

University of Nevada, Reno

**Scripting Mass Atrocity: Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

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Research on mass atrocity sometimes ignores regional variations in violence when seeking to better understand the conditions under which this type of violence occurs. Using the performative framework, it has been possible to better understand the context and social dynamics under which violence occurred in Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. Variations in the interpretation of instructions from central leadership by officials at lower levels of government were analyzed to assess variations in the levels, intensity, and nature of violence within the Northwest and East Zones of Cambodia while under the Communist Party of Kampuchea's government. It is clear that variations in the interpretation of ideological script and the implementation of policy varied and created different levels of violence across Cambodia. This analysis offers some explanation for the variations.

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“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven't done a thing. You are just talking.” –Wangari Maathai

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
DEFINITIONS	vi
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. CONCEPTUALIZING MASS ATROCITY	2
III. MASS ATROCITY	3
IV. METHODS AND DATA	18
V. BACKGROUND	26
VI. THE CREATION OF AN IDEOLOGICAL SCRIPT	35
VII. THE ZONES	53
VIII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	54
IX. DISCUSSION	70
APPENDIX I. A TIMELINE OF CAMBODIAN COMMUNISM	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
ARCHIVES CONSULTED FOR INTERVIEWS	85

<u>LIST OF TABLES</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
TABLE 1. The Role of Actors in Mass Atrocity	20
TABLE 2. Comparison Between East and Northwest Zones	25
TABLE 3. Classification in Democratic Kampuchea	29

<u>LIST OF FIGURES</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
FIGURE 1. DK Zones w/ Northwest and East Zones Highlighted	24
FIGURE 2. Organization of Democratic Kampuchea	34

## DEFINITIONS

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The study of Cambodian politics and history is rife with terminology, which is largely unknown outside of a specific group of academics. Below is a list of terms that will be useful for readers without in-depth knowledge of Cambodian history and culture.

**Ângkar Padevat (Ângkar)** – “the revolutionary organization” made up of individuals who were part of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, Ângkar also served as a secretive name for those in charge of the party.

**Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)** – The party that ultimately would be deemed the Khmer Rouge by Prince Sihanouk and the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea. This can be used interchangeably with Khmer Rouge.

**Democratic Kampuchea (DK)** – The official name of the Cambodian government while under the Khmer Rouge.

**Khmer** – The ancient kingdom that reigned over the current Cambodian region which is used as an adjective and a noun, in noun form Khmer is a native inhabitant of Cambodia, it is also the name of the language used within Cambodia, in adjective form it can be used the same way we would use words like American, Italian, or German.

**Khmer Republic** – The official name of the government of Cambodia under Lon Nol which was in power from 1970 until 1975.

**Khmer Rouge (KR)** – The name given to the Communist Party of Kampuchea by Prince Sihanouk, which became the common name for the regime abroad.



## **Introduction**

Approximately twenty percent of the Cambodian population perished between 1975 and 1979 under the leadership of Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). Of the 1.6 to 2.2 million people died during this time, an estimated fifty percent died as a result of direct violence (Tabeau and Kheam 2009, p.70). The remaining 0.8 to 1.1 million deaths were the result of malnutrition, preventable illness, unsanitary living conditions, forced migration, emotional hardship and limited access to basic health care (Tabeau and Kheam 2009, p. 1). The perpetrators of direct violence against the people were often low-level party members charged with implementing policies dictated by a mid-level cadre who were responsible for interpreting the party's ideological views. Described as ordinary civilians by most survivors (Williams and Neilsen 2016), these perpetrators killed an estimated 800,000 to 1.3 million of their own countrymen.

Mass atrocities have been a regular and alarming occurrence around the world throughout history. Some of those seeking to explain this type of violence have focused on better understanding the conditions under which ordinary people participate in mass atrocities (Verdeja 2012 p. 307; Gellately and Kiernan 2003). Others are predominantly focused on identifying conditions under which large-scale violence occurs and proposing general explanations and theories to make sense of mass atrocity. The media, in contrast, often portrays mass atrocity as inexplicable (Budiansky 2015).

Genocide is one type of mass atrocity, but it is not the only type. By focusing only on genocide, some researchers have concluded that this type of mass violence is the result of unfettered hate or is an inevitable outcome of certain types of development in multi-ethnic states (Geertz 1963; Grosby 1994; Van den Berghe 1995). Such conclusions may

help explain some cases, such as the Rwandan and Armenian genocides, but they are less easily applied to Cambodia, which cannot easily be explained by preexisting societal divisions. Some explanations focus on parts of the whole process which do not always account for equifinality, the fact “that *different* causal patterns can lead to *similar* outcomes” (George and Bennett 2005, italics in the original).

Some research on mass atrocity has focused on the role of ideology and decentralized governance in the performance of these types of violence (Fujii 2009). Regional variations in violence are, at times, ignored in attempts to understand the overall causes of violence; however, these variations provide beneficial insights through which we may better understand mass atrocity. Can variations in the interpretation of instructions from central leadership by officials at lower levels of government help explain variations in the levels, intensity, and nature of violence within different zones in Cambodia? If so, in what ways?

### **Conceptualizing Mass Atrocity**

Valentino defines mass atrocity as “the intentional killing of a significant number of members of any group of noncombatants (as the group and the membership are defined by the perpetrator)” (Valentino 2000, p. 4). Intentional killing by this definition includes deaths resulting directly from violence, as well as those that were the result of regime specific policy rather than violent acts. This definition encompasses genocide, which is defined by the United Nations as “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (United Nations 1951, Article III). Genocide studies focus on a subset of mass atrocity. Looking at mass atrocities, more

generally, to include cases of mass killings that are not directed at the types of identity groups identified specifically by the United Nations, can expand the number of cases available for comparison.

Though scholars tend to argue about how to properly classify the events Cambodia, mass atrocity is a more accurate term than genocide (Etcheson 2005; Chandler 2008; for an opposing view, see Kiernan 2008). The violence within Cambodia was aimed at people identified as “enemies” of state, a label that encompassed members of minority groups and ethnic Khmer. Ethnic and religious minorities were targeted, but primarily for their association with “enemy” nations (e.g., Vietnam, America, New Zealand) rather than their ethnicity (Valentino 2004). Ethnic Khmer with certain educational achievements and economic backgrounds were among those targeted, as were individuals who lived outside of the territories controlled by the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) prior to the invasion of Phnom Penh. Genocide, as defined by the United Nations is an inaccurate term to apply to Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge.

### **Mass Atrocity**

The literature on mass atrocity is substantial and interdisciplinary in nature. Across disciplines, social scientists have contributed to the development of theories aimed at explaining mass atrocity. The literature incorporates both contextual and strategic explanations.

#### *Contextual Arguments*

One strain of research, drawing on Hannah Arendt’s (1951) work on totalitarianism, focuses on the role of regime type in explaining mass atrocity. Rummel (1995), Bueno de

Mesquita et al. (2003) and Lake and Baum (2001) agree with Arendt and argue that autocratic regimes are more susceptible to mass atrocity than those with stable democratic institutions. Other scholars have added that mass atrocities are more likely to occur in environments where power is highly concentrated among an ideologically-inspired and repressive elite (Horowitz 1997; Rummel 1994; Kuper 1981). Communist regimes, given their political goals and ideological underpinnings, often fit this profile, which supports those who argue that mass atrocities are more likely to occur under communist systems than under non-communist ones (Valentino 2004; Fein 1993). Valentino specifically attributes the violence in these communist societies to the enforcement of communist policies, with emphasis on the repercussions of communist agricultural policies including the redistribution and collectivization of land (Valentino 2014, p.97). The emphasis of production over the rights of the individual leads to conditions under which individuals are seen as a dispensable means to an end.

Scholars have also identified states in the midst of regime transitions as the most susceptible to mass atrocity (Mann 2005; Levene 2005; Straus 2007). Mann (2005) argues that democratizing states are more susceptible to mass atrocity than strict authoritarian states due to institutional instability. Mass atrocity is a result of the distorted democratic ideals of elites in states with weak institutions, meaning institutions in these states are more easily manipulated by elites. Likewise, Levine (2005) views mass atrocity as a component of political development and argues that late developers, especially those democratizing in the post-colonial era, are more likely to have mass atrocities. He too correlates weak institutions with mass atrocity. According to Tarrow (1994), institutional instability threatens elites who often accommodate the masses through reforms; however, sometimes

when elites face what they see as insurmountable challenges, they resort to mass atrocity (see also Krain 1997; Melson 1992).

Still other researchers focus on crises that occur within states. Melson (1992) and Fein (1993) identify crises, such as the fracturing of authority or war, as windows of opportunity for revolutionary groups to take control (also see Krain 1997; Kiernan 1990; Fein 1979). Researchers have found a correlation between war and mass atrocity (Fein 1993; Krain 1997; Markusen and Kopf 1995). Fein states, “we find that genocides both lead to war and war leads to genocide,” (1993, p. 79), ultimately emphasizing the tautological nature of the argument that war and genocide coincide. Naturally, the scholars point out that mass atrocity has coincided with war, preceded war, and followed war (Fein 1993; Owens et al. 2013). Shaw (2003) argues that mass atrocity is a form of war and the two cannot be separated, and posits that war creates a “power organization” that is likely to define civilians as enemies. Midlarsky (2005), on the other hand, views mass atrocity as infrequent and atypical, but argues that international allies facilitate mass atrocity by offering aid to genocidal regimes and by failing to intervene. Across the literature, war is probably the most frequently cited factor associated with mass atrocity.

Aligning with other institutionalists, Barbara Harff (2003) concludes that six factors can help explain mass atrocity, unique among these factors is low trade openness. Harff argues that trade openness is an “indicator of state and elite willingness to maintain the rule of law and fair practices,” and is based on a state’s level of economic interdependence (Harff 2003, p. 65). She posits that low interdependence increases the likelihood of mass atrocity, and economic losses from an isolated existence reduce opportunity costs associated with mass atrocity (Gurr 1986; Staub 1989). Ultimately, she

is arguing that regimes without global obligations are more likely to resort to violence as a means of increasing economic development and maintaining control of the state.

Although most scholars focus on institutional context, some have looked more closely at the structural context under which mass atrocity is more likely to occur. Kuper (1981) argues that plural societies with deep ethnic, religious, or social divides are also more likely to be polarized (politicized, but lacking middle-ground), a condition which increases the likelihood of conflict between competing groups. Others suggest that states with deep political cleavages, especially those based on ethnic identities (Valentino 2004), are more likely to experience mass atrocity (Kauffman 1996; Huntington 2004; Goldstein 2004).

