

State Violence in Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979) and Retribution (1979–2004)

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Along with perhaps North Korea, Democratic Kampuchea (DK), as the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime called itself, can be regarded as the ultimate twentieth-century paradigm of the totalitarian state. Using sheer violence and terror, a small clique usurped state power viewing itself as endowed with the messianic mission to bring happiness and prosperity faster than any of its revolutionary model and competitors. It came to control every aspect of social and private life. No one was allowed to nurse, let alone express, any form of opposition.

Criminal Policies of the KR: ‘a State against its Own People’

At the time of the so-called trial of ‘the Pol Pot–Ieng Sary clique’, in August 1979, the pro-Vietnamese regime of Heng Samrin (People’s Republic of Kampuchea or PRK) produced the figure of exactly 3 314 768 dead, partly to justify the Vietnamese invasion. The only full demographic study that, to our knowledge, has been done to this day was published in French and often ignored by the English speaking world: Marek Sliwinski, in his *Le Génocide khmer rouge*,¹ comes out with just under 2 million deaths in excess of the normal mortality rate. Between 17 April 1975 and 7 January 1979 the death toll was about 25% of a population of some 7.8 million; 33.5% of men were massacred or died unnatural deaths as against 15.7% of the women, and 41.9% of the population of Phnom Penh. We note a strong imbalance between the sexes due not to fighting (the country was at peace, except for the Vietnamese invasion in late 1977), but because the numerous prison extermination centres were peopled above all with men, the women and children being a small minority.² For instance, in Krang Krâ Chan prison of Tramkâk District in Takeo province (Ta Mok’s), among the files of 475 prisoners I examined, only 44 were women—less than 10%. The average age of men

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was 34½ and women 33. So most were in their prime. David Chandler found that, in S-21 (Tuol Sleng), only 6.4% of inmates were women.³ We have here one of the main explanations as to why twice as many men as women were killed under DK.

Although the DK regime lasted only three years, eight months and twenty days, it was proportionately the most lethal. In North Korea, there have also been some two million victims, but from a population twice as large and under a regime that has lasted more than half a century. In absolute terms, Cambodia's toll is dwarfed by the USSR—20 million dead, China—65 million, but can be compared to Vietnam—1 million dead. In all, there may have been 100 million deaths due to all Communist regimes in the course of the twentieth century.⁴ Again, research conducted by Prof. Rummel from Hawaii University indicates that, when considering the entire twentieth century, the KR regime was the most lethal in terms of the percentage of the population killed.⁵

Brief Summary of KR Criminal Policies

Echoing Lenin's famous aphorism: 'Revolution is not a gala dinner party', the Khmer Rouge leadership taught cadre:

Revolution over imperialism is not about inviting guests to a dinner party . . . not about being well-mannered and polite, not about fearing the enemy; the Revolution is about seething with anger against one class, about striking and destroying one class.⁶

Those words sum up the rationale of the Khmer Rouge mass extermination of their own people.

Most state crimes perpetrated by the leadership originated from the brutal evacuation of all the towns, the trademark of that radical brand of Communism. Why this forced *ruralisation* followed by several *relocations*? Essentially, it was for security reasons. The KR were too few to be able to control the cities, Phnom Penh in particular. Town dwellers, perceived as potential 'enemies', had to be scattered. Soon, the country was transformed into what Leo Kuper called 'a system of slavery of a new type'. It took Cambodia back to pre-colonial days when it was the custom to take away prisoners of war as slaves. Khieu Samphan explained to me that the *Angkar* (or the *Organization*, meaning the Party) was convinced the US imperialists would not let go of Indochina that easily, nor would they admit defeat in the war against communism. Every soldier in the army of the preceding Republican regime could have been a CIA spy and therefore an object of suspicion and thus deserving of elimination. A gigantic CIA plot was bound to be fomented. All ex-soldiers had to be dispersed into the countryside and later culled from the people's communes for extermination. Such fears have been proved to be fantasy but another fear was more real—that the Vietnamese Communist leadership meant to control the Cambodian revolution as it was to control the Laotian revolution. Only the most sweeping and immediate collectivisation would fend off this threat. The *Angkar* were convinced this strategy had served them well during the revolutionary fight and freed them from Vietnamese tutelage. They had won the victory two weeks before the Vietminh entered Saigon and

meant to rush headlong on the path to total revolution, leaving their sponsors/competitors far behind.

During the so-called 'revolutionary struggle' (1968–1975), it had been common practice for the KR to relocate the population, forcefully enrol adolescents, chain, torture and execute war prisoners and control food distribution, not to speak of forced collectivisation.

From the very first day of the revolution, all private property was *de facto* seized by the state; the rule of law was abolished to be replaced by the rule of violence. Markets and currency vanished, universities, schools and hospitals were closed, private transport ceased to operate as did all freedom of movement, association, information and thought. All civilian and military cadres and many notables were summoned to serve the new regime and savagely slaughtered. All communications with the outside world were cut—except through Peking. Family units were broken up and many lost dear ones. What amounted to a rigid caste system was instituted—the 'Base People' (those farming communities under control of the guerrilla movement before its final victory) as opposed to the '17 April', or 'New People' (those living or having taken refuge in towns).

By the end of 1975, the KR had instituted a fully advanced war communism, what David Chandler calls 'Revolution in full spate'.⁷ It included communal eating, collectivisation of all farm animals and implements, together with cooking utensils, and the setting up of special camps for children and work units for adolescents and young adults. People were submitted to concentration camp-like daily routines with long hours of arduous work (agriculture in the rainy season, irrigation projects in the dry season), starvation diets, short hours of sleep and long nightly propaganda meetings. Religions (mainly Buddhism) were abolished, along with feasts, ceremonies such as traditional marriages, the usual calendar and all cultural activities. The *Angkar* substituted a revolutionary set of celebrations, with a rest day every ten days. Apart from literally working the people to death, the paramount obsession of the leadership was to hunt down the 'enemies of the revolution'; traitors and spies were said to stalk the country. A prison network was developed down to the district and often the commune levels, where the innocent citizenry were chained, tortured and executed in their hundreds of thousands.

How were the 'enemies of the people' selected? By and large, the KR selected first the enemies of the past—that is, the categories of citizens who, in Marxist-Leninist jargon, were members of the 'imperialist, feudalist and capitalist classes'. We can note the inanity of such categorisation since Cambodia had long ceased to be an imperialist nation, there never had been a feudal land-owning class and there were no real capitalists in the country, as it had as yet known no real industrial revolution. In actual fact, it meant the ruling military and civilian elite of the two previous regimes, from the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (1955–1970) and the Republic (1970–1975), the commercial and the professional classes, together with so-called intellectuals, the main figures of the Buddhist clergy as the internal enemies. The external enemies were still the Americans (and they were able to catch and kill a few at the time of the Mayaguez

incident in May 1975 and later a couple of sailors in the Gulf of Thailand) and more and more the Vietnamese, seen as the devourers of Cambodian territory and, worse, the new ideological enemies.

