

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

swindlers to cheat us again."<sup>331</sup> The PDK uphold the myth through discourse that proclaims the nation is defended only by their continued organizational vigilance against enemies, specifically, Vietnamese. The PDK explain,

[i]t simply doesn't occur to them [the nation of Cambodia] that the Yuon are on Kampuchea's doorstep and are always standing by, waiting for an opportunity, the opening when Kampuchea is left without the strength with which to defend itself, and then to come back as they please to control Kampuchea, without the least bit of regard for international law.<sup>332</sup>

#### **ORGANIZED AS THE "HARDCORE"**

Promoting fears of Vietnamese dominance adds a nationalist and racist theme readily accepted by many Khmer. The PDK emphasize to cadres that if the Party were not there to defend the nation the "race will inevitably disappear, and there would be a second Kampuchea Kraom."<sup>333</sup>

Fears of enemy incursion serve to unify the organization of the PDK. Members see themselves as the "hardcore of the nation and the people."<sup>334</sup> Without a strong union of loyal cadre, PDK areas would take on the appearance of Laos, a

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<sup>331</sup>Virtue, pp. 12,13.

<sup>332</sup>Current, p. 7.

<sup>333</sup>Ibid., p. 23. Kampuchea Kraom is the southeastern territory presently held by Vietnam that was once Cambodian land.

<sup>334</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

country swallowed by the Vietnamese to form part of the "Indochinese Federation."

The problem of Laos now is like that of a frog being swallowed by a snake. The legs and body have already been swallowed, leaving only nose, mouth and eyes of the head merely to be put on display for others to see.<sup>335</sup>

Although defending against the domination of Vietnam, the PDK remain suspicious of any organized forces, even those opposed to the Vietnamese presence.

#### **ORGANIZED TO DEFEAT ALLIES**

After the 1979 invasion of Cambodia, the Vietnamese installed a government led by former Khmer Rouge defectors known as the Revolutionary People's Party of Kampuchea (RPPK). Opposed to this foreign imposed government were the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) headed by Norodom Sihanouk.<sup>336</sup> The PDK joined the CGDK in 1982 and fought as nominal allies during the 10-year war against Vietnamese occupation from 1979 to 1989.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>336</sup>The CGDK was made up of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC). Khieu Samphan became the Vice President in charge of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>337</sup>An important aspect of this alliance is the PDK received aid from China and the West to oppose the Vietnamese installed government, probably saving it from extinction after their catastrophic defeat in 1979.

During this fight against the Vietnamese, PDK cadres were encouraged never to forget, their allies would seek to destroy them once the Vietnamese government was defeated.

Regardless of which of the three others we are talking about, they will be wanting to exterminate us. They are trying to exterminate us now, and in the days to come they will still be trying to exterminate us.<sup>338</sup>

#### **ORGANIZED TO DEFEAT "ENVY"**

In the PDK's perception, they were persecuted because of the envy of others. Never in Cambodia's history had an organization been as selfless in its fight against colonialism and external threats.

We can say that during the history of Cambodia for over 2,000 yeras, [sic] the virtue, quality, true character and value of Democratic Kampuchea are the best.... But this is also what the enemies, far or near, and the exploiting group, inside and outside the country, hate most. That is why they have to oppose us at all costs, they try over and over to defame us, to turn us away, to step on us, to crush us until we, our name, our forces, and this history no longer exist in Cambodia. They do not want this famous history to be able to spread to the world.<sup>339</sup>

Envy has thus become a vehicle for organizing the jealous defenders of the nation.

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<sup>338</sup>Current, p. 18.

<sup>339</sup>Virtue, p. 20.

D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

*THE MYTH OF HEIRDOM TO THE COUNTRY'S RESOURCES*

As defenders of the nation, another important myth to foster is the PDK's reverence for the nation's resources; the image of protectors of Cambodia's sacred soil. The temples of Angkor Wat were dutifully maintained during the revolutionary period. The revolutionary regime had also emphasized the ties between the Party and the land through oral discourse as well. One Revolutionary song entitled, "The Beauty of Kampuchea," sung during their ruling years emphasized that link in its first stanza:

O beautiful, beloved Kampuchea, our destiny has  
joined us together, uniting our forces so as not to  
disagree.<sup>340</sup>

In 1993 the ancient temple of Preah Vihear was seized in a highly symbolic act to prevent its corruption by the Thai and Cambodian government.<sup>341</sup> In 1995, the Khmer Rouge along the Lao-Khmer border disrupted illegal timber operations by burning a saw mill owned by a Cambodian who worked with Laos businessmen to cut down Cambodian forests.<sup>342</sup> However,

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<sup>340</sup>Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua, Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981, p. 327.

<sup>341</sup>The temple sits on the Thai-Cambodian border.

<sup>342</sup>See Hoke Mosely, "Timber Ban Heats Up Border Issue with Laos, Phnom Penh Post, April 21 - May 4, 1995, n.p.

economic realities belie this myth. The 20 percent of Cambodia under insurgent control supplements the lack of external support.<sup>343</sup>

The Party's priorities for resource management were laid out clearly for cadres in four points:

1. The land, forests, fish and whatever else is possessed in our liberated and semi-liberated zones must be apportioned for distribution to the people in accordance with the concrete situation of each location. This apportionment must also be premised on democratic centralism among those responsible for each battle theater.
2. Once land is in possession, it is necessary to think about housing and water.
3. Once there is land and water, it is imperative immediately to put attention to engaging in production.
4. Production must be divided by categories, and aim at producing whatever *quickly provides an immediate yield.*<sup>344</sup>

The PDK exploit resources to ensure the survival of the organization, both the population under its control as well as the need to generate capital for the shadow state. What the Party termed "geo-economics" emphasized that cadres recognize the riches in each locality and "visualise utilising [sic] the riches" to help the people make a living and the state fight

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<sup>343</sup> Anon, "A Smile on the Face of the Tiger," The Economist, August 28, 1993, p. 13.

<sup>344</sup> Current, p. 39. Italics added.

its enemies.<sup>345</sup>

Control of this territory lends viability. Despite the West's perception, Cambodia is not a resource rich land. Four-fifths of society toils at rice farming in soil that is mostly sandy and plagued by irregular rains.<sup>346</sup> Controlling arable land is critical because Cambodia produces less than it needs to feed its population properly.<sup>347</sup>

#### ***ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION FOR SUPPORT***

The Khmer Rouge not only cultivate their controlled areas for food, they practice a ritual of environmental degradation. Spoiling the environment is financially lucrative and is an essential aspect of maintaining external support. The PDK relies on cash purchases created from strip mining the gems around the Cardamom mountains and logging concessions in the northwest provinces of Cambodia to provide subsistence to the population and external finances for the state. Funds are put

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<sup>345</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>346</sup>Anon, "Not a Grain of Truth," The Economist, January 11, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>347</sup>The Khmer Rouge not only control potential farm lands but are responsible for much of the present lack of food. The Khmer Rouge managed a devastating famine while implementing the reforms of collectivization during their reign. By introducing "communist" rice, a symbolic seed variety which could not survive in flooded dikes, thousands starved. Killing the agronomists during this period, who could have taught proper farming techniques, did nothing to alleviate the problem. Anon, "Not a Grain of Truth," The Economist, January 11, 1992, p. 4.



into overseas bank accounts after being funneled through Thailand.<sup>348</sup> A Thai National Intelligence Agency report quoted in Far Eastern Economic Review estimated that the Khmer Rouge business deals with Thailand have earned Baht 2.7 billion so far (\$106 million) and earn Baht 300 million (\$250,000) monthly in combined forest and gem sales. When cash is not needed, loggers pay "in kind," to include "motor vehicles, radios and communications equipment, mobile telephones, generators, [and] quinine. . . ."<sup>349</sup> Significantly, these gem and forest lands are border areas with Thailand, (the Thai-Cambodian border is 725 kilometers long) so that the raw resources can be sold and transported directly out of Cambodia without government interference.