### *Strategic Arguments*

Many motives exist to explain elites' use of mass killing, and these motives may provide insight into how regimes carry out mass atrocity. From a strategic perspective, mass atrocity is a calculated act utilized by government elites to fortify and/or maintain power. Valentino (2004) concludes that mass atrocity is usually employed by a small group of individuals for their own benefit. He further states that the plural society thesis, positing social divisions as the source of atrocity, is inadequate at identifying high risk states (Valentino 2004). Fein (1993) identifies mass atrocity as both strategic and irrational. She sees mass atrocity as strategic in that elites actively choose genocide as a means of controlling a population, but irrational in that such tactics are largely unsuccessful. She categorizes atrocities as "ideological" and "reactive" in order to differentiate between the ways in which violence is triggered: identifying "ideological" atrocities as planned and

“reactive” atrocities as unplanned. However, among “reactive” cases, which she identifies as a reaction to intentional minority exclusion that results in minority rebellion (p.100), the use of violence is still a choice made by elites (Fein 1993). “Ideological” atrocities on the other hand, are those in which elites label specific groups as enemies and plan to exterminate members of the identified groups as a means of controlling the population (p. 98). The division of the population creates a common enemy of the masses.

Violence may also be used by elites as a means of coercing the masses into accepting the ideology of the regime (Snyder 2005). Fein (1993) argues that atrocity is employed in response to either a crisis or the belief that certain groups are impeding access to opportunities, and atrocity serves the purpose of homogenizing society and/or decreasing political resistance. Weitz (2003) and Sémelin (2007) argue that elites are driven by ideological goals of purity and/or utopia and utilize group identity as a means of targeting out-groups. Midlarsky (2005) argues that the use of *realpolitik* (politics focused on the practical rather than the ideological) and a regime’s perceived loss of legitimacy and power create conditions that encourage the application of “imprudent *realpolitik*” (political decision making without regard for consequences), which may also result in mass atrocities. Levene (2005) and Mann (2005) both argue that elites opting to unify the population through manufactured nationalism may utilize mass atrocity as a way to consolidate power and “catch up” with western society.

Scholars have also focused on how mass atrocity is enacted by the political elite. For example, Gagnon (2004) argues that elites can reorganize political spaces through the use of ethnic frames that draw attention to grievances between ethnic groups. By doing so, elites can take advantage of preexisting tensions and use these tensions to eliminate threats

to regime survival. This argument is similar to Lee Ann Fujii's (2009) argument that ethnic violence can be the result of the politicization of identity by elites. Sémelin (2007) further contends that leaders focus on unifying politicized in-groups through ideological fear mongering, intentionally creating group tensions. Others argue that mass atrocity is the result of elite manipulation of media which offers one-sided news and information causing an asymmetry of information that influences the actions of the masses (Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Kalyvas 1999). The masses are exposed only to the information the regime chooses and act on the incomplete information received via media (Kalyvas 1999). From this argument it can be assumed that it is only with the help of the masses that mass atrocity occurs.

Many scholars argue that the complicity of the masses, whether through action or apathy, is essential to the success of mass atrocity. For some, like Valentino (2004), mass killing is the result of passive acceptance by society of the elite's ideological will, meaning mass atrocity is the result of an apathetic mass public. He argues that violent acts are carried out by a small group of perpetrators rather than the masses and that popular support for killing is not necessary for mass atrocity to occur (2004). Other scholars, such as Mann (2005), Kalyvas (1999), Brubaker and Laitin (1998), Sémelin (2007) and Fujii (2009), argue that without the complicity of the masses, large scale violence would not occur. While most scholars recognize the importance of both the masses and the elites in the production of mass atrocity, some argue that it is the interaction between the two that must be explained.

For Tyner and Will (2015) complicity is both active and passive, and the scholastic differentiation between active violence and passive acceptance fails to account for the fact



that the two are morally equivalent. They argue, that “letting die” or choosing not to help when death or violence is preventable, is no better than killing (p. 364). Further expanding on this argument, Tyner (2017) identifies three conditions, which if met indicate the intentional production of death by the perpetrators of structural violence: ability, opportunity, and awareness (p.154). Essentially, if the elites and the masses are aware of the situation and have the opportunity and ability to help but fail to do so, then the resulting deaths are intentional and therefore morally equivalent to violence (Tyner 2017). Tyner (2009, 2014) further posits that communist elites attempt to “deconstruct” society through collectivization and proletarianization in an attempt to erase the past and create new space for development without regard to the health and welfare of the population. Ultimately, coopting the existing institutions and structures to produce violence is aimed at helping a regime fortify or maintain power. By doing so, the elites chose to implement mass atrocity through indirect means. By studying the interaction between elites and the masses, we can better understand regional variations in the types and intensities of violence.

### *The Creation of Regional Variations*

The development of local or regional variations of violence in Cambodia can be seen as a result of context, elite strategy, and the complicity of the masses. Victim construction is arguably intertwined with strategic theories of violence and can be helpful for explaining variations in violence between regions and locales. Incentives for participation in violence (Mann 2005), group dynamics (Kelman and Hamilton 1989), the dissemination of “scripts” (Fujii 2004; Hinton 2005; Oberschall 2000; Straus 2007), and environmental differences between locales (Fujii 2009; Straus 2007; Su 2011; Tilly 2003)

help explain regional variations in Cambodia. Mann (2005) argues that incentives for violence as well as disincentives for non-compliance motivate individuals to behave in different ways, which in turn results in different environments that affect the behavior of groups of people. Kelman and Hamilton (1989) suggest that individuals comply with orders and commit “crimes of obedience” when violence is legitimized and moral responsibility is deferred. For example, when violence is a regime-approved activity, when the victims of violence are dehumanized, and/or when violence is ordered by someone in a position of power.

Collective frameworks and scripted violence offer process-based explanations to regional variations in mass atrocity. Fujii (2004) argues that elites develop a message, which they diffuse via state controlled mediums to local governance. Then, in response, local officials interpret the ideological messages and create and implement ideologically backed policies of violence. Similarly, Hinton (2005) argues that elites exploit cultural practices, such as social norms and traditions, as a way of recruiting the masses to participate in mass killing. By manipulating pre-existing societal frameworks, such as the traditional hierarchy, honor, and other idiosyncratic social norms, the regime can reinforce their ideology among lower level leadership and the masses (Hinton 2005). These societal frameworks can be used strategically to reinforce their methods but can also be used against the regime by those choosing to resist rather than comply. According to Oberschall (2000), elites use “frames” as a means of dividing the masses and creating intergroup tensions through the exploitation of minority groups’ fears of exploitation. Like Fujii, Oberschall argues that this framework is diffused through society and is used as a foundation for policy creation and the enactment of retributive violence (Oberschall 2000; see also Straus 2007).

One subset of researchers argues that local conditions give rise to within-state variations in the intensity and types of violence implemented during a mass atrocity. Tilly (2003) argues that different explanations exist for different cases, but without analyzing other factors these differences may be missed. In his exploration of rural violence in Maoist China, Su (2011) argues that “eliminationist killings,” mass killing intending to eliminate an identifiable group, are not solely the product of the strategic state: “Recognizing the indirect effect of state allows us to examine the interaction between state policy and local conditions” (p. 12). He further argues that mass killing takes place when the community collectively defines the violence as legitimate (Su 2011). Similarly, Straus (2006) argues that social pressure and opportunism produce killing in areas under the leadership of ideological extremists. Giving attention to variations in violence at the local level is essential to better understanding the events that occurred under the Khmer Rouge.

### *Theory and the Khmer Rouge*

Building upon previous theories, which focused on the classification of Khmer Rouge violence and the strategic aims of the regime, much of the recent work on the mass atrocity in Cambodia has been focused on the roles of strategic elites, elite ideology and local level leadership in the implementation of violence (Tyner 2017, 2014, 2009; Tyner and Will 2015; Williams and Neilsen 2016; Path and Kanavou 2015; Owens 2014; Pina e Cunha et al. 2010). More recent contributions to the literature build on these previous scholars’ works, incorporating structural explanations, as well as strategic arguments (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008; Chandler 2008; Jackson 1989; Raszelenberg 1999; Etcheson 2005).

This first generation of scholars were participants in the academic debate over whether the events in Cambodia could be classified as a genocide. Kiernan (2008) argues that Chams (ethnic Muslims) and ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese faced genocidal discrimination and systematic extermination under the Khmer Rouge. Raszelenberg (1999) argues that policies of elimination were not based on hatred or a desire to destroy minorities, but rather that they were the result of a threatened elite, which feared threats to power. He adds that minorities were killed when identified, but were not hunted down as Jewish people were under the Third Reich (1999). Although they did not make explicit claims on the categorization of the atrocity, Chandler (2008) and Etcheson (2005) focus predominantly on the violence inflicted on party cadre and the general population rather than the violence directed specifically at minorities.

Another debate among this group of scholars revolves around the role of the elites and whether mass atrocity was strategic or a byproduct of regime policies. Vickery (1999) argues that mass atrocity was the result of untrained and undisciplined cadre, even arguing that other scholars intentionally omitted information, which put the regime in a positive light. Likewise, his contemporary Raszelenberg (1999) concludes that though killing was intentional “with regard to the Vietnamese, all other casualties are unrelated to genocide or “genocidal policies” (p. 68). Others from this first generation of scholars have argued that regardless of classification, the implementation of mass killings was a strategic decision made by the party elites (Etcheson 2005; Kiernan 2008; Chandler 1991, 2008; Jackson 1989). Etcheson (2005) concludes that there is evidence that recently uncovered documents (recently at the time of publishing, 2005) resolve this controversy, and support strategic arguments.

There is some consensus among scholars regarding the context that contributed to the CPK's rise to power, including economic deterioration, the continuing bombardment by the American military targeting government approved Vietcong bases in Cambodia, and an ongoing civil war (Kiernan 2008; Chandler 2008; Etcheson 2005; Hinton 2005; Tyner 2017). Hinton (2005) labels these events as "genocidal priming," defined as "the process(es) by which various primes coalesce, making genocide more or less likely, though by no means an inevitable outcome, in given historical situations" (p. 456). Over the last decade, scholars have offered more nuanced arguments aimed at explaining local variations in the intensity and implementation of violence, while maintaining the importance of elite strategies and context. The result is a subset of literature focusing on process-based explanations for the Khmer Rouge era. These explanations include anti-geography, manufactured differences, and indoctrination.