Next were what can be called the ‘enemies of the present’, that is those who did not adjust to the sweeping collectivism. They were mainly to be found among the ‘New People’ or ‘17 April’, that is the people expelled from all the towns after the victory of the revolutionaries. They included the sick, accused of malingering, the runaway, accused of betraying the nation, and anyone who voiced—or who seemed to voice—any form of opposition. More obnoxious were the ‘hidden enemies’ who were said to devour the society and the Party from within. They must be weeded out through self-criticism and mutual criticism and psychological manipulations in the course of re-education meetings. The repression and arrests were homed in on selected targets closer and closer to the Party centre. Perpetrators became victims as the regime’s prisons came to be chock-full with revolutionary soldiers and provincial Party apparatchiks. It was then, last but not least, that ‘the enemies of the future’ were captured and annihilated. This is what Mao had called the theory of permanent revolution, or the revolution after the revolution had officially triumphed. Its victory being always precarious, the Party must weed out those not only in society but within its own ranks were—or might become infected by—counter-revolutionary beliefs. Only by capturing those who later might catch the disease of the ideal of individual liberty, could Revolution be established for ever.⁸

In so doing the KR leadership imposed unspeakable physical, moral and psychological sufferings on a population continuously short of food. They were especially cruel with the sick and the dying whom they accused of malingering. The tactics of *Angkar* involved secrecy, deceit, lying and overpowering use of terror. By keeping records on all and sundry, the regime aimed at controlling everyone’s inner thoughts and engineering mental manipulations (with the young in particular) to create an ideologically pure being who would blindly submit to the Party’s will. Only one class was allowed to survive—the proletarian class.

Under DK, people were plunged into a mood of absolute despair. Every Cambodian felt as if he/she had been abandoned by the world community and dumped at the bottom of a deep dark well from which he/she would never emerge back to life. Some preferred to commit suicide. Hope had died out forever, it seemed. They could but look at birds soaring up into the sky—only they were free!

One can classify the perpetrators into a three-tier chain of responsibilities. First there were those who thought out the utopia and its concomitant necessary purification of society: they were the theoreticians of the total revolution. Such were Thiounn Mumm, the *Polytechnicien*, who, in 1970 from Beijing, wrote out the revolutionary programme of the united front under Sihanouk during the civil war; and Khieu Samphan, the French communist trained head of state from 1976. He had repeated from his teaching days during the Sangkum period that society needed to be wiped clean, and later that children and Buddhist monks ought to be put to productive work. The perpetrators had usually received their doctrinaire training abroad, in France, China and Vietnam.

Others, like Pol Pot himself, Nuon Chea, Brother Number Two, Son Sen, in charge of both external and internal security, or Ta Mok, were not only ruthless doctrinaires but men of action who defined and implemented the lethal policies implicit in the utopia. These fundamentalist revolutionaries had no qualms about ordering the people to quit their homes and all the cities, restricting food distribution and thus deliberately starving the population, and in the end having all potential opponents arrested, tortured and executed. The latter are those most responsible for the millions of deaths among their compatriots. They number a few hundred—military and civilian leaders—and they are the beneficiaries of the totalitarian state they instituted with their Vietnamese and Chinese revolutionary accomplices.

The last category is made up of the myriad thugs who had been conditioned from adolescence by the former group to unleash men's basest instincts—robbing their compatriots of their homes, their food and finally their lives, while in addition working them to death. Those who actually did the killings, in the Cambodian (plus communist) context of absolute subservience to the authority of one's 'betters' or the Party apparatchik, were, to our mind, actually the least responsible. They were literally obeying orders and, for most of them, not in a position to understand why the regime had turned humanity on its head. We can comprehend this now that they have been 'decontaminated', so to speak, or de-conditioned and their eyes opened to the real world. They have become again ordinary farmers and fathers; they want the trial of their leaders, for they want to know why they were made to perform such heinous crimes. These number some 80 000 men (among whom are a small percentage of women): the number of soldiers in the revolutionary army at the time of their violent seizure of power on 17 April 1979. They were those who, behind their Kalashnikovs, were the instruments of a terror that swooped down on the Cambodians.⁹

If analysts now agree with the figure of about two million victims in excess of the normal death rate, no one is sure of the proportions among the various causes of death. What percentage died of preventable or curable disease in a society where all modern medical care had ceased except for the happy few? What percentage died of starvation? What percentage was summarily executed? What percentage was arrested, put in prison, interrogated under torture to be finally put to death? As to the methods of execution, we are certain that, unlike in Stalin's Soviet Union, no one was shot. It would have cost precious bullets and would have been heard. Apart from some hanging, stabbing of pregnant women's wombs to take the foetus alive or men to take the liver or bile, the general method of execution was the muffled thump made by the soldier who hit the nape of the neck of a kneeling blindfolded victim bending over a pit he often had dug himself.

In the days when it was an article of faith not to intervene in the internal affairs of states, when large sections of 'progressive' public opinion in the West had been brainwashed by the Eastern bloc into believing that communism was, if not quite paradise, at least the end of corrupt governments, few were prepared to see the reality of DK. Senator McGovern, who had been a symbol of the doves in the US during the Vietnam War, was the only politician to dare suggest the Cambodians should be saved from their tormentors. Witnesses of massacres within Cambodia ran away, when they were not hampered from

doing so by their families, while protesters were put to death. The declarations of refugees to Thailand were first met with disbelief. It took almost two years and scores of similar life stories for public opinion to awake to the ghastly truth. Fr François Ponchaud's training in Bible criticism made him equipped to be the first to really decipher KR ideological manipulations,¹⁰ even before trained historians like David Chandler. In the meantime, the Vietnamese communists imprisoned and silenced runaways for fear the world knew the full extent of the crimes of their protégés. They long hoped to be able to bring the Cambodian revolution under their guidance, as they had managed to do in Laos. They only denounced those crimes once they had understood the 'Pol Pot clique' was uncontrollable and prepared to take over by surprise a country governed by ungrateful disciples. Besides, they legitimately wanted to protect their own villagers along the border who were the victims of the Khmer Rouge's bloody incursions.

Why was Such Violence Unleashed when the Cold War was on the Wane?

Very perceptively, William¹¹ and Shawcross noted that the principal elements that had contributed to the KR's totalitarianism were: 'wartime brutality, Marxist fanaticism, obsessive and threatened nationalism'.¹²

Endogenous or Internal Causes

This culture of exploitation, protection; obedience and dependency had deep roots in Cambodian social practice and strengthened the grip of those in power under DK.¹³

Those traits existed before DK and are still prevalent today in a country that is *not* a democracy. A strictly hierarchical society with a dominant patron–client relationship prevails. Allegiance to chieftains, nepotism and factionalism have been all connected to corruption and have been deeply ingrained in Cambodian society since before the French arrived. There is also a prevalent autocratic tradition: the word of the monarch must be obeyed absolutely. The tradition was allowed to lapse under Sisowath (1904–1927) and Monivong (1927–1941), during the second half of the colonial era, while in actual fact the Third Republic was fully in charge. But it was reinstated by Norodom Sihanouk with his 1955 coup when he dethroned himself in order to seize all political power and institute his one-party state under the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. In Cambodia, there still prevails a culture of obedience and subservience: one is totally servile, obsequious before a superior. David Chandler adds:

... the deference and respect that were traditionally due in Cambodia to those in power from those 'below' them... Hierarchies, patronage, and 'paying homage', so characteristic of 'exploitative' society (the Cambodian phrase translated as 'exploit', *chi choan*, literally means 'ride and kick', had not been extinguished by the revolutionaries.