Khmer Rouge mining and forest concessions to Thailand probably began as early as 1979, after the insurgents occupied border areas to escape the advancing Vietnamese. All concessions should have ended after the Khmer Rouge signed the Paris Peace Accords in 1991. Ieng Sary, Pol Pot's Minister of Foreign Affairs, explained the contradiction: "After the agreement was signed, our Chinese friends stopped all assistance. . . . So we had to sell some trees to the Thais to

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<sup>348</sup>Philip Shenon, "Now It's the Jungle That the Khmer Rouge Decimates," The New York Times, February 7, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>349</sup>Ken Stier, "Log Rolling," Far East Economic Review, Vol 156, Iss 3, January 21, 1993, p. 15.

meet the immediate needs of the people.'"<sup>350</sup>

This Khmer Rouge cadre has loosely defined "some trees." "Satellite imagery shows that nearly 5 million acres of forest, including more than one-fifth of the nation's tropical hardwood growth, have been destroyed . . . ."<sup>351</sup> The PDK exploit the fact that Thailand was forced to look to Cambodia for forest products because the Thais have chopped down most of their trees as well.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>Stier, "Log Rolling," pp. 15,16.

<sup>351</sup>Shenon, "Now Its the Jungle that the Khmer Rouge Decimates," p. 4. Logging has become so destructive to the country that on 29 April 1995 the government of Cambodia banned the export of all sawed timber. See Anon, "Cambodia Bans Exports of Sawed Timber," The New York Times, April 30, 1995, p. 8.

<sup>352</sup>This is best exemplified in a common Thai joke: "If a Thai finds himself driving through a forest, he should turn back: he has probably entered another country." Anon, "Wet and Dry," The Economist, April 10, 1993, p. 36. Cambodian forests, destroyed through the efforts of the Khmer Rouge (as well as the government), are headed in the same direction. One logger from Thailand showed Thai government officials where he and two other firms "cut a 70-kilometre road through rugged jungle terrain to reach their 200-300 square kilometre logging tracts." His company took out 1,158 logs in under two months before rains interrupted operations. Stier, "Log Rolling," p. 16. A UN Development Program (UNDP) report explains Cambodia has one of the world's highest deforestation rates and concludes: "Forest destruction threatens the productivity of agriculture and fisheries--in short, the very sustainability of economic development in Cambodia. . . ." The UNDP report is quoted in Stier, "Log Rolling," pp. 15,16. The report does not differentiate between the Cambodian government and KR concessions. An important corollary problem to lack of forest stands, is that top soil is eroded and the land will not hold water. Thailand has so denuded its countryside of trees that serious water shortages have plagued the

### SELLING ANGKOR FOR SUPPORT

The Khmer Rouge also exploit their relationship with Thailand through the black-market trade of Khmer antiquities, another form of external support. As The New Yorker put it: "One of the ironies of the Khmer Rouge's position is that even as they hype their claim to be the rightful heirs to the monuments of Angkor, there is evidence that they are actively selling their cultural legacy down the river."<sup>353</sup> Thirty-four pieces of sculpture were looted in 1992.<sup>354</sup> Since October 1993, twenty-two priceless antiquities have been stolen from the Angkor Conservatory in Siem Reap provincial town.<sup>355</sup>

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population. When combined with poor water management such as inefficient irrigation and cheap rates, the Thais are seriously considering diverting water from the Mekong river into two Thai tributaries. See Anon, "Wet and Dry," p. 37. Scarce water resources are another potential conflict looming over Cambodia since it shares the Mekong river with its western neighbor. Environmental degradation by the Khmer Rouge and conflicts with the Thai over shared renewable resources can become what a 1984 Earthscan paper predicted: "'an important cause of violent conflict.'" See Environment and Conflict, a 1984 Earthscan paper, quoted in Joseph J. Romm, Defining National Security: The Nonmilitary Aspects, (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1993), p. 27.

<sup>353</sup>Robert Bingham, "Political Ruins," The New Yorker, Vol 69, Iss 34, October 18, 1993, p. 58.

<sup>354</sup>Anon, "Catalogue Crooks," The Economist, March 6, 1993, p. 41.

<sup>355</sup>Bingham, p. 58. Siem Reap is the provincial capital city and home of Angkor Wat. The thefts are suspected to be carried out by or with the collusion of the Khmer Rouge due to their military precision and unique coincidences. On one occasion the thieves came into Siem Reap town riding

### **GOVERNMENT COLLUSION FOR SUPPORT**

Collusion takes place not just between the Thais and the Khmer Rouge. Cambodian government soldiers and the Khmer Rouge cooperate when the heist is oversized as one Cambodian art expert explained. "'When they are carrying heavy objects, they need a car, and it must be a vehicle that can pass through checkpoints on the way to the border. For this, they pay members of the national Army.'"<sup>356</sup> Bribing government soldiers is inconsequential, especially when pieces stolen in February 1993 claimed a market value of \$30,000 to \$50,000.<sup>357</sup>

### **THAILAND FOR SUPPORT**

Rituals with Thailand remain an important source of external support. "Democratic Kampuchea," the leadership explained, "needs friends and all kinds of relationship with

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motorcycles and carrying automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades. Approximately fifty men attacked the conservatory, fired a rocket through the front gate and used covering fire to keep away bystanders. Three people were killed and twelve wounded as the culprits carried away art that had not been previously documented or photographed. See Anon, "Catalogue Crooks," p. 41. (Interpol requires strict documentation to track down stolen artifacts). Slow cataloguing is typical in Cambodia and made more difficult by few qualified art historians: most of the archaeologists were killed during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. A similar coordinated event saw thieves in military garb hold guards at gunpoint and then make each guard carry one Buddha head into the countryside before releasing their newly acquired coolies. See, Bingham, p. 58.

<sup>356</sup>Bingham, p. 60.

<sup>357</sup>Anon, "Catalogue Crooks," p. 41.

the world, but it still can protect its independent characteristic."<sup>358</sup> Cadres are reminded "it is imperative to pay attention to building up an ever increasing number of big and small contact routes," so that the population can "have the means by which to sell and barter."<sup>359</sup> These routes to external support have two important functions: keeping popular support and arming the state.

The PDK leaders express fears that if they have no external links to Thailand, the people in their liberated areas will go elsewhere to promote their livelihoods. The Party explained if there are no outlets,

the people who are long-time residents in such a location won't want to stay there any more, and no matter what appeals we make to them to go and take up resident [sic] there, newcomers won't go, either.<sup>360</sup>

Outside links would eliminate fears in places like the Cardamom Mountains and the Northeast territories of becoming, in the words of the leadership, "places of hushed asylum."<sup>361</sup> The leadership emphasized "routes of communication with the outside world," would be thought of in "simple terms for now."

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<sup>358</sup>Virtue, p. 4.

<sup>359</sup>Current, p. 42.