Geographer James Tyner has produced an abundance of literature on the Khmer Rouge in which he proposes a unique perspective. Tyner (2017) argues that structures of violence in Democratic Kampuchea were the result of both the leadership policy choices and the overarching international structure. Tyner contends that anti-geography, the erasure of history and geography, was employed by the Khmer Rouse to destroy all vestiges of the old society in order to build a new society (Tyner 2009). He further concludes that the only value attributed to people during the DK era was their productive ability, which often dictated whether a person lived or died (Tyner 2014). Tyner does not focus on group level dynamics and scripted violence.

Alexander Hinton (2005) has argued that the regime manufactured differences and abstract categorizations took the place of individual identity. Once individuals had been

categorized into in-groups and out-groups, the regime actively devalued the members of the out-group as a means of dehumanization (Hinton 2005). The regime then initiated policies that resulted in the targeted population receiving less food, worse medical care, more intensive labor assignments, and inadequate housing (Hinton 2005). The regime set out to expel individual differences from Khmer society as a means of eliminating those who might undermine or rebel against the new society.

Another subset of research addresses the use of dehumanization, thought reform and indoctrination, which were used to enforce complicity with violence in Cambodia. Williams and Neilsen (2016) explore the role of dehumanizing ideological messages on the severity of violence under the CPK and conclude that although it may not have ignited the violence, these ideological messages served to legitimize acts of killing. Path and Kanavou (2015) argue that thought reform was employed by the Khmer Rouge to convert the masses into ideological automatons who wreaked havoc on society. Similarly, Pina e Cunha et al. (2010) argue that the indoctrination methods and social reconstruction policies implemented by the CPK destroyed societal norms and reduced individual agency. Individual agency was limited by communal living, forced migration, and the division of families. Through this process, the masses became an “army of unquestioningly obedient soldiers” (Pina e Cunha et al., 2010 p. 291). These explanations offer insight into the development of the violence that occurred under the CPK and provide some explanations for regional variations.

*Lee Ann Fujii's State Sponsored Ethnicity*

In *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, Lee Ann Fujii (2009) focuses on explaining regional variations in genocidal killings. She chose Rwanda because she argues that the case was atypical. She posits that the case is extraordinary for two reasons: the perpetrators were groups rather than individuals and killing was a public event (p. 7). Although she dismisses Cambodia as a comparable case, erroneously arguing that most of the killing happened in the S21 prison or in remote areas, her framework can be applied to the case of mass atrocity in Cambodia. Drawing on her theory of state-sponsored ethnicity and conclusions on the role of group dynamics in explaining mass atrocities, it is possible to better understand why violence varied across zones in Cambodia.

Fujii argues that mass atrocities are part of a process that can best be understood by examining the context and social dynamics under which violence occurs (Fujii 2009). She also argues that ethnicity cannot be encompassed by a single definition because numerous meanings and definitions exist within society. Ethnicity is complex and cannot be confined to a single definition. Instead Fujii argues that state-sponsored ethnicity, defined as “a specific set of constructions, which depict ethnic group identities in terms that are meant to occlude regional differences and smooth over local variations” (Fujii 2009, p. 11), is used to create targets. Ethnicities, in this case, are created using pre-existing group stereotypes and societal tensions and are then politicized by a regime without regard to local level distinctions of group identity. For this reason, ethnicity cannot be considered a cause of conflict but rather it should be regarded as an organizing principle used by elites to script and implement mass atrocity. Seemingly small divisions in society, such as economic class in Cambodia, can be employed by the party elites to achieve political goals.

According to Fujii, scripts for mass atrocity are routinely “written” as “a scene of apocalyptic proportions—the threatened existence of the group deemed innocent and good. The level and immediacy of mortal danger steadily increases, culminating in the heroic defense of the threatened group through annihilation of the group’s greatest [perceived] enemy” (Fujii 2009, p. 12). The promotion of a regime’s revised history and ideological stance is used by elites, local leaders, and ordinary citizens as a justification for the use of violence. The “writers” of violent scripts are often threatened elites within the central government who want to ensure their continuation of power and attain their political goals. Once a script has been produced, these elites distribute the script through government controlled channels, such as meetings, official documents, study groups, and other state-sanctioned media (Fujii 2009).

In Cambodia, party magazines, speeches, and propagandized materials were used to spread ideology and ideological goals. The scripted ideology is propelled through a regime’s hierarchy to regional and community leaders as a guideline for policy development and implementation (Fujii 2009). Regional (or zonal in the case of Cambodia) leaders also pass the ideological message to local leaders who enforce regional policies within their communities. Leaders at all levels who successfully implement ideological policies receive recognition and rewards from the central government, which serve as a reinforcement for the continued use of the script (Fujii 2009). The elites are dependent on local actors to interpret and implement the scripts, and elites develop means of motivating local leaders. Variations in the adherence to scripted violence can be explained by the contextual and leadership differences present in different regions (Fujii 2009). Depending upon the circumstances, individuals may implement policies directly in line with the script



while under different conditions others may see the script as a vague guideline and implement a different set of policies. In some cases the script will not be picked up on at all; rather, leaders will choose to improvise or even create policies that help the targets of state violence. The context under which the script is introduced will ultimately guide leadership toward variations in violence.

According to Fujii, at the lowest level of governance, individuals adopt roles that allow them to participate in violence and develop social bonds that reinforce their use of violence. Individuals join these social groups for a variety of reasons, such as support for the ideology of the central government, to protect themselves from becoming targets, or because it is easier to join than to resist. Through her research, Fujii identifies different roles performed by individuals and argues that roles are reinforced within groups and that these groups perpetuate the performance of violent roles (Fujii 2009, p.154). Essentially, groups provide individuals with a sense of structure in the chaos of war as well as a new identity, which informs their role in this new world and therefore dictates the actions they should perform. The roles individuals, among both leadership and the masses, take on will vary depending on the regional enforcement of specific policies and the interpretation of ideological scripts. As such, these roles provide them with direction in chaos and uncertainty, when their previous societal roles are no longer useful. At the lowest levels of the social structure, Fujii identifies “joiners” as individuals who act as participants in violence, and she proposes that group cohesion and dynamics influence violence among actors within specific contexts during mass atrocities. With regard to Rwanda, she argues that “powerful group dynamics helped pull certain joiners into violence initially and led joiners to continue their participation over time” (Fujii 2009, p. 178). Fujii compares two

regions of Rwanda in order to identify changes in patterns of social cohesion and interaction both before and during the genocide. Her focus is primarily on the ways in which group dynamics led to differences in killing in different areas of Rwanda.

### **Methodology And Data**

Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is used in combination with process tracing to help understand zonal variations in violence in Cambodia under the leadership of the Khmer Rouge. George and Bennett (2005) argue that supplementing QCA with process tracing helps combat the weaknesses associated with this type of qualitative methodology. QCA is a case study based methodology that accounts for equifinality – or the problem of different processes leading to similar outcomes – in social science based research (Ragin 1987). It is based on Mill's methods (Mill 1872) but allows for the investigation of more complex causal processes. This method allows researchers to test and develop theories that deal with more than one causal variable. Process tracing is ideal for historical analysis and is most effective when applied to theory development and theory testing (George and Bennett 2005). This methodology relies on the use of a narrative backed by insights (drawn from the related literature) that clarify the patterns that help explain an outcome (George and Bennett 2005). QCA with process tracing requires a detailed narrative, which explores the hypothesized causal mechanisms or patterns.

The performative framework or performativity is the underlying theoretical paradigm under which QCA and process tracing are being used. Performativity is pulled from dramaturgical theorizing, which includes the study of theater and scripts, and emphasizes the instrumental use of political and social scripts as a means of producing a

particular outcome, action, or event (Burke 2005; Edelman 1971). As is true in theater, a script is an idealized production that is open to modification and interpretation by others. Such a script may range from a very specific dialogue and narrative to something more akin to guidelines, such as those followed by improvisers. A script can be an overarching ideology that drives the production of policies and informs policy implementation. QCA and process tracing make it possible to identify the effects of political or ideological scripts on the enactment of state sponsored violence.

Cambodia's mass atrocity makes an ideal case for analysis and theory testing. The case is interesting given that it is a non-ethnic mass atrocity, unlike Rwanda, yet there is an element of the production of state sponsored ethnicity. Further, despite the limited quantifiable data available on Cambodia, plentiful qualitative data exists, and extensive, previously untapped information is available thanks to the ongoing (since 1997) tribunal run by the current Cambodian government and the United Nations. The division of Cambodia into political zones under the Communist Party of Kampuchea's leadership and the lack of communication between zones created a quasi-experimental setting for testing how context may affect the interpretation and implementation of ideological scripts. In the forty plus years since the mass atrocity, data has been collected from accounts by survivors to the uncovering of original government documents. Although much time has passed, new data is still being uncovered.

This approach requires an analysis of how context may affect process and agency. Mass atrocity is a process and can be viewed as successive events rather than a single isolated event. Viewing mass atrocity in this manner allows researchers to identify and begin to understand variations in the implementation of violent policies by state, regional,

and local leadership. In the case of state sponsored ethnicity, the variation in the use of violence within regions can be analyzed by identifying variations across contexts and variations in outcomes. The approach was informed by the methodology used by Lee Ann Fujii, whose framework and theory are being applied to the case of mass atrocity in Cambodia.

***Table 1. The Roles of Actors in Mass Atrocity***

<b>Type*</b>	<b>As defined by Fujii*</b>	<b>Possible equivalents in CPK</b>
Leaders	Local leaders who organized violence within their communities	Standing Committee, Zonal Leadership and District Leadership
Collaborators	Individuals who work with leaders with the purpose of pursuing their own agendas	Commune, Branch and Cooperative Leadership
Joiners	Ordinary members of the community	Base People
Survivors	Individuals who were the primary targets of violence	Class Enemies (targets changed depending on locality)
Rescuers	Individuals who helped targets escape violence	As defined
Evaders	Individuals attempting to avoid participating	As defined
Witnesses	Individuals who neither helped nor hurt targets	As defined (describes many new and base people)
Resisters	Individuals who refused to participate in the violence	As defined

\*Lee Ann Fujii (2009, p. 129-131)

Fujii looks at variations in violence at the local level in the Rwanda and uses interview data to contextualize the conditions under which the violence occurred (Fujii 2009). Fujii identifies social ties and group dynamics as the mechanisms that affect individual agency (Fujii 2009). She argues that context, although variable, creates patterns of violence, which can be seen in these local level cases. In her analysis, she identifies several types of actors present in genocide: leaders, collaborators, joiners, survivors, rescuers, evaders, witnesses, and resisters (see Table 1 for definitions and equivalents in

Cambodia). Fujii's analysis focuses on joiners, who she describes as the "lowest-level participants in the genocide" (Fujii 2009, p. 129). Fujii identifies the joiners as individuals, typically disenfranchised youth, who were responsible for most of the violence in Rwanda (Fujii 2009). She uses joiners to explain how individual agency is affected by context and scripts, and how social ties influenced violence and resulted in variations in the intensities and types of violence that occurred across Rwanda. Fujii's framework is applied to the case of Cambodia using data obtained from multiple sources.