In spite of Sihanouk's efforts to the contrary in the Sangkum days (1955–1970), there was still a very low level of education among the vast majority of the population. Superstitious beliefs were rife among all classes together with animistic beliefs in spirits, ghosts and sorcerers.

The revolutionaries had manipulated tribal people on a large scale, installing them as the core of the KR army in 1968 in Ratanakiri North-Eastern province. *Montagnards* served as role models for their faithfulness to the Party. Pol Pot believed he was to make Cambodia return to primitive communism, a 'revolution' in the literal sense of a revolving system or a return to a mythical or utopian past, and going back to the roots. '*Le monde va changer de base*' of the *Internationale* was translated by Pol Pot: 'Tomorrow, our new regime will be restored'. These tribal people, at long last, after two thousand years, along with the Khmer peasants, had a voice, a leading light, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), the *Angkar*.

The KR leaders saw that tribesmen had the ability to survive the harshest conditions. They did not use money and knew a certain degree of communal living. They had not been colonised or Indianised, and therefore knew nothing of Hinduism and Buddhism. They killed farm animals by hitting them on the back of the head—chicken and buffalo alike. This became the main mode of extermination under DK. They buried their dead in shallow graves: it became the universal means of disposing of corpses under DK. They showed a readiness to dismantle their houses and move villages, but within certain geographical areas. Under DK, people were moved a lot too, but much further afield. Along with tribal minorities, the KR also massively manipulated adolescent soldiers who had been press-ganged during the war.

A certain megalomania, coupled with a total lack of pragmatism and realism on the part of the Khmers, must have played a part. Their last Khmer leaders, Sihanouk, Lon Nol, Pol Pot and Hun Sen, behaved more or less like absolute despots who were unable to face reality. In the end, the Khmers were all haunted by a fierce nationalism and the obsession of losing their sovereignty to their more powerful neighbours: the Thais and the Vietnamese. In the case of the latter, the fear of the KR is linked to the second set of causes—the external or exogenous ones.

External or Exogenous Causes

From the 1930s to the 1960s

People unfamiliar with Cambodia's colonial history might believe one could draw a parallel between the kingdom and neighbouring Vietnam. While the French colonisers did indeed overturn a quite sophisticated system of governance at both the local and the central levels in the latter country, there was not much of a state at all to destroy in what remained of Cambodia by the time King Norodom was led to sign the Treaty of Protectorate with imperial France in 1863. The country was the other side of the great cultural chasm that divides Asia between Indian and Chinese influences. No Confucian system of highly literate mandarins had been established and a sense of public service was non-existent. Instead:

The essence of the leadership in traditional Cambodia was exploitation rather than service, patronage rather than cooperation. The word to 'govern', as in many Southeast Asian languages, was the same word as to 'eat', 'to eat the kingdom'.¹⁴

In this context, colonial rule was not felt by the general population as more exploitative—apart from by the King himself of course, who was gradually divested of all real, other than ceremonial, power. With the abolition of slavery, the modernisation of the judicial system, the creation of the Cambodian commune, the right to elect the local councillors given to every head taxpayer, the distribution of land titles, the creation of a professional Khmer civil service and the reform of the pagoda schools, the first steps were taken in the early decades of the twentieth century towards establishing a modern administration. To crown it all, the 1947 first democratic constitution formalised what had existed *de facto* since the accession of King Sisowath in 1907—a constitutional monarchy. It also gave full sanction for the first time to a multiparty system and universal suffrage.

If France had not established its own protectorate over Cambodia in 1863, the kingdom would have been divided up between Thailand and Vietnam, as it almost was again, informally, before the Paris peace accords in 1991.¹⁵

Still, in a way, the colonial era might have paved the way for the tragic years of Pol Pot's rule. With their *folies des grands* that the French shared with Khmer rulers, the colonisers in 1887 created the Union of Indochina, whose borders 'reimposed Vietnamese imperial boundaries that had existed circa 1825'—to the great pique of Cambodian nationalists. It thus made Cambodia and Laos *de facto* liege states of Hanoi, under the auspices of the Ministry of Colonies in Paris, of course. What is more, the French administrators, who were few and far between, were seconded by Vietnamese (then called Annamite) middle-ranking administrators, while the Khmers were only allowed to do menial jobs or staff the tiny colonial army. With regard to the new judicial system, the Khmers were only second-class citizens in comparison with the Annamites who enjoyed special status as French-protected subjects. A sense of unfairness built up over decades; it was to develop into fierce rancour among the Khmer Rouge against their Vietminh revolutionary 'elder brothers'. From 1973, at the time of the January Paris Peace Accords that paved the way for the Americans' withdrawal from Indochina, it grew into seething hatred. The Cambodians have always rejected what looked like the re-creation of an Indochinese federation under the leadership of the Communist Party-State in Hanoi—as is in fact to a large extent the case today with the CPL in Laos and the CPP in Cambodia. These dominant parties have contributed to making the two countries serve as buffer states for Communist Vietnam. They indirectly protect one of the last Communist states in the region from what they see as the deleterious influences of more democratic, affluent and enlightened Thailand.

As Christopher E. Goscha has shown in an as yet unpublished paper,¹⁶ this antagonism between the two nations and cultures—representing the competition between the Indian and the Chinese traditions—has roots in the 1930s, in the heyday of the colonial era. Albeit unwittingly, the often racist French colonisers did much to exacerbate the century-old territorial rivalry between the two peoples who were fighting for the control of the lower reaches of the Mekong valley.

Marxist-Leninism learnt through the PCF in Paris

The Communist and revolutionary influences on Cambodian students after the Second World War, at the height of the Cold War, were not in institutional or academic France, but in the civil society and the PCF (*Parti Communiste Français*). At the time of the First Indochinese War, and then the Algerian War, anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, anti-colonialism, the idea of communism flourished among large sections of the Paris intelligentsia and student circles. Until 1958, the PCF, with more than a quarter of the votes, was the largest party in France. When Saloth Sar (later Pol Pot) and Ieng Sary arrived in Paris in 1949–1950, Mao had just triumphed in Beijing and Stalin was more than ever the object of a personality cult on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

For instance Suong Sikœun¹⁷ later romanticised his arrival in Paris in 1957 and wrote:

La France représente aux yeux des intellectuels de gauche tout d'abord le pays où éclata et sortit victorieuse la Révolution de 1789, symbolisant les idéaux de liberté, d'égalité et de fraternité, qui les avaient toujours animés et inspirés. C'était ensuite et surtout la patrie des écrivains et philosophes dit des Lumières, Diderot, Montesquieu, Voltaire et Rousseau. Des dirigeants révolutionnaires de grand renom, Lénine, Chou En-lai, Den Tiao-ping, Ho Chi Minh avaient vécu et séjourné, à certaines périodes de leur vie, dans la ville des lumières qu'était Paris. Paris, ce fut en 1870 la Commune, la première révolution prolétarienne victorieuse. Paris, s'était surtout l'Insurrection contre l'occupation nazie. Paris la belle, la glorieuse, Paris 'Reine du monde', ainsi que l'a immortalisée une chanson d'Edith Piaf, incarnait pour notre génération l'espoir, l'avenir, la justice, l'égalité et la fraternité humaine. Le rêve pour chacun de nous était presque de 'voir la France et mourir'!