<sup>360</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>361</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

The priority, however, went to areas "nearby and contiguous" with PDK territory and "whose policy it is to maintain good relations with us: ie, Thailand."<sup>362</sup>

Historically, Thailand served as a source of covert support for the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia; and Thai antipathy for Vietnamese remains deep. It used the insurgents as an effective buffer to protect Thai border areas and has continued to do so in light of the Khmer Rouge being "the best sort of business partner--reliable and publicity-shy."<sup>363</sup>

Arms and supplies were funneled to the insurgency through a clandestine Thai border group known as Unit 878.<sup>364</sup> The task force dealt with the factions fighting the Vietnamese as well as collecting intelligence on the Khmer Rouge. Over the course of 15 years, Unit 878 developed numerous business contacts with the insurgents. According to the Thai government, Unit 878 has been disbanded and ties to the Khmer Rouge cut. Thailand's army commander, General Wimol Wongwanich, explained: "'We do not support the Khmer Rouge. It is not the

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<sup>362</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>363</sup>Philip Shenon, "Pol Pot, the Mass Murderer Who Is Still Alive and Well," The New York Times, February 6, 1994, p. 4.

<sup>364</sup>Rodney Tasker, "Comrades Adrift," Far East Economic Review, Vol 156, Iss 41, October 14, 1993, p. 20.

policy of the Government and the army.'"<sup>365</sup> Cambodian Foreign Minister Prince Sirivudh disagrees. "'Thailand continues to support the Khmer Rouge,'" he asserts. "'The Thais have not changed their attitudes at all. Thailand's activities are not just an insult to Cambodia, they are a scandal.'"<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup>Philip Shenon, "In Big Threat to Cambodia, Thais Still Aid Khmer Rouge," The New York Times, December 19, 1993, p. 16.

<sup>366</sup>Shenon, "In Big Threat," p. 16. On January 13, 1994, an attempt to sooth the relationship between Thailand and Cambodia was attempted by their respective heads of state during a ceremony to open a new Cambodian highway built by Thai army engineers. Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai made his first official visit to Cambodia, where he was met by First and Second Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen respectively. Although Thai military involvement with the Khmer Rouge was not addressed directly, the meeting did produce a joint communique that reaffirmed Thailand's "'firm and continuing support for the peace process,'" and noted both parties interest in "'criminal and illegal activities by armed individuals and groups on and along the Thai-Cambodian border.'" See Gordon Fairclough, "Uneasy Friendship: Thai Premier Mends Fences with Cambodia," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol 157, Iss 4, January 27, 1994, p. 19. The Thai prime minister also took the occasion to admonish fifty business representatives traveling with him not to exploit Cambodia. Collusion continues according to the Far Eastern Economic Review. The journal reported Thai police stopped a 10 wheeled truck carrying 5 tons of arms on its way to the Cambodian border. The police followed up the 7 December 1993 seizure with a raid on a nearby farm in eastern Chantaburi province. Officers found not only 1,500 tons of Chinese manufactured arms, but 13 howitzers, many mortars and "small arms and enough ammunition to supply a small army." The Thai army immediately thanked the police for its efficiency but explained the truck was stolen from an arms cache that had been in place for eight years. The Chinese had supplied the arsenal for Khmer Rouge use before the Paris Peace Accords froze them in place. Calls for an explanation why Cambodians (possibly Khmer Rouge) were in the truck and at the farm house were brushed aside by the Thai military. The

## E. DEFEATING ADVERSARIAL RESPONSE

### *THE MYTH OF INVINCIBILITY*

External support helps the PDK encourage the myth of invincibility. The population is offered little evidence to the contrary. The failed Pailin offensive in 1994 brought home to Cambodians just how poorly the government's effectiveness is against the PDK.<sup>367</sup> As of 1995, the first prime minister fears the Khmer Rouge will capture Phnom Penh in their current spring offensive.<sup>368</sup> Military prowess is just one of many invincibility rituals to defeat all adversarial responses.

### *DEFEATING NATIONAL ELECTIONS*

National elections are an important popular ritual for lending legitimacy to the victor. On October 23, 1991, nineteen nations forged the Cambodian peace accords in Paris as a means of sponsoring United Nations supervised elections. The Vietnamese-installed government of Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, and two noncommunist factions signed the accords. During the transitional period, the Supreme National Council

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explanation offered: they were civilian guards and staff. See Rodney Tasker, "Caught in the Act," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 156, Iss 51, December 23, 1993, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>367</sup>Pailin is the insurgent capital. Government forces took the capital and then lost it in April 1994.

<sup>368</sup>Reported by VOA correspondent David Butler from Bangkok on 10 May 1995.



with Prince Norodom Sihanouk at its head, acted as the "legitimate body and source of authority" for Cambodia until the May 1993 national elections.<sup>369</sup> Importantly, the peace accords provided protection to the Khmer Rouge with "freedom to move within Cambodia, and freedom to promote their cause on radio and television."<sup>370</sup>

The Khmer Rouge initially accepted the elections and vowed to observe the peace accords.<sup>371</sup> By May 1993, the political atmosphere had changed. The Khmer Rouge feared political repudiation at the polls and decided the UN supervised elections were no longer compatible with their goals. The Khmer Rouge began a concerted effort to take land in both north and central Cambodia as they saw themselves "being edged out of power politically."<sup>372</sup> "The Khmer Rouge," Jeane Kirkpatrick observed, "has used a painstakingly negotiated international agreement for disarmament, resettlement and elections as an opportunity for its troops to re-enter areas

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<sup>369</sup>Anon, "Security Council Approves 'Largest, Most Complex' Peace-Keeping Operation in UN History, vol 29, UN Chronicle, June 1992, p. 11.

<sup>370</sup>Stan Sesser, "Report from Cambodia," The New Yorker, vol 68, 18 May 1992, p. 47.

<sup>371</sup>"Khieu Samphan Vows to Observe Peace Accord," FBIS-EAS-91, 24 Oct 1991, p. 30.

<sup>372</sup>R. Moreau, "The Perilous Road Home," Newsweek, vol 119, 13 April 1992, p. 36.

of Cambodia from which they had been driven by force."<sup>373</sup> Not only did the insurgency break the peace accords and refuse to disarm, the outcome of UN elections were rejected. "The Party of Democratic Kampuchea, like the entire Cambodian nation and people," a clandestine radio explained through its spokesman Khieu Samphan, "rejects this theatrical farce to destroy the Cambodian nation and also categorically rejects the predetermined result of this election."<sup>374</sup>

#### **DEFEATING THE "TWO-HEADED" GOVERNMENT**

The elections established a coalition government of the King's party and the former regime. For the Khmer Rouge this was a "two-headed" government, a symbol of the immoral mix of Khmer blood with the hated Vietnamese imposed government. Clandestine radio broadcasts continually remind the population of this national tragedy through the "two-headed" symbol. A February 1995 broadcast contains these representative themes of the "two-headed elements, communist Vietnam, and the

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<sup>373</sup>Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Means to Counter Aggression Exist," The Daily Oklahoman, 3 August 1992, p. 6.