Interview data was gathered from the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-CAM), the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Houston Asian American Archive, the Minnesota Historical Society, and the Lowell Historical Society. Dr. Ben Kiernan also provided transcripts of several interviews from his research. Interview data provides one primary source. All interview data was collected between 1978 and 2015 in Thailand, Cambodia, and the United States. Some interviews were conducted in English and transcribed, while others were conducted in Khmer and translated into English. The majority of the interviews were conducted using open ended questions and therefore the information obtained in each interview varies. In total, forty interviews were analyzed with individuals or families who lived in the East or Northwest Zones of Cambodia under the leadership of the Khmer Rouge (twenty from each zone). Of these, twenty-five of the interviewees were men, twelve were women, and for three of the interviews a gender was indeterminable based on the information given. The interviewees were between the ages of seven and seventy-five in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge came into power. Those interviewed included base people and new people (see Table 3 below for definitions), including cadre and families of cadre.

These interviews are used in combination with historical accounts and primary source information to construct the analytical narrative.

Other primary source documents were obtained from DC-CAM, the ECCC, and the Yale Genocide Studies Program. These include issues of magazines produced by the Communist Party of Kampuchea, inter-party memos, speeches given in Cambodia and abroad, political plans and documents from the Central Committee, and biographic information pulled from the DC-CAM biographical databases.

Beyond interview data and primary sources, other information is needed to identify variations across zones. DC-CAM also provides geographical information, including the estimated number of mass graves and prisons in each zone. This data was useful for determining the most suitable cases for analysis. Background information drawn from experts, such as Ben Kiernan, David Chandler, Michael Vickery, James Tyner, Craig Etcheson, Alexander Hinton, and Karl Jackson, on the Khmer Rouge and Cambodia were also examined.

The focus of the analysis is context, ideology, and group dynamics. The use of diverse data can help provide information to support the argument. The prelude to the atrocity needs to be looked at through a historical lens, and secondary historical accounts and analyses are used to paint a picture of Cambodia prior to the revolutionary takeover of Phnom Penh by the CPK. Understanding the context under which the revolution occurred can help explain the ideological base from which the CPK rose to power. Ideological differences and the interpretation of the Central Committee's ideological scripts are essential for understanding the variations in violent outcomes across zones. Finally, firsthand accounts, interviews, and primary source communication among leadership

provide the information necessary to generate a performative narrative examining the role of social ties and group dynamics in the variations of violence in Cambodia.

During the Democratic Kampuchea era, the country was divided into seven regions of governance known as zones. Of the seven zones, two provided the best opportunity for comparison of scripted implementation of ideological policies: the East Zone and the Northwest Zone (highlighted on Figure 1). Unlike the other zones, these two zones shared several traits: consistent leadership, availability of qualitative data on both zones, and the number of deaths in each zone. The other zones were eliminated because of a lack of data in the cases of the North Zone and Northeast Zone, and because of the Zone Secretaries' relationship with the Standing Committee in the cases of the Southwest, West and Central Zones.

Unlike in other zones, the zonal leaderships of both the East Zone and Northwest Zone were consistent over an extended period. Both zones had a single Zone Secretary from 1975 until the Standing Committee's internal purges in 1978. The interpretation of ideology by zonal leaders can best be viewed over time to investigate patterns of policy implementation, so consistency in higher level leaders has allowed for comparisons regarding zone specific violence. Patterns can help determine what aspects of violence were statewide versus zone dependent. Purges occurred in waves and the higher-level leaders in these two zones only became the focus of these purges during the final wave in mid-1978 (Transcript Trial Day 81).

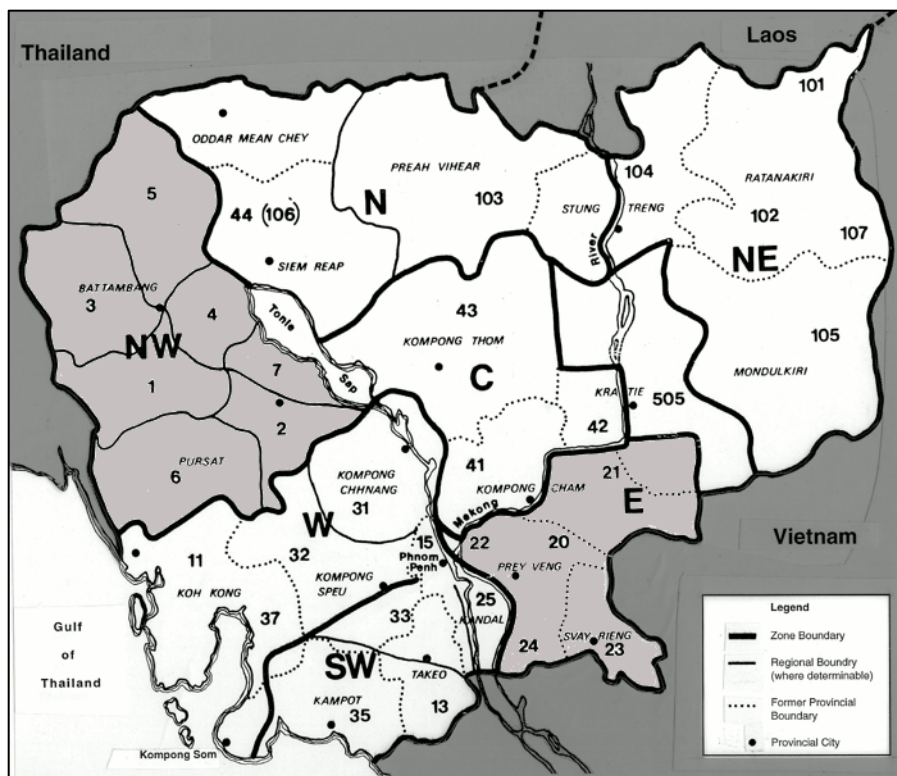


Figure 1. DK Zones with Northwest and East Zones Highlighted (Yale GSP)

Prior to mid-1978 it is believed that the East Zone had comparatively fewer executions and a better quality of life than the other zones (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008; Etcheson 2005; Chandler 2008). Ultimately, both zones had a comparable number of prisons and total deaths, but the initial populations, the number of internal migrants, the number of mass graves, and the number of deaths between mid-1978 and January 1979 varied (see Table 2). When examined as a whole, these numbers indicate how violence likely differed between the two zones. In the East Zone, there was a smaller influx of new people brought in from the cities than in the Northwest, with a population increase of thirty-three percent in the East as opposed to seventy-one percent in the Northwest. In the East, despite a smaller initial population, the percent of the overall population loss was similar to that of the Northwest Zone. However, 100,000 to 250,000 of the deaths in the zone occurred during massacres in the East Zone after the leadership change in June 1978. This



might indicate that prior to the purges there were fewer overall deaths in the East than in the Northwest.

***Table 2. Comparison Between East and Northwest Zones***

	<b>EAST ZONE</b>	<b>NORTHWEST ZONE</b>
Approx. Population in 1975*	794,000	1,010,000
Prisons**	23	21
Internal Migrants*	191,000 (+33%)	588,000 (+71%)
Mass Graves**	2,328	2,075
Approx. Population in 1980*	612,000	1,056,000
Deaths from East Zone Purges (July 1978-January 1979) *	100,000-250,000	0
Total Deaths*	8.7% of total pop.	9.1% of total pop.

\* Demographic Expert Report (2009) \*\*DC-CAM Geographic Database

The implementation of collectivism in both Zones differed based on ideological interpretation. The type of labor and the amount of food given were, in practice, determined by the individuals' "membership" in a group and by the intensity of the labor they performed; however, this too varied between zones. The context under which Central Committee goals were implemented by zonal leadership provides insight into variations in the levels of violence between zones.

Prior to conducting a comparative analysis, it is first necessary to determine the content of the ideological script and understand how the script was presented to zone and local-level leadership. To understand how group dynamics and group violence occurred it is also necessary to examine how context may affect group ties and group dynamics in Cambodia. It is also necessary to analyze how context may have restricted the choices available to the mid-level and low-level leadership in each of the zones. The analysis will identify the relevance of the policy implementation and enforcement practices with regard to three aspects of society: the Zonal Secretaries' relations with the Standing Committee,

the implementation of collectivism within zones, and the propaganda and reeducation policies enacted within the zones. The analysis of each Zone Secretary's relationship with the central leadership can be used to identify the constraints placed on implementation strategies by zone leaders. By comparing the ways in which collectivism, reeducation, and indoctrination practices were implemented, it is possible to identify the cadre training and discipline within each zone, which helps establish the level of leniency, or lack thereof, of zonal leadership. This analysis will show the ways in which variations in the implementation of scripted ideology affected the intensity of violence committed within each zone.

## **Background**

The political and social conditions in Cambodia from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onward laid the groundwork for the Khmer Rouge. In 1954, France recognized Cambodia's independence and began decolonizing and helped transfer power to a constitutional monarchy. Cambodia was a young state in a contested region. To the east, the Vietnamese were fighting a civil war aided by the USSR and China in the north and by the United States and France in the south. By 1962 Americans moved westward, bombing the eastern parts of Cambodia with little regard for the sovereign state. This further destabilized the fledgling government lead by Prince Norodom Sihanouk (Tully 2005). In the west, pro-American Thai guerillas were infiltrating the border of Cambodia in their attempt to stifle the spread of communism. Sihanouk's already tenuous hold on power began to disintegrate, allowing room for the opposition to gain popular support.

By 1970, Sihanouk had lost much of his political support, power, and many of his allies. Leading up to this, communist guerillas from China, Vietnam, and Cambodia were organizing Cambodia's rural populations and using them to further the goals of spreading communism (Kiernan 2004, p. 198-296). By 1970, one quarter of Cambodia's rice crops were being sold illegally to Vietnamese and Cambodian guerilla forces, resulting in decreased tax revenues and an economic loss for the state (Kiernan 2004). Concurrently, one-fifth of Cambodia's territory was occupied by revolutionaries with their sights set on overpowering and ousting the Sihanouk's central government (Kiernan 2004). Sihanouk's cousin Sirik Matak organized a coup while Sihanouk was on his annual holiday in France (Tully 2005). Matak and a few of his followers woke Prime Minister Lon Nol and at gun point forced him to approve the National Assembly vote that removed Sihanouk from power (Tully 2005). This left Lon Nol as the precarious leader of the newly named Khmer Republic (Tully 2005).