In his 2003 PhD thesis, *Parcours politique des Khmers Rouges (1945–1978)*, Sacha Sher carefully studied in particular the formative years in France of those Cambodian students. It appears that the Cambodian students did not get their revolutionary ideas from their courses of lectures and from the supervisors of their theses, but from the intellectual climate then prevailing in Paris at the time of the Cold War, and more specifically from their membership of the French Communist Party.

More broadly it was the romantic idea of Revolution, along with the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*, that teased their fancy. For instance, during his secondary schooling in Cambodia, Suong Sikœun had been inflamed by the 1789 Revolutionary ideal. 'I am a product of the French Revolution I studied in Kompong Cham College. It is a short step from Robespierre to Pol Pot. They shared the same determination, the same integrity', he said in 1996. The young students learnt in France far less about Marxism-Leninism in the Party cell, where there were French citizens whose problems were quite alien to them and where they felt marginalised, than inside their own so-called language group '*the Marxist-Leninist Circle*'. This is where they analysed Communist literature and the situation at home in Cambodia, then in the throes of the struggle for independence. The works of Stalin were analysed, in particular his *History of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union*.

Sacha Sher pointed out that while Khieu Samphan obviously could not openly advocate the use of force, he did point out that ‘the mobilisation for growth in agricultural income will be possible only by authoritarian means—particularly at the beginning’ (p. 161). Very significant also of the future attitude of the Khmer Rouge was the belief that service activities or the tertiary sector—such as commerce or banking—were unproductive, ‘or papered over forms of unemployment’. Khieu Samphan was convinced only agriculture, crafts and small industries were really enriching the country. From the country’s GDP (Gross Domestic Production), KS deducted about 40% as useless. Much of the administration was also regarded as parasitic. He thought the import–export trade amounted to theft as it absorbed 40% of national production. This is why he was in favour of a state monopoly on foreign trade.

Only the state could take the initiative to ensure industrial takeoff and stimulate industrialisation. He was in favour of recourse to voluntary labour to improve communications and the development of cooperative and state farms to rationalise work (183–88). That could be achieved if peasants were submitted to political indoctrination (172). His praise of autarchy shows he was definitely influenced by his French-educated Egyptian friend Samir Amin, who was developing theories of postcolonial imperialism as the root cause of unequal development in his 1957 thesis *Les Effets structurelles de l’intégration internationale des économies précapitalistes* (the structural effects of international integration on pre-capitalist economies) that he quotes in his own thesis. Samir Amin, a Marxist theorist of economic development, later a supporter of DK, was to write numerous books that were more like radical revolutionary tracts than academic economic theories. According to him, the PCK line was correct and the evacuation of the cities ‘*was perfectly justified*’.¹⁸ The author explains (or justifies?) the massacre of the Republican army by the revolutionaries by the fact that numerous soldiers were CIA spies and had been planted by the US in the heart of the revolutionary society to corrupt it.¹⁹

Party-approved literature (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Maurice Thorez) was studiously dissected and they learnt to ‘purify’ the ranks of the party. Purges within the party were said to be the continuation of the class war in society. They learnt the tactical necessity of forming a united front to seize power, to take advantage of ‘progressive’ elements in the bourgeoisie (of the aristocracy in the case of Cambodia, with Sihanouk). The tactic of a united front is still in use in Cambodia twenty-five years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, in order to corral all opposition, thereby ensuring no check on the absolute authority of the party. That party, now the CPP (the Cambodian People’s Party), founded in 1951 under Vietminh auspices, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2001.

Over the years, from 1950 to 1970, the ‘Circle’ or Club looked like a group of professional revolutionaries confidentially debating which measure to take to seize power’ (Sacha Sher, p. 133). ‘For them the Organisation (the Angkar) represented the people, the Central Committee represented the organisation, the government and the administration were to obey the Central Committee, and thereby dutifully carry out the orders of the people; the decisions of the Central Committee are indisputable.’²⁰

The use of the word 'Organisation', instead of Party, comes from Lenin through the Vietnamese. Still, the revolutionaries who really made the decisions in the core group of Angkar, Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Son Sen, Nuon Chea, Sao Pheum and Ta Mok, either had no university degree as in the case the first three, or had never been to France as regards the last three. Those endowed with genuine university credentials were sidelined or purged, while the surviving ones were given more prestigious posts only after the fall of the regime, when the movement was prolonged for almost another twenty years with its members as warriors in the moribund Cold War.

Extended contact with French Communists taught aspiring Cambodian revolutionaries about the blessings of 'Revolution' and gave them the absolute conviction that, for poorer and newly independent countries, the key to development lay in Communism. Besides, whatever happened or whatever men did, it was a scientifically proven Truth and certainty that the new vision of History would dominate the world. Their messianism was expressed in the following assertions:

'As the wheel of history inexorably turns, if you are in its path and if it touches your arm, it will crush it; if it catches your leg, it will roll over that, too', or, more briefly, 'Even if the cock does not sing, the sun will still rise. . .' as the KR slogan had it.

Mao Zedong evoked the same image in his *Little Red Book*:

This is an objective law, independent of man's will. However much the reactionaries try to hold back the wheel of history, sooner or later, revolution will take place and will inevitably triumph. Communism is at once a system . . . the most complete, progressive, revolutionary, rational in human history. . . . The Communist ideological and social system alone is full of youth and vitality, sweeping the world with the momentum of an avalanche and the force of a thunderbolt.

Mao and Pol Pot built for eternity 'for a period of one hundred, one thousand, or ten thousand years'.²¹

'We liberated our country on 17 April 1975. . . . We did that for the defence of Democratic Kampuchea, for the Cambodian workers and peasants in co-operatives, for the next decade, the next century, the next millennium, the next ten thousand years, and forever. . .',²² said Nuon Chea, president of the Assembly of the People's Representatives, during a mass meeting on 16 January 1977, in Phnom Penh. This so-called scientific socialism was no more than a new millenarianism.

The Role of Vietnamese Communists

Steve Heder from SOAS, in his new book, *Cambodian Communism and the Vietnamese model*, vol. 1: *Imitation and Independence (1930–1975)*,²³ strongly questions the claim that Paris played the central role. The three Cambodian intellectuals most associated with that influence, Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon and Hu Num, 'were non-entities in the Cambodian movement, through at least the late 1960s'. As to Ieng Sary and Son Sen (who were among the six most important leaders) they 'were almost as deeply immersed in Vietnamese doctrine as Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Sao Pheum and Ta Mok'. Those are the six names that constituted the core of what was *Angkar Læu*, or the Supreme Organisation.

Heder convincingly argues that the French influence pales in comparison with the Vietnamese, which had been of paramount importance back to the 1930s, the time of the creation of the Indochinese Communist Party. During their party's long formative period, Cambodian Communists 'were taught the specific strategy and tactics for making revolution in the Indochinese context. The Party was led by a duopoly of Pol Pot and Nuon Chea. Seizing power required secrecy, disavowal of Communism, construction of a non-Communist face, ultimate use of violence—above all the people's war—to achieve revolutionary ends, and denial of Vietnamese connection. The pursuit of formulas regardless of facts' (p. 2). It also entailed the use of absolute violence to bridge the gap between reality and fiction. 'Massive murderous violence was used as part of an attempt to make Cambodia more of a successful revolution from above than the Soviet Union under Stalin and more of a successful great leap forward than China under Mao. The catastrophic results were manifest in the large-scale crimes against humanity and the execution of hundred of thousands of alleged enemies and betrayers of the revolution' (pp. 4–5).