<sup>374</sup>"Khieu Samphan Issues Statement on Election," FBIS-EAS-93-092, 14 May 93, p. 42. The Khmer Rouge stepped up military operations with limited attacks and attempted to discourage voting in the national elections. However the Supreme National Council, the acting authority in Cambodia, responded with calls for negotiation. Prince Sihanouk called the communist guerrillas to an emergency meeting in Beijing in May 1993 before the elections occurred, but their boycott could not be reconciled. See "Khmer Rouge Agree to Emergency Talks in PRC," FBIS-EAS-93-083, 3 May 1993, p. 39.

warmongering alliance" being fought by the Khmer Rouge to "prevent the communist Vietnamese enemy from wolfing down and exterminating the Cambodian nation and race. . . ." <sup>375</sup>

#### **DEFEATING THE CAMBODIAN ARMY**

Following the elections, military operations into Khmer Rouge areas attempted to break the strangle hold the insurgents have over Cambodian territory, the majority of which is along the Thai border. <sup>376</sup> The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) put together a spectacular assault in March 1994 that surprised the PDK and captured an important symbol of insurgency: the PDK capital city Pailin. Outflanking the guerrillas, the RCAF bypassed the most heavily mined areas of Pailin (with the help of captured Khmer Rouge guides tied to government tanks) and seized the insurgent stronghold. <sup>377</sup> However, the victory did not endure. Operating from sanctuaries in Thailand, the Khmer Rouge retook their capital within a month. Most ominous, however, was not the tactical loss but the underlying military problems the withdrawal revealed. Soldiers retreating to the rear complained of lack of food,

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<sup>375</sup> "Khmer Rouge 'Cabinet' on Government 'Defeats'," FBIS-EAS-95-030, 13 February 1995, on line. The majority of Khmer Rouge broadcasts always contain the "two-headed" symbol.

<sup>376</sup> Anon, "A Smile on the Face of the Tiger," p. 13.

<sup>377</sup> Anon, "Teenaged Deserter Vows to Fight Again," Phnom Penh Post, Vol 3, No 6, March 25-April 7, 1994, p. 3.

water, salary, and that the wounded were simply left behind. Pailin had also been subject to massive looting during the campaign, "with the worst offenders being high ranking officers."

With the recapture of this PDK symbol, the insurgents pushed on to threaten a government symbol, the second largest city in Cambodia, Battambang.<sup>379</sup> Coming within miles of this provincial capital, the Khmer Rouge forces occupied areas never before under their control. In what must have been perceived as an invincible effort, Sihanouk stepped in and called for negotiations. His fear at the time was expressed in a Western interview. "It is a necessity," said the king. "The reality is not good for us or our future. Cambodia could be a destroyed nation. A dead state."<sup>380</sup>

#### ***DEFEATING THE STATE THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS***

Public negotiations are an important ritual the Khmer Rouge use to further the myth of invincibility. Negotiations are rituals rooted in Cambodian history. Centuries ago, Khmer princes practiced palace intrigue against the ruling court by negotiating separate agreements with neighboring powers.

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<sup>378</sup>Anugraha Palan, "MPs Urge Inquiry Into Pailin," Phnom Penh Post, Vol 3, No 9, May 6 - 19, 1994, p. 3.

<sup>379</sup>This 1994 operation is now being repeated in 1995. See VOA broadcast for 10 May 1995 by David Butler.

<sup>380</sup>Nate Thayer, "One Way Out," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 157, no 22, 2 June 1994 , p. 14.

Divided leadership encouraged those same neighboring powers to gobble up land and enslave the Khmer population. From the fall of the Angkor Empire in the 15th century to the conquest by the Vietnamese in 1979, rituals of intrigue in negotiations continue to plague Cambodia.

For the government in 1994, no other option may have appeared open to deal with the insurgency after the failure at Pailin.<sup>381</sup> The Cambodian government had previously demanded three goals be met before negotiating with the insurgents: "an immediate cease-fire; the dismantling of their armed forces; and the relinquishing of their territory to the national government."<sup>382</sup> Yet, the Khmer Rouge have shaped perceptions of the insurgency to make negotiations a part of government policy. Importantly, the insurgents understand that divisiveness plagues the government in any arbitration and will be exploited. To understand the government's problem with negotiations, one must first look at the organization of both the national leadership contrasted with that of the Khmer Rouge, bearing in mind an important point: "there is no

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<sup>381</sup>The Phnom Penh Post indicates that secret negotiations were attempted before Sihanouk's announcement but had no success. See Ker Munthit, "PM Claims Upper Hand on KR," Phnom Penh Post, April 8-21, 1994, p. 3. The government may have in fact been surprised by the king's attempt to call for public negotiations.

<sup>382</sup>Nate Thayer, "Test of Strength," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol 157, Iss 4, January 27, 1994, p. 19.

history of power-sharing in the Cambodian political culture," explains journalist Nate Thayer, "which may explain why the members of the coalition government spend more effort on consolidating their own power than on building a unified political foundation for the state."<sup>383</sup>

Norodom Sihanouk, proclaimed king in September 1993, was named titular head of state but with no constitutional authority. King Sihanouk is basically a symbolic head of government or as he put it: "'number one guarantor of the popular will.'"<sup>384</sup> Nonetheless, Sihanouk has virtually ruled Cambodia since 1941 when the French installed him on the throne at age 18. Now in his 70s, the king has at one time or another negotiated with all factions in his desire to lead a free Cambodia, including supporting the Khmer Rouge liberation of the country after he was deposed in a 1970 coup. "He was never bound by ideology," journalist Stan Sesser remarked, "but rather, motivated by a desire somehow to insure Cambodia's survival . . . ."<sup>385</sup>

Cambodia is presently constitutionally "ruled" by two coequal prime ministers. First Prime Minister is Prince

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<sup>383</sup>Nate Thayer and Nayan Chanda, "Things Fall Apart . . . ." Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 157, no 20, 19 May 1994, p. 17.

<sup>384</sup>William Branigan, "It's King Sihanouk Now--And Again," The Washington Post, September 25, 1993, p. A15.

<sup>385</sup>Sesser, p. 52.

Norodom Ranariddh, head of the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) party which won a narrow victory in the May 1993 elections. As Sihanouk's son, Ranariddh comes under constant pressure to balance many prevailing interests. Loyalty to his father certainly. But as leader of FUNCINPEC, Ranariddh must also take into account the party's former alliance with the Khmer Rouge to oust the Vietnamese during the civil war. Most important, Ranariddh must consider his new coalition partner Hun Sen, the former leader of Cambodia during the Vietnamese occupation, the very man his party attempted to depose.

Hun Sen, the Second Prime Minister, heads the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). A former regimental deputy commander in the Khmer Rouge with ten years service, Hun Sen broke with Pol Pot's regime in 1977 and joined the Vietnamese.<sup>386</sup> Hanoi installed Hun Sen as governing head of Cambodia in 1979, "to present a more compassionate, liberal face to Cambodia to the outside world . . . ."<sup>387</sup> Although the CPP lost the national elections to FUNCINPEC, the party continues to control the military, administrative, and security apparatus throughout Cambodia and takes the lead in the war against the Khmer Rouge.

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<sup>386</sup>Ibid.

<sup>387</sup>Ibid.

The Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, have no public problems with divided leadership. Although Pol Pot is publicly retired, he retains control according to defectors and has appointed Khieu Samphan to act as the sole spokesman in negotiations. Khieu has held the title of the President of Democratic Kampuchea since 1976. A founding member of the Khmer Rouge organization, his studies in France before the 1975 victory "provided the intellectual framework for the Khmer Rouge's decision to evacuate the inhabitants of Cambodia's cities to the countryside . . . ." <sup>388</sup> Obviously, Khieu was chosen for his faithful loyalty to the regime's mandate. "His duties in the late seventies . . . included acting as host at macabre 'last suppers' for Khmer Rouge officials who were about to be purged and executed." <sup>389</sup> When Khieu was invited to Phnom Penh to negotiate the national elections on 27 November 1991, a mob of angry students attempted to take his life. Khieu is not worried: "'Our position, he explained patiently, 'is to let bygones be bygones.'" <sup>390</sup>

The government was forced to negotiate outside Cambodia in 1994 when the Khmer Rouge complained that Phnom Penh was not safe, probably using incidents like the November 1991

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Robert Sam Anson, "Crazy in Cambodia," Esquire, August 1992, p. 134.



attack as foundation. Sihanouk therefore called for "roundtable" talks in Pyongyang, North Korea, to be held 27-28 May 1994. The government was represented by Sihanouk and both prime ministers. The king called for national reconciliation and the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge into the Royal Government as well as the incorporation of the National Army of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK, the Khmer Rouge army) into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces.<sup>391</sup> Ranariddh and Hun Sen, the legal representatives of the state, came with their own agendas. In fact, Sihanouk himself explained to a reporter a month before the talks that "the co-premiers both appeared reluctant to talk peace with the KR [Khmer Rouge]."<sup>392</sup>

Since the press did not attend the talks, one can only discern the atmosphere of the discussions from the interviews that followed. From the king came a message delivered on 1 June: "we will always be loyal to the sacred principle that the country must be free from partition or secession; it must not be divided into three, four, or more parts. We must preserve the territorial unity and territorial integrity of Cambodia forever."<sup>393</sup> Sihanouk reaffirmed his commitment to

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<sup>391</sup>"Sihanouk Vows Outcome of Roundtable Talks, FBIS-EAS-94-106, 2 June 1994, p. 57.

<sup>392</sup>Jon Ogden, "King Bids to Broker Peace Talks," Phnom Penh Post, April 8-21, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>393</sup>"Sihanouk Vows Outcome of Roundtable Talks," p. 56.

include the insurgents in the government. "[P]ower should be given to them [Khmer Rouge] equally," proclaimed the king, "though they did not take part in the elections."<sup>394</sup> Sihanouk added, Hun Sen "disagreed with that."<sup>395</sup> In fact, Ranariddh and Hun Sen probably privately disagreed with the talks as a whole. Publicly, both complied with the king's proposal, yet neither seemed bent on accommodating the inclusion of the insurgents in the government.

Sihanouk offered a cease-fire to the insurgents, which would be monitored by Cambodian observers. The Khmer Rouge, however, demanded foreigners to monitor the cease-fire and gave the king a list of ten countries out of which five could be chosen.<sup>396</sup> Sihanouk went on to explain in his broadcast this would not work because it was already tried during the UN sponsored elections. "Somehow when foreigners came during the time of UNTAC [United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia] the Khmer Rouge did not allow them to do any overseeing," the king explained. "It might take months or even a year to solve the problem of cease-fire supervision. Our people will continue to suffer endlessly."<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>395</sup>Ibid.

<sup>396</sup>Ibid.

<sup>397</sup>Ibid.

The Khmer Rouge response to the government's initiative is described in an interview with Khieu on 2 June 1994 over a clandestine radio broadcast. "I proposed that consultations be held . . . to formulate a minimal policy program according to which all parties would agree to setup a national government and national army of which all Cambodian parties would be members."<sup>398</sup> He went on to denounce Hun Sen's role. "He [Hun Sen] talked about a cease-fire. He did not say anything about national reconciliation or how to bring about lasting peace . . . . [H]e put forth three points which were conditions set by the communist Vietnamese and the alliance to do away with the PDK [Party of Democratic Kampuchea] and block national reconciliation and peace."<sup>399</sup> The three points were not mentioned in this radio interview, however, on 17 June the Khmer Rouge radio carried a discussion of three conditions given to the insurgents in a later meeting which probably contain the germ of Hun Sen's demands:

1. Getting Democratic Kampuchea to implement a cease-fire.
2. Getting Democratic Kampuchea to hand over all its zones to the former State of Cambodia of the communist Vietnamese, and now to the two-headed government; and
3. Getting Democratic Kampuchea to demobilize all

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<sup>398</sup>"Khieu Samphan Interviewed," FBIS-EAS-94-106, 2 June 1994, p. 58.

<sup>399</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

its troops.<sup>400</sup>

Khieu would not agree to any loss of territory nor a disarmament, just as these demands were rejected after the 1991 Peace Accords. As for the cease-fire, the guerrilla leader did accept this point on one condition, international arbitration. Yet, as was already pointed out, Sihanouk could not justify further delay to arrange foreign monitors.

Most significantly, the PDK also called for dissolution of the present national government. In its place the Khmer Rouge radio broadcast demanded "power be given to King Norodom Sihanouk for a few years so that he can settle national problems by forming a national salvation government with the king as the prime minister and four deputy prime ministers . . . ." <sup>401</sup> Khieu Samphan would be among the four. Unfortunately, the duly elected leaders of Cambodia had no plans to dissolve their government.

The underlining difference between the two sides is summed up by Sihanouk in his 1 June broadcast. "They [Khmer Rouge] will continue to fight; they will agree to stop only if the existing government dissolves itself, contrary to the

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<sup>400</sup> "Khmer Rouge Issues Statement on Cease-Fire," FBIS-EAS-94-117, 17 June 1994, p. 46.

<sup>401</sup> "Editorial Views Diplomats Statement on Reform," FBIS-EAS-94-121, 23 June 1994, p. 37.

Constitution."<sup>402</sup> Since the parties did not agree to end the war, Sihanouk asked that the talks be resumed on 15 and 16 June 1994 in Phnom Penh.

Sihanouk's call for a second "roundtable" in Phnom Penh appeared to have little hope of success since even he did not attend. Khieu was the only principal negotiator to arrive. The king sent a representative, Samdech Nhoek Chulong, to act in his stead while the two co-prime ministers also sent representatives as well.<sup>403</sup> The talks achieved neither a permanent cease-fire nor further negotiations. Both Sihanouk and Hun Sen had previously announced that no further negotiations would follow this second "roundtable." Following the failed talks, the Khmer Rouge office in Phnom Penh was closed and all Khmer Rouge representatives were ordered out of the city by 19 June 1994.<sup>404</sup>

Sihanouk, obviously upset that both "roundtable" talks had failed to bring about national reconciliation, made another surprise announcement. In a 16 June 1994 interview, Sihanouk proposed a plan whereby he would take absolute power. The "'current government,'" the king explained, "'has shown it

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<sup>402</sup>"Sihanouk Vows Outcome of Roundtable Talks," FBIS-EAS-94-106, 2 June 1994, p. 57.

<sup>403</sup>"DK Official Chan Youran Reviews Roundtable," FBIS-EAS-94-122, 24 June 1994, p. 46.

<sup>404</sup>"National Assembly Said to Outlaw KR," FBIS-EAS-94-122, 24 June 1994, p. 46.

is not capable of stopping the process of deterioration of the situation . . . .'"<sup>405</sup> On 23 June, the king become more explicit. "'In case the situation becomes anarchic and desperate, I would have to take power for one or two years,'" Sihanouk explained.<sup>406</sup> Acting not as head of state, but head of government, Sihanouk also proposed four vice-presidents to include the Khmer Rouge in a new governing body.<sup>407</sup> The goal he explains, is "'the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country . . . . The only difference is . . . no war with the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer Rouge in my government.'"<sup>408</sup> Hun Sen's response was also predictable. The Second Prime Minister rejected it as a "'legal coup to dissolve the constitution . . . .'"<sup>409</sup>

For the Khmer Rouge the failed talks had little impact. Khieu remained philosophical for his supporters. Speaking over a clandestine radio on 28 June he justified continued negotiations:

Achieving national reconciliation, as an important

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<sup>405</sup>Nate Thayer, "Standing Up to Father," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 157, no 26, 30 June 1994, p. 15.