The rural population, despite communist influence, remained loyal to Sihanouk and the monarchy. Further, they responded to the regime change with pro-Sihanouk riots. To quiet these protests the new government, under Lon Nol, demanded that Vietnamese forces, who were given permission to set up bases by Sihanouk, leave Cambodian soil (Chandler 2008). The demand was popular among citizens who complained about the occupation, but the Vietnamese forces ignored the order, enraging Khmer citizens (Tully 2005). To protect their property and livelihood, young Khmer joined the military in droves; however, they were untrained and underequipped and were repeatedly defeated by the experienced Vietnamese military (Chandler 2008). The government did not have effective control over its military. With no governmental accountability for their actions, many Cambodian

officers indulged in corruption and aided Vietnamese forces with munitions and weaponry (Kiernan 2004). This is ironic given they had joined the military to protect themselves from Vietnamese forces.

In 1973, America began a bombing campaign in the Cambodian countryside in a desperate attempt to defeat the North Vietnamese forces hiding in Cambodia (Tully 2005). Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia in 1973 after the United States withdrew from Vietnam, but a civil war between the military of Khmer Republic under Lon Nol and the Khmer Rouge had been long underway. After Vietnamese forces left Cambodia, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), an organization composed of several different communist groups, began implementing collectivization in the rural areas under their control (Tully 2005). By the start of 1975, CPK forces had surrounded Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, preventing the delivery of essential shipments of food and weaponry from reaching the city. In March of 1975, Prime Minister Lon Nol fled Cambodia, leaving the state without leadership and without much hope of being able to prevent communist forces from taking the city.

On April 17, 1975, shortly after Lon Nol's flight from Cambodia, the Communist Party of Kampuchea's revolutionaries seized control of Phnom Penh, taking control of the state and renaming Cambodia, Democratic Kampuchea (DK) (Tully 2005). Within a week of taking power, the new government evacuated the city and relocated two million Cambodians to rural outposts already controlled and occupied by communist officials (Chandler 1999, 2008; Etcheson 2005; Kiernan 1985, 1989, 2008; Power 2002; Weitz 2003). From April 17, 1975, to January 7, 1979, the Communist Party of Kampuchea controlled every aspect of civilian life and engaged in activities that resulted in an estimated

1.6-2.2 million excess deaths, that is deaths beyond what is naturally expected (Tabeau and Kheam 2009). Throughout the Democratic Kampuchea era, individual Khmer were reclassified into distinct groups with the goal of aimed at creating a classless society (See Table 3).

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Membership</b>
Cadre	Any member of society who had a clean, agrarian based biography and who had served with the Communist Party of Kampuchea prior to 1975
Base People	Peasantry from rural Cambodia who worked as farmers and had little to no education or political involvement
New People	Any citizen from an urban center, ethnic minorities, monks, and rural Khmer who received education or held positions of power within the community prior to 1975

*Table 3. Classification in Democratic Kampuchea (Kiernan 2008)*

### *Classes in Cambodia*

The creation of state sponsored classifications for the Khmer people was an essential aspect of the development mass atrocity. Distinct interpretations about the existence and intensity of class tensions in Cambodia prior to 1975 existed within the minds of Cambodians. In reality, little variation in the treatment of rural peasantry had occurred throughout French colonization and Sihanouk's rule. These individuals had a consistent quality of life, but were never able to achieve greater economic stability.

In a 1977 speech, the CPK's top leader, Pol Pot, articulated the regime's ahistorical version of Khmer class development (Pol Pot 1977). In the CPK account, the Khmer peasantry had been involved in class warfare since the end of the primitive communist era over two-thousand years prior (Pol Pot 1977). Pol Pot's protracted speech was distributed in written form for posterity.

An examination of Kampuchean society of that time revealed that the peasants were 85% of the country's entire population. Therefore, the peasants were the overwhelming majority of the population. They were exploited by all classes. They were exploited by the capitalists and the landlords. However, it was from the landlords that the peasants suffered the worst, most varied and most direct exploitation (Pol Pot 1977, p.28).

In this version of history, the exploitation of the majority of the rural Khmer was predominantly the fault of fifteen percent of the population who took advantage of the peasants, and it was the goal of the CPK to liberate the remaining 85 percent from such oppression (Pol Pot 1977, 32).

The CPK's goals did more than address what they perceived as domestic class contradictions. They also argued that there were contradictions present within imperialism and colonialism. The argument made by Pol Pot was that despite the end of the French protectorate in 1954, Cambodia remained a "satellite of imperialism" (Pol Pot 1977, p.24) because of their dependence on other states.

Neither the economy nor the culture was independent. Nor was Kampuchea independent politically. Some sectors were independent, but others were not. It was the same for our social life. Not being independent means being dependent on foreign countries, dependent on foreign imperialism in general, headed by U.S. imperialism. Kampuchea was not at all independent in military affairs. The Khmer-U.S. military agreements of May 16, 1955, were proof of this (Pol Pot 1977, p.24).

At the CPK's First Party Congress in 1960, the revised history was used to develop the ideological foundations for the development of the CPK's revolutionary goals (Pol Pot 1977, p. 23). To achieve these goals, the CPK began to mobilize the bottom tiers of the peasant class using a combination of violence and propaganda (Pol Pot 1977). The Khmer Rouge divided the existing classes into smaller classes, peasants were divided into rich, middle, and poor peasants, and within the middle and poor peasant classes there were three levels, including upper, middle, and lower levels (Jackson 1989, p. 113-114). All three

classes of poor peasants were said to make up 70 percent of the population of Cambodia and were to be given a majority of the leadership roles under CPK controlled government (Jackson 1989).

The DK version of history likely overestimates the number of peasants who were exploited by landlords during the post-protectorate, pre-DK era (1953-1975) (Vickery 1986; Ebihara 1990; Kiernan and Boua 1982; Hinton 2005; Willmott 1981). In the 1950s, Jean Delvert estimated that 92 percent of peasantry were property owners, albeit the national average of property owned was a relatively small parcel of two to two and one-fifth hectares, which was less than the two to three hectares required for an average family of five to survive (Hinton 2005; Kiernan and Boua 1982). Others contend that Pol Pot overestimated the presence of usury in Cambodia, arguing that although it did exist its presence was over stated by the “research” relied upon by Pol Pot for his 1977 speech (Kiernan and Boua 1982). More along the lines of Pol Pot’s assertions, some have pointed out that impoverished families, although capable of paying off most debt within a year, were trapped in a reoccurring seasonal indebtedness, which left them dependent on yearly loans and unable to move toward economic independence (Kiernan and Boua 1982, Ebihara 1971).

In general, there is little evidence to suggest that class stratification was a predominant cause of tension prior to the formation of Democratic Kampuchea (Kiernan and Boua 1982, Ebihara 1971; Hinton 2005). For instance, in a study from 1959 to 1960, May Ebihara found “no enduring, well-defined groups beyond family or household that differentiate individuals; and the status differences within the community are not extreme” (Ebihara 1971, p. 187). Hinton agrees, stating that “class stratification was a problem in

some areas, but in general it was not severe when compared with the situation in China and Vietnam” (Hinton 2005, p. 57) and “economic conditions alone were not severe enough to generate wide spread support for the [communist] movement” (Hinton 2005, p.58). Rather, he argues that people altered their behavioral norms in a way that conformed to the new regime as a result of political training and indoctrination. Ultimately, he argues that the development of violent groups can be seen as a natural result of conformity, which allow ordinary people to participate in atrocity (Hinton 2005).

Although the CPK did not overthrow the Khmer Republic until 1975, the ideology that would disseminate as a script under the Democratic Kampuchea government was the result of years of ideological development under the tutelage of French, Chinese and Vietnamese communists (Tyner 2017). Intellectual leaders of the CPK developed strategies to create a communist society driven by four major goals: ending class-driven society, organizing the Khmer population into collectives, increasing labor production, and reeducating individuals who lacked class conscious (Weitz 2003, p. 150). Weaved into the CPK script, these goals would contribute to violence against the Khmer people, and would alter group cohesion among the civilian populations.

### *Establishing Class Tensions*

There is little evidence to suggest that significant class stratification or hostility between urban and rural Cambodian populations existed prior to the Khmer Rouge siege, but other societal structures existed for the CPK to manipulate and unify the peasantry against both internal and external political outsiders. Organized community was limited, if it was present at all in rural Cambodia; no organizations existed for the exchange of



commodities or ideas and neighbors shared little in common other than proximity (Kiernan and Boua 1982). This was a problem because it limited the political power of the peasants and limited their options for effecting change. To build communities, the CPK used propaganda and reeducation to emphasize and implement collectivization while stressing the importance of agrarian development as a way of reestablishing economic equality and ending class-based oppression. Increased production, agricultural development, and violence incentivized rural populations to accept the CPK's ideological goals.

#### *Governmental Structure during Democratic Kampuchea*

The structural organization of Democratic Kampuchea facilitated various interpretations of the ideological script created by the Standing Committee, the topmost leadership. Hierarchical in nature, middle and low-level leaders were prevented from communicating with each other and this resulted in variations in script interpretation between zones. The governmental structure only allowed information to flow up and down between levels of leadership within a single zone but communication between zone leaders was limited (See Figure 2 for hierarchy). A decentralized (decentralized in regard to direct policy implementation) Standing Committee dealt with the distribution of ideological script and oversaw zonal leaders. All information traveled to the topmost leadership before being redirected to other zones or to lower level leaders. Intended for better control of the zones, this allowed the Standing Committee to better oversee zonal activities. Understanding the role of ideology requires understanding the structure of the CPK government.