Still, if the book fully demonstrates that the KR would never have developed their lethal policies without Vietnamese tutelage, Pol Pot's and others' stay in the prestigious French capital in the formative years of their lives must have equipped them with the rationale for total revolution. Paris provided the ideology and the utter conviction that a Communist revolution was the key to development; Hanoi taught the know-how. What was pure theory (Communism was never tried in France) became practical and feasible under Vietnamese guidance, mainly through sheer violence and deceit.

In the 1970s: at the Time of the Second Indochinese War

If we look at the geopolitics of the region, we see Cambodia was torn between the East–West Cold War zones, as the border between the two camps went through that territory, roughly along the Mekong river. This corresponded to the old divide between the India-dominated Asia, and the China-dominated Asia.

The Khmers were unwillingly engulfed in the Second Indochinese war with the Vietminh occupation of Cambodia. Just as Lenin could launch his coup and seize power in Moscow during the Second World War, so Pol Pot could enter Phnom Penh, in the atmosphere of terror and chaos created by the Second Indochinese War. The Vietminh occupied (1964–1975) large sectors of Cambodian territory in the so-called 'sanctuaries', thus importing the conflict. American bombings (1969–1973) followed. Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the titular head of state, had abruptly left for Paris on 6 January 1970, running away from the problem he had himself helped to create. In spite of entreaties, he refused to return to Cambodia and left a weak and badly equipped army of 27 000 men facing 65 000 Vietminh occupying large areas of Eastern Cambodia. After the constitutional 'dismissal'²⁴ of Sihanouk, the newly expanded Republican army was exclusively confronted in 1970, 1971 and 1972 by Vietminh or Vietcong troops in a war of invasion. The Vietnamese even occupied Angkor.

The fighting was gradually transformed into a civil war only from 1973, after the January Paris agreement between the Vietnamese and the Americans. In other words, without Sihanouk's switching sides to the revolutionaries while in Beijing, and the Vietminh offering the Khmer Rouge followers of Pol Pot vast swathes of the Cambodian territory, the youthful guerrilla fighters could never have entered Phnom Penh victoriously on 17 April 1975. Under international pressure for peace, the Republican army was made to lay down arms, as everyone was war weary. The unpublished memoirs of General Sosthène Fernandez, commander in chief of the Khmer Armed Forces, clearly demonstrate this.

Once the revolutionaries had grabbed power, the Cambodians also became a pawn in the Moscow–Peking feud. The fight was not simply verbal between the 'revisionism' of Moscow and the orthodoxy of Mao. China and the Soviet Union (through their client state, Vietnam) used Cambodian territory as their battlefield in their competition to dominate Southeast Asia, and ultimately the Third World. The KR leaders, while having absorbed all the lessons learnt from Stalin and Mao, claimed to have no model and wished to effect their own idiosyncratic revolution. Having adopted the Marxist revolution last, they meant to outstrip their more powerful neighbours. They boasted a fanatical fundamentalist Maoism, spurred by the towering presence of the ubiquitous Chinese Ambassador, Sun Hao, and his 1500 or so 'experts'. If the KR received much encouragement from Beijing, they outdid their masters, who, by the end of the regime's life, had got cold feet and in 1978 refused to send troops to fight against the invading Vietnamese army.

Under DK, there was to be no transition, no compromise, no socialist phase. On the other hand, it must also be noted the reputation of KR leaders for Spartan austerity is somewhat overdone. After all, they had the entire property of all expelled town dwellers at their full disposal, and they never suffered from malnutrition. For instance, Long Norin, an official from the Ministry of Foreign affairs who was supervising Sihanouk's security in his Royal Palace, admitted to me he had put on twenty kilos in the year 1976—a year when so many of his compatriots were starved to death.

Retribution & Aftermath

The Revisionism and Impunity of the Heng Samrin Regime (1979–1991)

Sadly, the rout of the KR military by the superior Vietnamese army in early 1979 was not to be the end of the movement. Cambodia became once again the battlefield of forces operating from beyond its borders. Neither could the Chinese admit the defeat of their protégés, nor the Thais stand idle while a vast Vietnamese army was close to their border. With the support of the ASEAN countries, they contributed to revive a moribund KR army and use it as a kind of mercenary army to fight for other nations' interests. It is ironic that those who posed as fierce nationalists in actual fact struggled above all for their more powerful Communist eastern neighbour in the Second Indochinese War, and for the benefit of the totally divergent ideology of another dominant state to the west during the Third Indochinese War.

In the meantime inside Cambodia, as demonstrated by Evan Gottesman in his well-documented *Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge: Inside the Politics of Nation Building*,²⁵ the Khmer Rouge cadres were massively recruited by the post-Khmer Rouge so-called Heng Samrin regime (1979–1993), or the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). Those cadres still staff the higher ranks of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). One has never seen perpetrators dragging themselves before an International Criminal Court. No wonder the project of a Khmer Rouge international tribunal has been stalled for over twenty years now. If there is no real regime change in Phnom Penh, it seems difficult for an International Tribunal, following recognised norms, to be started in there.

A state of impunity has prevailed for the massive crimes against humanity of the past and the continued political murders of the present. Cambodia has still not faced its past murderous decades. Very little history is taught in schools. A distorted view of what was then termed the Cambodian ‘genocide’ has prevailed among government circles. Since 1979, the so-called Pol Pot regime has been equated to Hitler and the Nazis. This is why the word ‘genocide’ (associated with Nazism) has been used for the first time in a distinctly Communist regime by the invading Vietnamese to distance themselves from a government they had overturned.

This ‘revisionism’ was expressed in several ways: the KR were said to have killed 3.3 million, some 1.3 million more people than they had in fact killed. There was one abominable state prison: S-21, now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. In fact, there were more than 150 on the same model, at least one per district. The eastern region was said to have been a model of humane collectivism in comparison with the rest of the country, led by true moderate Communists. No wonder, since most of the leaders of PRK came from that region. What happened under DK was not similar (if significantly more lethal) to the repression in all Communist regimes, but a ‘genocide’, or even ‘self-genocide’, a word coined for the benefit of DK. A *Nhan Dan* editorial on 7 January 1979 described the crimes of DK as a ‘*fascist genocide*’. But what have the North Koreans been practising to this very day?

Cadres in the PRK were asked ‘to warmly welcome officers and soldiers (of the DK regime), to practise leniency towards those who sincerely repent, to give appropriate rewards to those who had performed feats of arms in service of the revolution.’²⁶ The man most responsible for the Front’s lenient policies towards former KR cadres was Chea Sim, former secretary of the Party Committee for region 20, and former member of the Kampuchean Peoples’s Representative Assembly. He recruited cadres through the same KR technique: *provoattérup*, or personal biographies. There was a deep historical relationship between the two revolutions: after thirty years of fraternal anti-imperialist struggle, a few years of tension could be overlooked. The party ordered the release from prison of all former KR officials and soldiers, while, at the same time, cracking down on suspected members of non-communist groups (p. 75).

The so-called trial of 15 August 1979 lasted for only four days. Witnesses such as Vandy Kaon represented the intellectuals. Three ‘criminal figures’ (low-level KR cadres who had repented) also bore witness. On 19 August, the judgment was

read: the accused were found guilty on all charges, including genocide and were sentenced to death *in absentia*.