<sup>406</sup>Nate Thayer, "Last Act," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol 157, no 25, 23 June 1994, p. 16.

<sup>407</sup>Ibid.

<sup>408</sup>Ibid.

<sup>409</sup>Nate Thayer, "Standing Up to Father," p. 15.

personality in Phnom Penh said, is like boring a hole in a piece of wood. You cannot make the hole just by merely placing the drill on the wood; you must drill it little by little until the drill is through. This means that just a couple of rounds of talks or negotiations will not make national reconciliation. We need more meetings and consultations.<sup>410</sup>

Why would the Khmer Rouge want further negotiations? The insurgency sees a divided government and a king that has championed their cause as well as proclaimed an interest in rejuvenating dictatorship which all but destroys the democratic state. By pressing the ritual of negotiations, the insurgency fuels internal divisiveness, which has historically brought the Cambodian nation to its knees for centuries.

#### ***DEFEATING AMNESTY PROGRAMS AND DEFECTIONS***

Unable to crack the PDK's invincibility myth through military action or negotiations led the government to try other means; namely amnesty programs and encouraging defections. Following the May elections of 1993, the government attempted a general amnesty program that would avoid the Khmer Rouge leadership and appeal directly to the common soldiers. Out of a force of some 10,000 guerrillas, Far Eastern Economic Review calculates more than 1,000 have defected since August 1993, while the Washington Post put the number at 1,500.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> "Khieu Samphan on Hun Sen's 'Lese Majeste,' FBIS-EAS-94-124, 28 June 1994, p. 56.

The government claims 2,000.<sup>412</sup> Insurgents interviewed by the Post gave many reasons for leaving the movement: "war-weariness, loss of purpose, distrust of leaders and generally declining morale" not to mention, "disease, particularly malaria, and shortages of ammunition and medicine."<sup>413</sup> One expert on the Khmer Rouge, Christophe Peschoux, feels the guerrillas are severely weakened. "'The Khmer Rouge are facing their worst political and ideological crisis since 1979,'" the French analyst explained. "'Their propaganda mill is totally exhausted. They're finding it more and more difficult to keep their forces mobilized."<sup>414</sup>

But government ineptitude in handling the defectors rejuvenates the insurgency. Former Khmer Rouge soldiers are presently taken to reeducation camps and indoctrinated in the rituals of the new regime. But there are problems with how the new inductees are treated. "At least five cases of maltreatment including beatings, whippings and other forms of

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<sup>412</sup>Nate Thayer, "Defectors' Dilemma," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol 157, Iss 1, December 30, 1993 - January 6, 1994, p. 16 and William Branigan, "Defections Weakening Ranks of Cambodian Rebels," The Washington Post, September 25, 1993, p. A15.

<sup>413</sup>James Pringle, "Thai Army Keeps Khmer Rouge Equipped for War," The Times, December 27, 1993, p. 8a.

<sup>414</sup>William Branigan, "Defections Weakening Ranks of Cambodian Rebels," The Washington Post, September 25, 1993, p. A15.

<sup>415</sup>Branigan, "Defections," p. A15.



punishment have been recorded by human-rights activists. . . .  
."415 Adjustment to the new regime remains a challenge. Attempts are made to retrain the insurgents, give them uniforms and succor, and then send them back to the field to fight their former comrades.

Unfortunately, the insurgents may have been better off in their prior circumstances. The state has little to offer the insurgents since the present serving government soldiers have not been paid, have little food, and are always short of supplies. Yet another problem is false defectors. Civilians and other former warring factions also seek the amnesty program as a source of employment. Re-defection now plagues the program. "Given the poor conditions, broken promises, beatings, summary executions, political indoctrination classes and fake defectors which have haunted amnesty efforts so far," Far Eastern Economic Review concludes, "it is not surprising that voluntary surrenders have petered out and that many defectors have escaped back to the Khmer Rouge."<sup>416</sup>

#### ***DEFEATING THE STATE THROUGH PERCEPTIONS OF INSURGENCY***

In many ways the Cambodian government is its own worst enemy in trying to defeat the insurgency. The Khmer Rouge exploit this fact by encouraging different perceptions of the

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<sup>415</sup>Thayer, "Defectors' Dilemma," p. 16.

<sup>416</sup>Ibid.

insurgency through the use of the myths, symbols, and rituals described in this study. In sum, the governing troika have come to different understandings of the insurgency. As already noted, King Sihanouk called for reconciliation with the Khmer Rouge; his two prime ministers attempted to force capitulation on the battlefield. Some in the king's ruling FUNCINPEC party see the insurgents as a "power card," to be played discreetly against the actual power of the CPP since Hun Sen's party essentially controls the government and provincial bureaucracy, internal security, and the national army. The CPP in turn fears the former alliance of FUNCINPEC and Khmer Rouge maintained during the Vietnamese occupation. Members of the CPP remain convinced the royal party is sympathetic if not completely penetrated by Khmer Rouge officials. King Sihanouk's ties to the Khmer Rouge go back to his alliance with the insurgency after he was pushed aside in a coup in 1970. Although each of the three heads of government use success by the Khmer Rouge insurgency to solicit international support and financing for their respective platform, none have learned a lesson of Khmer history: rituals of national division invite conquest.

#### ***DEFEATING THE STATE THROUGH CORRUPTION RITUALS***

Government division encourages selfish interests and corruption. And corruption it seems, has become a ritual, faithfully reproduced between both the Cambodian civilian and

military leadership. Unable to support their families on poor government salaries, civilian leaders in government seek compensation at the expense of the national infrastructure through bribery and nepotism. With the country's needs now pushed from civilian leaders' priorities, nothing gets done. As Asian historian, Milton Osborne observed, "'everything seems to be on hold. It is as if everyone is waiting for something to happen.'"<sup>417</sup> Writing from Phnom Penh, journalist John Brown noted: "No press law has been accepted, no penal code, no criminal procedure code, no immigration law, no citizenship law, and no property law."<sup>418</sup>

Military leadership mirrors this corruption. According to the London Financial Times, Cambodian military officers have enacted "secret trade agreements" with the Khmer Rouge so that lucrative trade routes and logging roads remain free of mines.<sup>419</sup> RCAF collusion raises not only the myth of PDK invincibility but lowers RCAF legitimacy. Results on the battlefield see the same corruption. During the assault of the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin, government foot soldiers

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<sup>417</sup>John C. Brown, "FUNCINPEC's Evaporating Mandate," Phnom Penh Post, Vol 3, No 6, March 25 - April 7, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>418</sup>Ibid.

<sup>419</sup>Victor Mallet, "UN Winds Up in Cambodia, But the War Is Far From Over," London Financial Times, March 17, 1994, p. 4.

complained that they had not received any salary for four months.<sup>420</sup> After the RCAF took Pailin and then lost it, even worse corruption became clear. The corruption and resulting defeat have become so acute that members of the Cambodian National Assembly have taken the unprecedented step of calling for the Co-Defense Ministers to explain the military failures.<sup>421</sup>

#### **THE "VOICE" OF THE KHMER ROUGE**

The Khmer Rouge clandestine radio station, Voice of the Great National Union Front of Cambodia, is a powerful tool for invoking symbolic discourse to encourage national divisiveness. Probably located in Thailand, it serves as conduit to rural supporters and internationalizes the Cambodian conflict on behalf of the Khmer Rouge.<sup>422</sup> Negotiations with the government are always framed within the popular appeal of "national reconciliation." But by harping on government corruption the insurgency undermines state legitimacy.