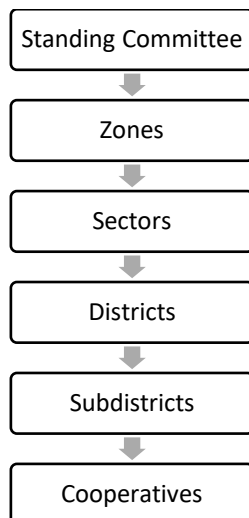


Figure 2. Organization of Democratic Kampuchea (adapted from Etcheson 2007)

The topmost leaders were members of the Standing Committee which, in practice, was an executive committee of the Central Committee of the CPK. The Standing Committee, also referred to as the State Presidium or *Ângkar*, was comprised of the top leadership (CPK 1975 “CPK Statute”; Etcheson 2007). Below this level of leadership were Zonal Committees, which were comprised of three members: a secretary, a deputy secretary, and a member. Although the Standing Committee appointed the Zone Secretary, the secretary appointed (dependent upon approval from the Standing Committee) the deputy secretary and the member. Initially, six zones existed alongside special municipal regions, which were considered autonomous; however, after the first internal purge in 1976 a seventh zone was created from autonomous sectors, which had previously been under the leadership of individuals killed in the purge (Etcheson 2007; Jackson 1989). The zones are commonly labeled by their geographic locations.

Directly under the Zonal Committees were the Sectoral Committees. These also consisted of three members. The number of sectors in each zone varied; for example, there were seven sectors in the Northwest Zone but only five sectors in the East Zone. Sectors

were divided into districts, each with its own three-person committee. Below district level were subdistricts and collectives. At these lowest levels, committees were not limited to three people. They varied in size from one location to the next (CPK Statute). Each level within the hierarchy communicated with the level immediately above it; information rarely traveled horizontally (Etcheson 2007, Jackson 1989). Even zone secretaries, the leaders of each zone, communicated with one another via the Standing Committee, which controlled all channels of communication within the state. This structure allowed *Ângkar* to monitor communication as a means of preventing “traitorous” activities (Etcheson 2007). Information was relayed down the vertical hierarchy from one committee to the next and, although communication was controlled, the instructions sent by the Standing Committee were broad and allowed for leeway in their interpretation at each level of governance.

### **The Creation of an Ideological Script**

The ideology of the CPK was passed down through the levels of hierarchy via the four-year plan, party magazines, and through national, zonal, and sectoral meetings. The ideology was used by leadership to create policies, which were implemented at the zonal, sectoral, and local levels by cadre. The ideological script served as a constraint to the decisions that could be made by leadership below the Standing Committee. The script created guidelines for the running of the nation and specifically addressed various aspects of state building. Leadership, the building of communes, social ties, the treatment of new people, propaganda and reeducation, and the methods of violence used are all important considerations for understanding regional variations in violence.

### *Leadership*

The upper-level cadre and the Standing Committee developed the Party's Four-Year Plan during meetings between July 21 and August 2 of 1976 (Chandler et al. 1988). This document set out the economic and social goals of the CPK. The Committee was determined to speed up economic development and help the regime rapidly industrialize and collectivize (Tyner 2017). The document was predominantly concerned with agriculture and gave high priority to rice cultivation and irrigation (Chandler et al. 1988). Three zones, the Northwest, Southwest, and East, were to account for approximately seventy percent of the national rice production (Chandler et al. 1988). The plan also specified food rations for the population. The allocation of food was divided into four categories depending on group "membership" and intensity of labor; the amount of rice allocated per person per day was between 1.5 cans and 3 cans, each of which contained approximately 200g of rice (Chandler et al. 1988). Plans for the industrialization of Cambodia and for social and cultural development were also included in this document.

The goals for agricultural and industrial production were so lofty that achieving them was improbable given the materials and resources in Cambodia (Chandler et al., 1988) Despite unrealistic goals for development (Hinton 2005; Chandler 2008; Kiernan 2008), the CPK put the Four-Year Plan into effect without regard to the human costs of the production targets. Despite implementing an intolerable work schedule (Chandler et al. 1988), the production of rice improved only slightly (Chandler et al. 1988). Rather than expropriating excess food for international sale based on actual production, the *Ângkar* sequestered the amount of rice as determined by their Four-Year Plan, this resulted in food shortages across zones and led to mass starvation (Chandler et al. 1988). The CPK also

aimed to solve the “water problem,” by which they meant a lack of control over the flow and movement of water for agricultural production. According to the Party’s plan, “In order to gain mastery over water there must be a network of dikes and canals as the basis. There must also be canals, reservoirs and irrigation pumps” (Chandler et al. 1988, p. 89).

Each level of leadership from the Zonal Committee down, was responsible for some aspect of policy creation or implementation. The level of agency and ability to make decisions decreased as the individual’s position on the leadership ladder decreased. The wide scope of zonal leadership to interpret Standing Committee instructions and decrees, allowed for significant variation in implementation across zones. Zonal Committees as per the CPK statute were tasked with implementing tasks in the sectors, districts, and branches (communes and collectives) under their control. This meant ensuring the ideological purity of cadres (all individuals deemed candidates by the party based on a clean biography), directing construction and agricultural productions, managing security protocol for internal and external threats, and reporting important information to the Standing Committee. As such, the main job of the zone leaders was primarily task delegation and cadre organization. Leadership also regularly reviewed the biographies of cadre to identify and eliminate individuals with flawed biographies. Biographies were deemed flawed if the individual had a background that was not agrarian. A flawed background resulted in reeducation or execution.

### *The Creation of Communes*

Essentially, the purpose of collectivization was to control all aspects of Khmer life through indoctrination and punishment (Kiernan 2008; Pina e Cunha et al. 2010).

Beginning in 1973, the Khmer Rouge began to collectivize agriculture in liberated zones in order to eliminate individuality and free thought among the people and to free society from capitalism and class-consciousness (Kiernan et al., 1998). While living in collectives, individuals were forced to work an exorbitant number of hours, eat as a group, wear identical clothing, and read only materials provided by the Party. Any sign of individuality was a sign of distance from the collective consciousness, a punishable offense (Chandler 1991, Kiernan 2004, Hinton 2005). Fears of punishments, such as decreased food rations, reeducation, and death provided strong incentives for compliance and forced the masses to comply.

Collectives were meant to serve the purpose of deconstructing class-based society by attempting to eliminate social and cultural norms within the population. Religion, family, and village life were at the center of Cambodians' lives prior to collectivization, but this changed under CPK rule (Kiernan 2008, Hinton 2005). Buddhism, previously the official religion of Cambodia, was designated as a reactionary religion and deemed detrimental by the DK (Power 2002). Temples were pillaged and destroyed, monks were forcibly disrobed and were killed if they refused, and the people were banned from entering the temples that remained and from praying (Kiernan 2004).

The concept of family under the CPK was deemed collective as well and this was used as a justification for separating children from parents (Power 2002). Children were taken from their parents and moved to different collectives for reeducation and indoctrination. Children, who were believed to be blank slates, were reeducated and integrated into the party structure. Survivor Teeda Butt Mam, age fifteen in 1975, recalls that "they took young children from their homes to live in communes so they could

indoctrinate them” (Pran and Depaul 1997, p.12). Youkimny Chan, who lost his entire family during the era remembers being placed in a youth labor camp. He states that “they [the cadres] said Pol Pot was our new family. If any of us found that our parents were not obeying the Communists, we should turn them in” (p. 24). An article in a 1974 issue of the CPK magazine *Youth* presents an argument that prior to the revolution family building was primarily a function of economics, a means of obtaining money, or maintaining economic status through marriage. However, under the CPK family building served the purpose of “liberating the nation, the people, and the poor class” (CPK 1975 “Global Vision”). The same article emphasized liberation from capitalism and capitalists throughout society.

#### *Social Ties and the Treatment of “New People”*

Through the creation of classes (in their theoretically classless society), the Khmer Rouge developed a script, which incited fear and encouraged violence during their reign. The use of state sponsored identification, collectivization, manual labor, and reeducation/indoctrination all contributed to the development of mass atrocity. At the zone level, the interpretation and policy creation based on ideology resulted in distinct brands of violence driven by social ties and the hierarchal communication structures implemented by the Khmer Rouge.

In mass atrocity, roles serve the purpose of identifying which script an individual should follow, and these scripts dictate his or her actions in the company of others. By playing a role, the identity of one individual would fuse with the next and create “islands of solidarity in a sea of anomie and if that solidarity is founded on violence to outsiders to the group, then it serves to affirm group solidarity” (Pina e Cunha et al. 2010, p. 302).

Group cohesion based on identity would therefore be maintained by individual adherence to the shared social norms, ideology, and behavior of the group. The amount of individual agency allowed within the group would likely dictate the intensity of the participant's violent acts (Pina e Cunha et al. 2010; Fujii 2009; McDoom 2013). Choices are limited by context and within Cambodia one option could mean survival while another option could mean death.

Collaborators and joiners served as enforcers of policy at the local levels. The distinction between collaborator and joiner is significant. The collaborator participates in the violence in pursuit of their own agenda, while the joiner is an ordinary citizen who is pulled into a group that is bound together by violence. Group coherence is solidified through shared violent acts and groups provide protection for individuals willing to participate in joint activities. Joiners in Cambodia were predominantly youth from agrarian communities. Most of these individuals had little to no education prior to indoctrination in the regime.

Pol Pot and his highly educated followers in the Communist Party of Kampuchea relied on the youngest and least literate elements of Khmer Society to impose their programs and policies. Furthermore, these young cadres, as a result of strict indoctrination and discipline and a minimum stake in the existing society, were willing to use terror, violence and execution to enforce their will and carry out the orders given [to] them by their superiors (Jackson 1989, p.267).

Because the joiners were predominantly old people, rather than new people, many participated in violence within their own communities.

Joiners in Cambodia typically had both ingroup-focused and/or outgroup-focused motivations rather than self-focused motivations like those of collaborators. Ingroup-motivations are those that are the result of social dynamics within a group, such as



conforming to group behavior or taking orders from an authority figure (Williams and Nielsen 2016, p.3). Outgroup-motivations are those that are motivated by emotions regarding the victims of the violence, such as, fear, hatred, resentment, and disgust (Williams and Nielsen 2016, p.3). In contrast, collaborators are predominantly those who, although falling under the same state sponsored identity as joiners, have self-focused motivations. They may have been motivated to participate to seek out revenge, gain material possessions, or gain more power (Williams and Nielsen 2016, p.3). Joiners who represent the ordinary citizen are individuals who participate in violence in order to maintain their identity under new social norms. Creating and maintaining group norms was a way to deal with and protect oneself within chaos, which reinforced the actor's role. Alexander Hinton argues that performed group violence bonds groups of perpetrators and reinforces group dynamics that allow for killing and excess violence:

Each of these men was asserting through their actions an identity that was evaluated by their peers. By 'cutting off their hearts' and killing 'enemies,' these men were making a claim that they were 'truly loyal' to *Ângkar* and had a progressive political consciousness. When this 'line' was affirmed, a perpetrator gained face and might even rise in rank. Had they failed to carry out their 'duty,' the perpetrators would have been shamed and perhaps even killed—for it would indicate that they, like the enemy, had a regressive consciousness. Moreover, by killing and then consuming the liver of victims, the perpetrators affirmed their bond for one another and their membership in a larger social collective that was distinct from the impure and evil 'other' (Hinton 2005, p. 316).