After the abolition of the currency and the destructions of DK, there was no money to pay these 'new-old' cadres. The regime had two sources: property nationalised under DK (which was not returned to the surviving owners) and extortion from the people. It could also rely on Soviet and Western aid—in particular massive food aid orchestrated by Oxfam and UNICEF. The story was vividly told in *The Quality of Mercy*, by William Shawcross, in 1984. The book showed how only a fraction of the aid inside Cambodia went to the people and most must have gone either to feed the Vietnamese army or to pay the new bureaucrats in kind. Besides, they were encouraged to help themselves to whatever they could grab. These were the standards that set the norm for the present administration in Phnom Penh.

The old tradition of client-patron relationships was re-established. As the main 'patrons' were KR revolutionaries, in spite of the rhetoric to the contrary, the policy has always been 'to dig a big hole and bury the past'. They had considerably enriched themselves and their followers, while most of the population remained poor. Gottesman described Hun-Senism, 'a kind of State capitalism in which officials were apt to consider the resources at their disposal—land, factory parts, timber, vehicles, soldiers—as assets to be exploited for profit. For Hun Sen and much of the rest of the leadership, a permissive system of this sort was the key to consolidating power. It created a network of happy officials whose loyalty the regime could count on, even after the Vietnamese withdrew and Sihanouk returned' (p. 300).

In the meantime a great deal of international concern prevailed after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime and the Vietnamese invasion in early 1979. However, the Cold War had not yet come to its end and the Soviet Union was still being seen as a threat to the West. For the United States in particular, denouncing the crimes of the Khmer Rouge was not at the top of their agenda in the early 1980s. Instead, as in the case of Afghanistan, it was still at times vital to counter what was perceived as the expansionist policies of the Soviets. The USA prioritised its budding friendship with the Democratic Republic of China to counter the 'evil' influence of the USSR in Southeast Asia, acting through its client state, revolutionary Vietnam. All the ASEAN countries shared that vision. So it became vital, with the military and financial help of China, to revive and develop armed resistance to the Vietnamese troops, with the resurrected KR at its core. This dismayed the non-Communist Cambodian resistance, and human rights activists who were beginning to campaign for the creation of a special international tribunal to judge the crimes of the KR.

In the meantime, the denunciation of those crimes became an essential plank of the pro-Vietnamese propaganda machine of the PRK. The new regime, which had been recognised by only the USSR and its client states, together with India, was keen to set up a tribunal to judge the 'Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique'. But the August bungled trial of August 1979 failed to improve their international image.

UNTAC²⁷ to the Present Day: 1992–2004

UNTAC and the massive presence of the international community, along with its multiform aid, have made few inroads into the CPP's monopoly of power. In addition, there is in Cambodia a tradition of political opportunism and serving any government, whatever its policies. This is the case for instance of the present Minister of Finance, Keat Chhon, who was in the royal government of Sihanouk in the 1960s, in the KR Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Ieng Sary under DK, with the Heng Samrin regime and holds out as the irrevocable Minister of Finance in the present Hun Sen government.

In the absence of retribution and the prevalence of impunity, corruption flourishes unabated. Corrupt officials are never punished, every transaction being in dollar bills. In the absence of a professional and decently paid civil service, there is not even a law against the corruption of officials. They take bribes to supplement meagre wages and the fees so levied amount to ruthless extortion. The closed, anonymous leadership favoured by Communist regimes has given birth to a system of nepotism and corruption, which is the main cause of widespread poverty today in spite of massive plans to alleviate it in the past decade.

In his revealing book, based on government archives, Evan Gottesman, the author, concludes his chapter on 'Buying power: privatization, corruption & patronage' with these words:

Hun Sen and the rest of the Cambodian leadership are the beneficiaries of the political and economic system that evolved in the 1980s. Civil servants, whose salaries are still too low to support themselves and their families, are allowed to pocket a percentage of any fines, taxes, fees, or bribes that they impose on the citizenry. The rest of the money is handed up, sometimes for State or Party coffers but generally to individual patrons. The result is a power structure made up of vertical—and yet mutually dependent—relationships. Top officials engage in direct corruption when they conclude deals with foreign investors. But the leadership also promotes lower-level corruption by perpetuating a weak salary system and by making nepotistic appointments. Powerful patrons have little incentive to punish their own loyalists. As long as the money flows, officials act with impunity—engaging in theft, extortion, or worse. (p. 335)

No Berlin Wall ever fell in Cambodia. No Vaclav Havel or Lech Walesa came to power. The regime did not collapse; it negotiated its survival. Courting assistance from, UN and the West, but protecting its power in undemocratic and frequently violent ways, when possible. (pp. 348–49)

Hun Sen and the CPP leadership could tolerate the multiparty system imposed on them by the international community so long as the other parties did not directly challenge their interests as the violent coup d'état in July 1997 and the present political stalemate have shown.

Here is just one single example of how the CPP leaches the state. Bangkok Airways' (and its subsidiary Siemreap Airways) flight from Bangkok to Siemreap-Angkor is one of the most expensive in the world. Bangkok Airways was given a monopoly on the lucrative Bangkok-Siemreap route. Since October 2001 and the well-organised demise

of the national carrier, *Royal Air Cambodge*, Hun Sen and CPP officials have received \$20 commission per ticket. The market is expanding rapidly and 200 000 tourists flew from Bangkok to visit the Angkor temples in 2003, meaning the disbursement of commissions exceeding US\$ 4 million. Such rackets also cover public construction of roads, forestry and the import of smuggled petrol (only one-third of the tax levied on petrol is said to reach state coffers) mainly on the part of the military. Land speculation is rife and the poor are expelled from their land by official or military land grabbers. Judges, who have recently seen their stipend rise to a couple of hundreds of dollars, 'earn' on average US\$3000 a month.²⁸ In April 2004, China provided \$50 million to the Phnom Penh caretaker government.

The endless delays in the Khmer Rouge tribunal are being closely followed by China in particular, which is not eager to see the prosecution of some of its former protégés. Because buying time would allow the ageing and ailing surviving main suspects (Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan) to die naturally, thus avoiding prosecution and exposure of embarrassing facts, China is happy to support Cambodia's current Hun Sen government. 'Beijing will favour further delay of the process or a death knell for the tribunal'.²⁹ Although a new Tribunal Law was approved in October 2004, it is quite certain that the Cambodian authorities will use all imaginable tactics to further delay the actual opening of the trial, while putting all the blame on the international community and donors in particular.

According to the Asian Development Bank, poverty in Cambodia has not been reduced in the past ten years. Many independent observers are struck by the deterioration in the living conditions of most Cambodians in the countryside over the last decade, the result of land problems, ecological disasters, unemployment, and poor public and social services. Over one-third of the population are below the poverty line, while the per capita income is calculated at only about \$0.50 per day! Cambodia is the only country in the world where both the mortality and illiteracy rate have increased over the last ten years. The infant (under 5) mortality rate was 115/1000 in 1990 and 138/1000 in 2002.³⁰

The illiteracy rate is about 63%, comprising analphabetism (no knowledge of the alphabet) 36% and illiteracy (knowledge of the alphabet but inability to read and write properly) 27%. This shows the failure of the education system due to the incompetence and corruption of decision-makers. The unemployment rate currently exceeds 50%, and a significant percentage of Cambodians do not have enough to eat.