The Vietnamese presence both in government and society are continually invoked with the symbolic reminder of a "two-headed" government, thus playing on a deep seated racial prejudice formed over centuries of conflict with their eastern

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<sup>420</sup>Anon, "Teenaged Deserter Vows to Fight Again," p. 3.

<sup>421</sup>Anugraha Palan, "MPs Urge Inquiry Into Pailin," p. 3.

<sup>422</sup>Anon, "Cambodia's Nightmare," Far Eastern Economic Review, vol, 157, no 23, 9 June 1994, p. 5.

neighbor.

Military assaults by the government on insurgent controlled areas are simply exploited over the radio as attacks on the suffering population. "[I]f the enemies of the nation attacked Democratic Kampuchea," a clandestine station announced, "it was the same thing as if they attacked the entire Cambodian nation and people, especially the nearly 7 million peasants."<sup>423</sup> All this symbolic discourse is backed by symbolic violence.

#### ***SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE***

The insurgency uses both military force and symbolic terror to promote their quest for power. Far Eastern Economic Review claims the Khmer Rouge see a vulnerable government and have switched their strategy to exploit new opportunities. "Instead of seeking a share of power in the government and army through negotiations," says the journal, "it has decided to launch a protracted military and political offensive to force the collapse of the government."<sup>424</sup> Symbolic political violence to increase government instability is certainly prevalent. For example, in April 1994, an American aid worker taken hostage by the insurgents for months was finally freed on ransom, however, three other foreigners were killed when

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<sup>423</sup>"Article on Composition of Democratic Kampuchea," FBIS-EAS-94-111, 9 June 1994, p. 43.

<sup>424</sup>Nate Thayer, "One Way Out," p. 14.

their \$50,000.00 ransom was not met.<sup>425</sup> Both events held evidence of collusion between the insurgency and state officials further promoting a sense of government illegitimacy. On a higher scale of violence, a Cambodian daily reported 11 clashes between guerrillas and the royal army in northwest Cambodia in one month alone.<sup>426</sup> All these forms of violence foster the image of a weak governing power and an invincible insurgency.

#### **OUTLAWS OR SAVIORS?**

To regain the initiative, the government attempted symbolic warfare of its own through legislative discourse. Following the failed second "roundtable" on 15 and 16 June 1994, Chea Sim, the Cambodian National Assembly chairman, proposed a draft law to outlaw the Khmer Rouge. On 7 July, the Cambodian National Assembly adopted the law outlawing the insurgents and on 28 July the law was ratified.<sup>427</sup> Ironically, one anonymous senior CPP member said the law was proposed in April 1994 by King Sihanouk himself. "Then three days later, the king issued a call for round-table peace talks with the

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<sup>425</sup> "Khmer Rouge Demand \$50,000 for Kidnapped Westerners," FBIS-JPRS-TOT-94-033-L, 1 August 1994, on line.

<sup>426</sup> "Military Activities Against Khmer Rouge Reported," FBIS-EAS-94-167, 28 August 1994, on line.

<sup>427</sup> "Law Outlawing Khmer Rouge Ratified," FBIS-EAS-94-145, 28 July 1994, p. 87.

radical faction," alleged the anonymous source.<sup>428</sup> If this were the case, Cambodia is truly groping for the proper legal response to the insurgency.

Popular opinion supported the law according to a poll conducted by the newspaper Kaoh Santepheap. The daily explained, "the common people are happy to see the Khmer Rouge declared outlaw rebels because the Khmer Rouge have been rebels since 1979. There should not be any difficulty declaring them as such one more time."<sup>429</sup> As for those still in sympathy with the insurgents, the paper offered this advice: "It would be better for those who are not happy with the move to outlaw the Khmer Rouge and go live with them in the jungle."<sup>430</sup>

The Khmer Rouge response to being outlawed came on 5 July

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<sup>428</sup>Thayer, "Things Fall Apart . . ." p. 18.

<sup>429</sup>"Paper on FUNCINPEC's Khmer Rouge Situation," FBIS-EAS-94-124, 28 June 1994, p. 57.

<sup>430</sup>Ibid. The advice from the newspaper was probably aimed at two leading government advocates of the king's negotiating position, Finance Minister Sam Rangsi, who also acts as the vice-chairman of the FUNCINPEC party and Foreign Minister Prince Norodom Sirivut, Sihanouk's half brother. Both men support the king's call for not outlawing the guerrillas and threatened to resign from the government. Although this dissent is expected in a democratic polity, it only adds to the tension in an already shaky coalition government. For on 2 July 1994, another of the king's sons, Norodom Chakrapong, was implicated in a coup to bring down the government and sent into exile. See Nate Thayer, "Shadow Play," Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol 157, No 28, 14 July 1994, p. 15.

1994. The insurgency promoted themselves as symbolic saviors of the nation. "Communist Vietnam," proclaimed the clandestine radio,

the communist Vietnamese puppets, and their unscrupulous alliance have enforced dictatorial and fascist laws and are currently forging a law to impose a monopoly, dictatorship, and fascism with the aim of attacking and destroying Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>431</sup>

On 11 July, Khieu announced the formation of a new insurgent government, the Provisional Government of National Union and National Salvation of Cambodia (PGNUNS).<sup>432</sup> Khieu appointed himself Prime Minister, with an agenda of "national reconciliation" and called for the "muster" of all national forces to end the war. The broadcast continued with these chilling words: "It will also solve the problem of the four million ethnic Vietnamese [who live in Cambodia], who pose the greatest danger to the survival of our Cambodian nation, people, and race."<sup>433</sup> How the "problem" will be solved is not described in the transmission, but considering the organization's considerable experience with "killing fields," it

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<sup>431</sup>"PK Statement Condemns Law to Ban Khmer Rouge," FBIS-EAS-94-129, 5 July 1994, on line.

<sup>432</sup>"Khmer Rouge Leader Announces New Government," FBIS-EAS-94-133, 11 July 1994, on line.

<sup>433</sup>Ibid.



warrants little explanation.<sup>434</sup>

#### F. CONCLUSIONS

The long term strategy of the Khmer Rouge surely includes encouraging the collapse of the state through infighting between the governing factions and feeding the corruption that permeates both civilian and military leadership. As Asian expert Frederick Brown of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies explained: "'The strength of the Khmer Rouge lies with the weakness of the rest of Cambodia. Until those weakness are remedied, the Khmer Rouge will have the ability to come back.'"<sup>435</sup>

If the Khmer Rouge have a "come back" plan, its basis is reconstructing five myths that give viability to the insurgency. By utilizing the myth of a new public image, the Khmer Rouge attempt to gain both international and domestic legitimacy. A democratic language and symbols have replaced the communist images of the 1970s to maintain this myth.

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<sup>434</sup>An Associated Press report dated 21 January 1995 relates the massacres of hundreds of people in Northwest Cambodia based on defectors' reports. One defector, who had served with the NADK since 1973 expressed, "'They are continuing with new massacres and I must quit them.'" Importantly, the same defector noted that the KR also killed those who worshipped ancient spirits. "'Angkar (the collective Khmer Rouge leadership) said they don't believe in it and they ordered those who believe in forest spirits to be executed....'"

<sup>435</sup>Robert S. Greenberger, "U.N. Risks Tarnishing Evident Success of Peacekeeping Operation in Cambodia," The Wall Street Journal, November 1, 1993, p. A12.