Through acts of violence, group cohesion is increased and violence in the name of ideology is reinforced, regardless of whether the individual accepts the ideology.

As a base person, local ties could make the difference between life or death. For example, those with ties to local leadership were likely to get easier work assignments and larger rations of food. Conversely, social ties among new people were limited as many had

been pushed out of cities and separated from family, friends, and neighbors. Their status as new people, also limited their ability to develop new relationships and ties with others in the communes. Even for those who were not ostracized from their community, trust was something that was rarely given in the DK era. In areas that had long been under the control of the CPK before the establishment of Democratic Kampuchea, local peasants knew that association with unknown entities could be deadly (Kiernan 2008). An article in *Revolutionary Flag*, the party magazine, identifies traitors as individuals who collude with enemies and individuals under the influence of the bourgeoisie; moreover, it warns cadre to be vigilant and work hard to identify these traitors (CPK 1978 “Revolutionary Flag”).

Teeda Butt Mam, a survivor of the regime, recalled that as a new person, the DK “separated us from our friends and neighbors to keep us off balance, to prevent us from forming any alliance to stand up and win back our rights” (Mam 1997, p. 11), and “they kept moving us around, from the fields into the woods. They purposely did this to disorient us so they could have complete control” (Mam 1997, p. 14). New people were never given the comfort of consistency while under the regime’s control; they were constantly relocated, and it was rare that even their basic needs were met. The stress of being constantly upended was coupled with a fear of being taken for “reeducation” and for this reason many new people attempted to hide their identity and education.

Further, new people would routinely hide their education, intelligence and background when it became widely known that those with educations were being taken away for refashioning (hard labor) and reeducation (execution) (Tyner 2012). An estimated 75 to 90 percent of all teachers at all levels were executed during the DK era, and some estimates indicate that fewer than fifty previously practicing medical doctors were still

alive after the Vietnamese intervened in Cambodia in 1979 (Tyner 2012, p.132-135). Even those who managed to survive the initial purges of new people in 1975, were rarely able to continue hiding their education and identity. Many individuals were outed by former friends, neighbors, and even their own children. Those with questionable biographies (mostly new people) were hesitant to trust anyone with their true identity and lived in constant fear that someone would recognize them from their past life and report them.

Hinton (2005) details an account from a new person by the name of Neri, who recalls that her father was a teacher in the village in which they lived. At first Neri's family had a familial connection with a Khmer Rouge cadre, but the connection was executed and that left her family without the security provided by an internal connection (Hinton 2005). When her father became sick, he went to the hospital, and it was at this time that he and other "enemies" were taken to be executed (Hinton 2005). She recalls that "one of the executioners, Hean, was a disgruntled former student of Tak's [her father] ... my father was a very strict teacher and would frequently hit his students in order to make them want to learn. Hean was a particularly lazy and disobedient student and was beaten often ... so he killed my father" (Hinton 2005, p. 88). Had Neri and her family been pushed into another region, they may have been able to hide their identities; however, because her father had been a teacher, both her parents and seven of her eight siblings were executed. In Cambodia, the phrase 'pnchanh phchal,' translates to 'completely destroy' and epitomizes the method used by the DK to eliminate "enemies" during the DK era (Hinton 1998).

In some areas intellectuals were protected by local leadership, a doctor under the regime "reported that his identity as a physician was known and that the cooperative chief

had protected intellectuals by registering them as workers” (Vickery 1999, p. 127). Although some groups of people were able to avoid violence by accidentally stumbling upon a rescuer, most new people lived in fear. In the recent tribunals, one former cadre testified that “some people had to conceal their identity [sic] because they were afraid that they would be classified into upper classes. They said they belong to poor peasants, they were not educated, so on and so forth. And it is true that people had to do so” (Transcript 23 April 2013). These new people would, therefore, be further isolated from making connections for fear of revealing their true identities.

Higher level leaders offered even greater protection than local leadership. In some cases, ties to the zone leader resulted in the protection of an individual (much the same way that ties to enemies could result in execution) from punishments sent down from the Standing Committee. Connections to administrative workers in the Special Zone in Phnom Penh also improved the chances of survival. Iep Keav recalls being sent to work at a children’s unit, a less labor intensive job with access to adequate food in Phnom Penh because of a familial connection to the Chief of the Ministry of Culture (Keav 2004). Similarly, Sau Hau was saved from the East Zone purges because of her previous interactions with a central government chairman, Minh, Ieng Thirith’s (the minister of foreign affairs) daughter. Minh was able to secure a reassignment for Sau Hau, despite her East Zone status, which allowed Sau Hau to live in relative comfort compared to her fellow East Zone “traitors” who were sent to hard labor camps throughout Cambodia (Sau Hau 2003). After the leadership purges in 1978 most leaders had been eliminated, which made local ties nonexistent as the open positions were often filled with cadre from other zones.

Party members held significant sway in determining the fate of the base people, but such connections, could also pose great risk if the person providing protection was deemed an enemy of the state. This can be seen from the mass party purges in both the Northwest and the East Zone, during which Pol Pot and the Standing Committee authorized the killing of anyone with ties to the leadership in either zone. This meant that anyone living within the zone or any cadre with friends, associates, or family in the zone was at risk for elimination (Heder and Tittmore 2001). Although the purges began as a way to eliminate “bad elements” (CPK 1978 “Revolutionary Flag”) in the party, meaning those with unacceptable class backgrounds or those who lacked ideological spirit, they ultimately led to a system that implicated individuals based on their social ties within the regime.

The development of personal biographies was essential to the process of classifying individuals. Potential party members and new people were required to write biographies, which included information about their lives before and during the revolution (Vickery 1999). Leaders within the zones then used these biographical assessments to divide and designate the population into groups (Vickery 1999). This process resulted in assignment to one of three groups, base person, candidate, and new person (Etcheson 2005, p.93). Candidates were individuals who had the potential to become a base person, but did not yet have membership in that group. New people were guilty of being traitors or enemies unless proven otherwise and although some were spared execution, they typically received worse treatment, less food, harder and more demanding labor assignments (Etcheson 2005; Weitz 2003; Kiernan 2008).

### *Reeducation and Propaganda*

The use of propaganda and the construction of a revised history were major components in the script building process of the *Ângkar* (elites). As previously stated, the rewriting of society as politically tense was the first step in creating unrest among the Khmer people. It was necessary for the regime to present a “scene of apocalyptic proportion” (Fujii 2009, p. 12) to create a new perception of reality for the masses. This included an emphasis on class stratification, oppression because of class stratification, and the culpability of foreign involvement and elite involvement in mass atrocity regardless of the truth. What the CPK created was a reality in which “Cambodia has been plunged into a most cruel war which brings untold suffering to the women and people of the country” (CPK 1973). Using radio, film, art, and newspapers, the CPK disseminated their message to the population. The preexisting institutional norms and networks from the capital throughout Cambodia made it possible to have a constant flow of propaganda to cadre.

Propaganda played a crucial role in construction of enemies of the state. In one issue of the *Revolutionary Youth* newsletter, two revolutionary duties are given to Khmer youth: to build the country and defend the country (CPK 1975 “Revolutionary Youth”).

It is imperative to constantly fight to build, indoctrinate, strengthen, and expand the Party's proletarian stance to reach one's self [sic], to reach the ranks of our revolutionary youth, not making allowances for ourselves, not relaxing and keeping the door open for other non-working class stances to enter and co-mingle along with the Party's proletarian stance (CPK 1975 “Revolutionary Youth”), p. 12).

Individuals were to maintain a strict ideological stance by fully accepting the regime's ideology without question. There was to be no open criticism of the regime and anyone failing to uphold the party ideology would be aggressively targeted for reeducation or execution. Another excerpt of the same newsletter warns that feudalism and capitalism

individuals exist within Cambodia, despite the overthrow of their economic foundations and political regime (CPK 1974 “Revolutionary Youth”). This message is more than a simple warning about individuals, stating that relaxing the rules or standards could result in the overthrow of *Ângkar* (the party elite). The loss of *Ângkar* would mean continued economic inequality among the masses and ultimately the victory of enemy forces wishing to take advantage of peasant populations (CPK 1974 “Revolutionary Youth”).

The threat presented by out-groups is a reoccurring theme in CPK literature produced by the *Ângkar*. The narrative of the DK relies on the existence of threats that, if left unresolved, would lead to the destruction of the Khmer people. The party meant that the elimination of all enemies was the only way to secure victory for Kampuchea and avoid a tragic loss of power. In various news bulletins, the *Ângkar* routinely identified the United States and Vietnam as dangerous perpetrators of imperialism that must be destroyed. In one newsletter from 1978 the text warns that the “Vietnamese enemies are the most savage and barbarous aggressors, annexationists, swallows of territories, eliminators of the Kampuchea’s nation” and “the Kampuchea’s people will surely annihilate the Vietnamese enemy” (CPK 1978 “DK News”, p. 1). Although highly xenophobic, the regime did not seek to eliminate minorities for their ethnicity; rather, they purportedly targeted them because of their association with Vietnam and their outgroup status (Raszelenberg 1999).

After “having literally erased all remnants of the previous society, the Khmer Rouge Leadership attempted to construct a new political subject to inhabit their imagined utopia” (Tyner 2009, p. 9). They achieved this through reeducation and indoctrination practices that were integrated into Khmer life at all levels of society, from *Ângkar* to the civilian population. These practices, derived from foreign communist ideology, were

refined to exploit existing Cambodian cultural norms and institutions (Hinton 2005). The CPK used systematic thought reform methods such as lifestyle meetings, political study sessions, and propaganda as tools for indoctrination (Path and Kanavou, 2015). These practices conditioned obedience among the cadre and the Khmer youth, and dissuaded individuals who would otherwise be unwilling to surrender to these processes from being noncompliant (Path and Kanavou, 2015).