Social ministries go short of cash: the implementation of the state budget for 2003 shows serious irregularities. The Ministry of Education received 79% of its budgeted money, the Ministry of Health 59%, the Ministry of Rural Development 54%. These ministries were the victims of a sophisticated cash allocation policy that allows corruption and covert financing of pro-CPP activities. In 2003, the Government spent less on education salaries than in 2002. The teachers do not dare to strike. When there is talk of a strike, they receive threats. The murder of Chea Vichea, in early 2004, the founder of free trade unions, is there to show that the Government is serious, and this silences potential protesters. To this day, the assassination has still not been solved.

In 2003, with a population of 13 million inhabitants, public health expenditure per capita amounted to only \$2.3 a year. This compares with approximately \$200 in Thailand and \$2000 in the USA. Systemic government corruption has led to a tragic misallocation of resources.

To some extent, the origin of the almost one-year long political deadlock that followed the 27 July 2003 legislative elections is to be found in the attitude of the international community since the free and fair elections under UNTAC in 1993. At the time, the winners were denied the reins of power (62% of the vote for the opposition as against only 38% for the PPC). The UN authorities stood by as the ruling Communists maintained effective control after that decisive electoral loss. Under the auspices of the UN, it was decided at the time that a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly was necessary to form a government—thus keeping in office the losers of the elections. And so the CPP, which controlled both the government and the administration down to the commune level, was allowed to remain in office and keep its grip on power intact. In 1997, Hun Sen's former Communists engineered a political coup to oust their royalist partners and murdered hundreds of opposition activists. In the following year, they manipulated the second round of parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, international observers endorsed them as 'free and fair.'

For the 27 July 2003 legislative elections, the Alliance of Democrats (FUNCINPEC³¹ plus the Sam Rainsy Party) collected, altogether 2.2 million votes versus 2.4 for the CPP, while one million potential voters could not register. With further manipulation at the seat allocation level and the systematic refusal to recount ballots, the CPP secured seventy-three seats versus fifty for the Alliance (26 for the FUNCINPEC, 24 for the SRP, which in fact had more votes than its partner). There were conflicting views on responsibility for the protracted political deadlock.

The CPP said: 'we are the winning party, which is entitled to form the new government and lead the country. Even though short of the required two-thirds majority, we control 73 seats out of 123 at the National Assembly. The deadlock is attributable to the other two parties (FUNCINPEC and the SRP, the Sam Rainsy Party), which put forward unacceptable conditions for joining a coalition government with us. Losing parties (representing the minority) cannot and must not dictate their views to the winning party (representing the majority). This would be totally undemocratic.'

The Alliance of Democrats said: 'we wish to engage in a sincere and constructive dialogue with the CPP in order to form a three-party coalition government. According to democratic practices, we insist on first negotiating a programme for the new government that would include proposals from all the cooperating parties. The CPP has long refused such an approach, and persists in wanting to discuss only the distribution of lucrative posts. This has caused the stalemate that has lasted for more than eleven months.'

On 30 June 2004, Prime Minister Hun Sen and National Assembly President Prince Norodom Ranariddh solemnly signed an agreement in the name of, respectively, the CPP and the FUNCINPEC. Although the agreement mentions a commitment to

a number of key reforms (justice, corruption, electoral commission, etc.) Hun Sen seems to come out as a clear winner. He has de facto broken the Alliance of Democrats (FUNCINPEC plus SRP), guaranteed that he will remain Prime Minister for one more term and 'bought' the royalists by offering them posts in a grossly inflated government. It will include no less than five deputy prime ministers, ten senior ministers and, twenty-seven ministries. The Ministries of Defence and Interior will retain two co-minister positions. Each ministry will include five secretaries of state and five under-secretaries. The total number of secretaries will be two hundred and sixty! This might be the largest government in the world. Prince Ranariddh has just acquired an 'Alouette' French helicopter. The cost and the provenance of the money are unknown.³²

In a keynote address that Sam Rainsy, the leader of the opposition, delivered at the Community of Democracies Ministerial Meeting in Seoul on 11 November 2002, he said:

Cambodia's absence from the league table of democracies should be shocking, considering that Cambodia was the beneficiary of a \$2 billion United Nations peacekeeping mission and administration from 1991 to 1993 following the end of Vietnamese occupation. In the decade that followed the UN withdrawal, Cambodia received billions more in international assistance to rebuild and develop a stable democracy.

Where Communist ideologies once prevailed, such regimes now rely on money laundering and trafficking in humans, gems, arms and narcotics for the cash to keep their loyal armies equipped and to purchase electoral legitimacy. Continued international support for such criminal regimes in the form of generous aid packages, military assistance and multilateral loans only strengthens their ability to carry out these activities. Cambodia is now Southeast Asia's premier transit point for drugs, trafficked women and children, and laundered money.

As a first step, democratic nations must re-evaluate the impact of their bilateral and multilateral assistance. Donor governments, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund must demand simple choices from aid recipients to meet international standards of justice, democracy and good governance. Only by holding the worst regimes to account can the world truly help the people of nations like Cambodia out of misery into a future of democracy and prosperity.

Such excerpts address head-on the general issue of why so many countries of the South remain mired in poverty. It is because these countries are governed by men who are too often corrupt, incompetent and even criminal. It is high time donor countries understand that direct aid to those governments (leaving aside aid to the grassroots through NGOs) must have strings attached. Those strings must be set in a road map that defines the steps to be taken on the way to democracy, each adapted to the particular situation of the country concerned. The conditions must be very stringent: if the conditions are not met, brushing aside all declarations of intention and making decisions on actions, then the aid must cease. If this approach had been applied to Cambodia, then the present inefficient regime would have had to think twice about its disastrous policies. And more electors could have turned away from them for hosts of promises not kept.

On the other hand, now that the extent of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge has been fully exposed and the July 1998 Rome Agreement has officially defined in international law the nature of crimes against humanity, Cambodia is at long last equipped to face its past. This is what a tribunal—with a strong international component—to judge the crimes is supposed to achieve. We cannot address here the question of the trial and impunity in Cambodia as entire books have been or are being written on the subject. I shall restrict myself to looking briefly at two aspects of this conundrum: France's role and the question of memory within Cambodian society.

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, France did not recognise the People's Republic of Kampuchea or the Vietnamese Communist-dominated Heng Samrin regime. Like other Western powers, it would not sanction the takeover of one Southeast Asian country by another. Unlike other Western countries though, France also abstained from supporting the candidacy of a representative of the Khmer Rouge at the UN General Assembly in the course of the 1980s. Unfortunately, however, the old colonial power was instrumental in forcing the Sihanoukists and the Republicans to form an obscene alliance with its former tormentors, the KR, under the name of the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) in 1982. In so doing, the international community officially reintegrated some of the worst perpetrators of crimes against humanity into the world diplomatic sphere as this was tantamount to exonerating those leaders—Khieu Samphân, Son Sen, Ieng Sary—from their heinous crimes. The bespectacled Son Sen, in his drab Soviet-style suit, the ex-overlord of S-21, was later to be one of the two KR representatives of the UN-sponsored Supreme National Council that embodied Cambodian nationality at the time of UNTAC.³³ In the meantime, civil society organisations were lobbying for an international tribunal. This was not the order of the day in the chancelleries.