Promoting the myth of popularity relies on embracing symbols once anathema to the insurgency to include private ownership of land, capitalism, and materialism. Although all invariably produce individualism, the Khmer Rouge accept this to keep popular support for their long term collective effort.

Organizing myths attempt to keep the population focused on the group agenda. Perceiving themselves as the only force capable of preventing the Vietnamese from "swallowing" their areas as well as the country provides a means of organizing the movement behind the myth of enemy incursion. This myth unifies the forces of both nationalism and racism to the insurgency. Playing on the historic fears of Vietnamese attempts to exterminate the Khmer race gives an excuse to continue the fight for both a stronger "core" element within the organization and the "core" element's role as leaders of the nation.

Fighting to protect the state as the heirs of the country's resources is a myth to cover the financing of the insurgency now that allies are few and external support limited. The insurgency sells important natural resources to Thailand and government officials that cannot be reclaimed. These acts serve to maintain the population and lend viability to the insurgency. The boundary with Thailand also serves as the main source of external support. The boundary is unsecured and open to continuous dialogue and dalliance between

Thai financiers and Khmer insurgents. The rituals on the border lend viability to the movement through continued financing and arms sales.

In one respect, arms and sanctuary afforded by the Thais helps promote the myth of invincibility as means of defeating adversarial response. The government effort to neutralize the Khmer Rouge remains inadequate and will remain so as long as the insurgents can escape across the border. The invincibility myth contributes to calls for continued negotiations with the insurgency as a means to reconcile the country. However, failed negotiations due to divisive political agendas within the government exacerbates the myth. Government failures, both civilian and military, help the Khmer Rouge convince the population of their invincibility and assert their legitimate role as the nation's true defenders.

All five myths weaken the elected ruling authority of Cambodia and promote the viability of the insurgency through rituals that strengthen legitimacy, encourage popular support, further organizational cohesion, maintain external support, and defeat adversarial response.

## VII. THE HEIRS: THE KHMER ROUGE EPILOGUE

The mythology surrounding the "Heirs of Angkor" is used to describe not only other insurgent groups from South America to North Africa,<sup>436</sup> their myths are the progenitors of other ferocious faiths.<sup>437</sup> All these references to the Khmer Rouge indicate the myths, rituals, and symbols of the Cambodian insurgency not only lend viability as this study concludes, but continue to capture the world's imagination.

Unfortunately, the myths of the Khmer Rouge have also captured the hapless country of Cambodia. The new government is at a distinct disadvantage in preparing proper legal and military responses to the insurgency. Cambodia has no history of democracy nor of sharing power. In some respects, simply outlawing the organization may be the best response available until the political environment improves. However, as a new democratic experiment, the government is its own worst enemy. Government initiatives ranging from amnesty programs to military action all suffer from lack of effective direction and coordination as well as conflicting national objectives.

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<sup>436</sup>See William Rosenau, "Is the Shining Path the 'New Khmer Rouge,'" Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol 17, 1994, and the "Green Khmer," described in Algeria's war against the Islamic extremists in FBIS-NES-94-078-A, 6 April 1994 and FBIS-NES-94-213, 2 November 1994.

<sup>437</sup>Besides the above groups, see the Ukrainian radical group "Pryama Diya" which explained it will use the "'experience of the Khmer Rouge...'" for its actions. See FBIS-SOV-94-206, 24 October 1994.

To win the war against the Khmer Rouge will require effective leadership, national will, and unified political and military strategy. The Cambodian government must translate all these to its legal and military responses to the Khmer Rouge or see its efforts fail. Yet an important aspect the government must not overlook is the "cognitive dimension."

Pol Pot understands what kind of fight insurgency is: "It is a deep-rooted fight," he explains to cadres, "because it is the fight of ideology, of mind, of brain."<sup>438</sup> Pol Pot and his cadre are the dreamers J. Bowyer Bell described in the introduction to this analysis. The Khmer Rouge through an understanding of what their leader describes as the "ideological battlefield," shape their dreams to validate one of the foremost desires of Brother Number One: the "'perenniality of the Kampuchean race.'"<sup>439</sup> Their goal is to infect the many in this psychological contagion. The virus is carried in many forms of discourse, but certainly in the myths, rituals, and symbols of the insurgency.

The Khmer Rouge should never be underestimated as simply a symptom of a weak international state. The insurgency has suffered forty-four years in the crucible of struggle and

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<sup>438</sup>A document attributed from Pol Pot to his cadres entitled, "What is the Virtue, the Quality, the Reality and the Responsibility of Democratic Kampuchea in the Past, Present, and Future?", dated 2 December 1986, p. 10.

<sup>439</sup>Pol Pot as quoted in Becker, p. 4.

remains determined to protect its perceived interests:

We have a firm concept. We stand by Democratic Kampuchea, which is our natural interest, because we really believe that there is no other alternative than Democratic Kampuchea which can protect your interest.<sup>440</sup>

The committed among its ranks remain confident in ultimate victory as described in one Khmer Rouge soldier's comment on the government attack of the insurgent capital city: "We will lose some areas, including maybe . . . Pailin. . . .," he explained. "But by the end of the fighting, we will have more territory than we have now. We will attempt to hold our areas but not at any cost. If they want it, they can have it. But they can't keep it for long."<sup>441</sup>

To retain this commitment, the Khmer Rouge leadership understands that their struggle is not only on the corporeal plane but the incorporeal plane as well. The symbolic actions of the Khmer Rouge act as links to these beliefs giving them "concrete expression" in the insurgent's quest for power and viability. These symbolic ideas draw inspiration from the geography and history of the region and incorporate the essential elements of Khmer culture. This study demonstrates

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<sup>440</sup>Virtue, p. 5.

<sup>441</sup>Nate Thayer and Ken Munthit, "Govt Soldiers Take Shaky Hold on Pailin," Phnom Penh Post, Vol 3, No 6, March 25 - April 7, 1994, pp. 1,2.

how these symbols are translated into action through five areas critical to insurgent viability: legitimacy, popular support, organization, external support, and defeating adversarial response. This method has applicability to any insurgency. Each area saw important aspects of Khmer culture emphasized through symbols to give the insurgency a greater chance of success against the overwhelming power of the state.

For the Khmer Rouge, symbolic actions promote strength where there is weakness and provide unity where there is faction. Symbolic actions that promoted ethnic discrimination myths, nationalist rituals, and symbolic alliances with the monarchy and Vietnam are a means to help explain how the insurgency survived in the 1950s and 60s without a majority of popular support as well as how their rural based victory could be achieved in 1975. Not to be overlooked is the power of these symbols to work as a two-edged sword however. The Khmer Rouge became engrossed in the common blood ties and racial purity myths they created during their 1975-1979 reign which was an important factor in their demise after only forty-four months. Symbolic actions have also helped reconstruct the movement following defeat. Through five important myths that promote a new public image, popularity, enemy incursion, heirs to national resources, and invincibility the Khmer Rouge continue to enhance their viability against the prevailing government.

Without the benefit of superior physical resources insurgents utilize and manipulate the symbolic resources available. By effectively tapping into cultural images, the Khmer Rouge are better prepared to dominate the battle of perceptions, overcome their inherent fears, and remain a viable insurgency in the years to come. Only by better understanding the insurgent's "self-definitions,"--their perception of themselves, their cause, and their future--can the Khmer Rouge be dealt with in light of their perceived heirdom to the people and nation of Cambodia.





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