I am tempted to believe that it was similarly a mistake to bring the DK component to be part of the Paris accord of 23 October 1991. They represented no constituency in Cambodia at the time, except a few perverted and careerist intellectuals and ignorant brain-washed thugs. If they had then been excluded, isolated in their cantonments on the Thai border, they would have died their own natural death, as they did at the end of the 1990s. Then, the international community could have turned to eliminate the KR in the Phnom Penh government. The opportunity was given when they obtained only 38% of the popular vote in the 1993 UN-controlled free elections, as against 62% for a triumphant opposition. The opportunity was not taken and Hun Sen's power was left untouched. French members of UNTAC could not oppose this deleterious trend, except in the early days of the mission when the disagreement between the Australian General Anderson and the French Général Loridon came to a head. The Australian was a collaborationist—that is, in favour of using diplomatic rather than military means to induce the KR to open their zones. The French general, quite rightly to my mind, had seen through the bluff of the KR and thought the UN should be given a new mandate to solve the problem immediately, even if this meant going back to the Security Council. Officially, though, France chose the easy option and the French general was sent home. Anderson took control of the UNTAC military component, the KR refused to disarm and so did

the Phnom Penh government. The civil war was prolonged for another five years and ex-KR still monopolise all the main centres of power in Phnom Penh to this very day.³⁴

Today France is among the few nations prepared to finance the trial of a few surviving KR leaders but no one knows for sure when and even if a trial will start at all. There are still too many people in the Government who must dislike the idea, not forgetting the ex-King Sihanouk who was the official leader of the revolutionaries from 1970 to 1976. Is this one of the reasons why he abdicated in early October 2004, in order not to have to sign a Tribunal Law he strongly objected to? He said on his Internet site that the projected expenditure—\$50–60 million—would be better spent in supporting the disastrous Cambodian agriculture industry.

As to the question of memory of the KR massacres within Cambodian society, there is no doubt it is still a very sore and vivid subject among the survivors who are over thirty years of age. After more than a quarter of a century, it is amazing how much they can remember of their despair, their hunger, and the anguish at the loss of their dear departed ones. Although time obliterates or distorts many details, the researcher can still unearth many of the mind-boggling realities of the regime. Only the perpetrators claim to have lapses of memory or that it is better to bury the past. But as long as the Cambodian government and its centrally controlled education and media systems cannot frankly face the past, this contributes to explaining why the Khmers cannot construct a democratic present and future. While ordinary survivors do remember vividly what happened to them, they want to know *why* it happened. The younger generations are ignorant of *what* happened at all, apart from what their elders have told them and they are curious to know. This is why all age groups would like a trial, not just as fair retribution but to answer the puzzling questions that are haunting their minds.

Conclusion

A national public opinion survey of Cambodian political attitudes was conducted in January and February 2004 by a Washington-based professional organisation[32] with the help of the International Republican Institute and the Cambodian-run Centre for Advanced Studies in Phnom Penh. It showed public opinion was sharply divided into two equal halves. In spite of massive propaganda (all TV channels and most radio stations are controlled by the state) and a very low standard of education (a tiny fraction of voters in the towns read the newspapers), the CPP has to face strong opposition because of its appallingly bad governance.

In the absence of justice for past and present crimes, in the absence of a competent and caring government, one may wonder if massive institutional and humanitarian aid to a state and its unpaid bureaucracy does not contribute to perpetuating an intrinsically unfair and pernicious system. What hope is there for the future of the barely educated 200 000 young people arriving each year on the labour market? How could victims have a fair deal when they are still led by the perpetrators of massive state crimes?

However, unlike Burma, Cambodia has now been wide open to the world for the past fifteen years. There are many signs that the system is beginning to crack up.

New developments are bound to take place thanks to a few more enlightened Khmer politicians and the growing impatience of a sizeable young and better-educated elite.

Notes

- [1] L'Harmattan, Paris, 1995.
- [2] See Moeung Sonn & Henri Locard, "Prisonnier de l'Angkar", Paris, Fayard, 1993.
- [3] See *Voices from S-21: Terror & History in Pol Pot's Secret prison*, Thailand, Silkworm Books, 2000.
- [4] See Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le Livre noir du communisme*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1998, p. 8.
- [5] See *The Phnom Penh Post*, 19 December 2003–1 January 2004, p.13.
- [6] See "Pol Pot's Little Red Book", Silkworm Books, Chang Mai, 2004.
- [7] Read the chapter bearing that title, in *Facing the Cambodian Past, Selected Essays, 197–94*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 1998, pp. 255–75.
- [8] For a more detailed description of the choice of the 'enemies', read Chapter IV, 'The Hunt for the Enemies of the People', in my *Pol Pot's Little Red Book, or the Sayings of Angkar*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2004.
- [9] To understand this, read, for instance, publications of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, such as *Victims & Perpetrators? Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades*, Phnom Penh, Meng Try Ea & Sorya Sim, 2001. *The Khmer Rouge Division 703: from Victory to Self-Destruction*, Phnom Penh, Hu Vannak, 2003.
- [10] See his *Cambodia: Year Zero*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977.
- [11] *The Quality of Mercy*, Simon & Schuster, 1984, p. 338.
- [12] Chandler, *Voices from S-21*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 2000 p. 149.
- [13] 'The tragedy of Cambodian History', 1979, in David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, Chiang Mai, Silkworm Books, 1996, p. 302.
- [14] 'The Tragedy of Cambodian history revisited', 1994, *ibid.*, p. 315.
- [15] See his 'Beyond the 'Colonizer' and the 'Colonized': Intra-Asian Debates and the Complexities of Legal Categories in French Colonial Indochina', personal communication.
- [16] See his unpublished autobiography, provisionally entitled '*Itinéraire d'un intellectuel khmer rouge: une rétrospective indispensable (1956–1996)*', pp. 61 & 62).
- [17] Preface to *Le Kampuchea*, Catherine Quiminal, 1982, p. XVII.
- [18] *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- [19] François Debré, *Cambodge ou la Révolution de la Forêt*, Paris, Flammarion, 1976, p. 87.
- [20] *Ibid.*, 1964, p. 166.
- [21] FBIS, 19 January 1977, p. H 2.
- [22] White Lotus Press, Bangkok, 2004.
- [23] Justin Cornfield, *Khmers, Stand up!*, Monash University, 1994.
- [24] Yale University Press, 2002.
- [25] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- [26] United Nations Transitory Authority in Cambodia, 1992–1993.
- [27] Source of this information: the Phnom Penh Faculty of Law & Economics.
- [28] Read John Ciorciari, Senior Research Scholar at Oxford University, *Cambodia Daily*, 18 March 2004.
- [29] See UNDP, Human Development Report 2003.
- [30] Front Uni National pour un Cambodge pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique Et Coopératif.
- [31] The rumour in Phnom Penh is that the deal has cost Hun Sen \$6–15 million as a gift to his partners.
- [32] United Nations Transitory Authority in Cambodia.
- [33] For instance, Keat Chhon, an ex-Khmer Rouge, who was with Pol Pot till the early 1980s, now the irremovable Finance Minister, declared in the National Assembly during the debate for the approval

of the 2004 budget that the unemployment rate today in Cambodia is 2.5%. Every serious observer knows that about 50% of the population does not have a real job. The Minister of Finance can no more face reality than Pol Pot, his former boss. See *The Cambodia Daily*, 12 October 2004, p. 12.

[34] Ayres, McHenry & Associates.

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