The goal of “lifestyle meetings” was “to build the Party internally in eradicating and altering faults and various confusions inside the Party and to push to expand the good qualities of the Party to prosper, quickly, non-stop” (CPK 1975 “The CPK Statute”). Obsessed with eliminating all enemies, the CPK wanted to enact programs that would ensure party members stuck to the party line (Williams and Neilsen 2016). The main activity in these meetings were self-criticism and criticism practice:

The so-called criticism or self-criticism was conducted in each branch. They convened this sort of meeting in order to give members the opportunity to self-review themselves [sic]; what they had done and what they need to improve. So those who were listening in the sessions would give constructive comments and by taking those constructive comments, we could do everything to improve ourselves and, as to how much they could do with all the comments made by their fellow members, then it was up to individual members (Transcript Trial Day 64).

Deviation from the party line was criticized, and sometimes resulted in disciplinary action to deter activities not focused on progress (Chandler et al., 1988 p.207-8). Discipline took place at “security centers” (prisons) throughout the state. The severity of punishment increased depending on the center’s designation as a commune, district, sector, or zone level prison. Punishment ranged from extra study sessions to torture followed by execution, and although reintegration was possible, the likelihood of it occurring varied from one prison to the next depending on the policy implementation and enforcement by local



leadership. Prisoner reintegration decreased every year the regime was in power (Path and Kanavou, 2015).

Political study sessions were used to propagandize cadre and civilian leadership to reinforce the ideology of the regime. In a 1978 statement to the Communist Workers' Party of Denmark, the Deputy Secretary of the CPK, Nuon Chea, described political study sessions as "courses held about twice a year in which party members are introduced to revolutionary concepts and educated in our political, ideological and organizational lines" (Chea 1978, p. 26). Local study sessions for small groups were held several times a month and were a way to reinforce revolutionary rhetoric. These were thought, by the central government, to be effective tools for maintaining civilian and cadre loyalty. Most meetings used short books for educational purposes, as the party believed that these were more appropriate for the literacy level of peasants (Chea 1978). These books did not cover Marxist theory but focused instead on reconstructing society and eliminating internal enemies (Transcript 23 April 2013).

### *Methods of Violence*

Violence was ubiquitous throughout Cambodia while under the leadership of the CPK. Human life was disposable in the eyes of the Standing Committee. The individual's only worth was their ability to work and their ability to create a product for the central government. This concept was drilled into cadre and was used to justify the most heinous of crimes throughout the DK era. Death became the punishment of choice for any and all rule breakers regardless of the severity of their crime.

In March 1976, the Standing Committee granted leaders of the zones the right to execute members of the masses for crimes against the revolution (CPK 1976 “Decisions”, p. 1). What constituted such crimes was also at the discretion of the local leadership. However, authority to execute party members and members of the military remained a power of the Central Committee. Zone Committees were responsible for the implementation of zonal security and were responsible for evaluating cadre biographies. Cadre with questionable biographies were to be referred to the Standing Committee for evaluation rather than be punished at the zone level (Etcheson 2007). Scripts at the local level varied because of the responsibilities given to the zone, and differences could be seen down the hierarchal chain.

The decision to eliminate the masses could be made by committees at any level from commune up to the Standing Committee. Variance in punishment and cadre brutality was evident even at the district and collective levels. The reason for such variance can be accounted for by the vertical structure of communication and leadership within the CPK. Communication between cadre working in neighboring collectives was limited and interpretation of the Standing Committee’s orders was relayed through many levels before reaching the local cadre. Comparable to the childhood game of telephone, misinterpretation and intentional reinterpretations were made at each level (Etcheson 2007).

Although the *Ângkar* sought to maintain secrecy in regard to violence, the killing of base people was rarely done covertly and was often times conspicuous. Occasionally people were disappeared or sent for “reeducation,” but there was rarely any doubt about what had happened to them (Tyner 2012; Kiernan 2008; Chandler 2008). More often though people were loaded onto trucks or lined up to be taken away to prisons or directly

to the killing fields (Tyner 2017). The brutality of the regime was made clear in 1975 during the evacuation of Phnom Penh, during which approximately 10,600 people were killed or died as they were marched into the countryside during mass relocation (Kiernan 2008, p. 48). Interviews with survivors indicate that ex-soldiers and military officials, once associated with the Lon Nol regime, were the first to be targeted and executed, followed by government employees and intellectuals. If they survived the initial purges during the evacuation, individuals associated with the Lon Nol regime were killed when their history was uncovered. Death (from starvation and violence) was normalized throughout Cambodia and was used as a tool for keeping the population compliant (Hinton 2005).

Across Cambodia, there were particular aspects of violence that were similar between the zones. Killing was often done in a very intimate manner using weapons that required the killers to be in close proximity to their victims. For example, slitting the throats of victims, beating them to death with various objects, disemboweling them, and bayonetting them (Hinton 2005; Tyner 2009; Kiernan 2008; Jackson 1989; Vickery 1999). Not only was the killing personal, in this sense, it was often carried out in tandem with torture and extra-lethal violence, actions or violence that is beyond what is necessary to cause death (Fujii 2013). Execution practices were implemented in a distinct way as well. However, throughout most of Cambodia cadre enforced a “root and branch” method of purging (Hinton 1998). Used as a means of preventing retaliation and revenge, anyone who was considered an enemy would be executed along with their entire family (Etcheson 2005; Hinton 2005).

Ângkar’s desire to establish socialism in Cambodia by increasing productivity and exporting rice rendered the civilian population expendable in the eyes of the CPK. The

theme of human expendability is present throughout the regime's propaganda and is emphasized in the slogans and sayings used by the regime. A few examples from *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Sayings of Angkar* include: "no gain in keeping, no loss in weeding out" (p. 210), "better to kill an innocent by mistake than spare an enemy by mistake" (p. 209), and "hunger is the most effective disease" (p.284). The value of human life varied among zones and sectors and can be seen in the implementation of labor practices in each zone.

Death due to famine and illness was common under the CPK and, despite clear evidence of these problems, regime officials continued with their collective labor plans. Depending on the season, the civilian population was expected to work ten to fourteen hours a day, often without modern machinery or ample equipment. The justification for excessive manual labor was that hard work developed the collective consciousness, which subsequently strengthened and advanced the individual's collective spirit (Chandler et., al 1988). However, without an adequate food supply, the health and strength of the civilian population rapidly declined (Heuveline 2015). Starvation under the CPK accounted for approximately 1.5 million deaths (Heuveline 2015). Even in areas with larger rations, proper medical care was unavailable to the civilian populations (Tyner 2009). Moreover, since having an education was equivalent to a death sentence, most doctors either hid their background or had been summarily executed by the regime as class enemies (de Walque 2005).

Through the use of both direct and indirect violence, death became a normal part of life within CPK run Cambodia. People were tortured and died at prisons used to cleanse the population of internal enemies, they were indiscriminately slaughtered and thrown in

to mass graves, and those who were not victims of direct violence suffered because of the living conditions created by the regime. Malnutrition, overwork, and preventable illnesses resulted in mass death among the population.

## **The Zones**

### *The Northwest Zone*

Prior to the mass purges, Ros Nhim served as the Northwest Zone Secretary. Although he had a reputation for being ideologically moderate, his policy implementation did little to reduce the prevalence of violence and death (Kiernan 2008). There seems to be a general consensus among scholars who conducted interviews in refugee camps that conditions in the Northwest were some of the worst (Chandler 2008; Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008; Becker 1998; Jackson 1989). The 1975 forced migration of Phnom Penh refugees to the area increased the population by eight-hundred thousand, nearly doubling the population (Kiernan 2008). As a result of the arrival of the new people, food became scarcer. The food supply was further diminished by the Standing Committee's expropriation of rice and other crops (Kiernan 2008). The volatility of local level cadre also lowered the quality of life for people in the Northwest Zone (Vickery 1999; Becker 1998; Kiernan 2008). In fact, the number of deaths that occurred in the zone distressed the Standing Committee, which decided to attribute the massive death toll to "enemies" trying to sabotage the regime (Chandler 1999). Because of poor zonal leadership, cadre in lower-level leadership positions applied inconsistent policy implementation and enforcement within different sectors.

### *The East Zone*

East Zone Secretary Sao Phim believed the purpose of the revolution was to improve the lives of Khmer people, and under his leadership lower-level cadre were more lenient in the implementation and enforcement of party ideology (Vickery 1999). Comprised of cadre who maintained a “pure” communist identity, initial violence was directed only at individuals who were members of the old regime (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008). During the evacuation of Phnom Penh, fewer individuals were relocated to the East Zone, approximately 300,000 new people were relocated to the zone; additionally, approximately 100,000 were moved from the East Zone to the North Zone in 1975 (Kiernan 2008, p.205). Relocation was determined by the Standing Committee, who determined that the Northwest needed more laborers than the East. The implementation and enforcement of policies was considerably more consistent in this zone (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999; Etcheson 2005).

### **Comparative Analysis**

Violence was pervasive in Cambodia during the DK period; nevertheless, the conditions in the Northwest Zone prior to 1978, were far worse than in the East Zone during that same period. Variations in policies regarding food, labor, execution, and the treatment of new people contributed to the differences in violence and can be attributed to the decisions (albeit constrained) made by leaders in the zones, sectors, and districts. In other words, these decisions were the result of interpretation of script and resulted in different policy implementation. An analysis of these scripted differences is useful for explaining some variations in violence between the Northwest and East Zones.

The following analysis compares the two zones with regard to interpretations of ideological script and the implementation of policies based upon those interpretations. Of particular importance is the relationship that leaders had with the central government and the Standing Committee. This relationship helps explain the constraints on leaders' choices. A second issue is how the interpretation of script affected policy decisions regarding the distribution of food and labor among the masses. These policy differences help explain variations in the intensity of violence within the zones. The variations in the treatment of urban evacuees is another issue. Script interpretation and policy implementation resulted in variations in the treatment of urban evacuees in rural areas, this also contributed to the intensity of violence. Finally, the interpreted variations in the use of security centers, executions, and propaganda helps explain why the East Zone was less deadly than the Northwest Zone.

### *Leadership*

The relationship between zonal leader and the Standing Committee contributed to different intensities of violence. This can be illustrated by a comparison of the Secretaries of the Northwest and East Zones. The ideological alignment of Zone Secretaries affected their interpretation of script and the closer their ideology was to the center's, the fewer choices they had available for policy implementation. Pre-DK era party alignment also affected the Zone Secretaries' ability to make choices. Secretaries who represented a greater threat to the regime were often capable of deviating further from the script. Consistency in the implementation of interpreted policy was tied to the Zone Secretaries' involvement in cadre development.

In the Northwest and East Zones, the ideological similarities between the Standing Committee and the Zone Secretaries varied. Ros Nhim, Secretary of the Northwest Zone, was a member of the Central Committee and was obligated to follow party line in order to maintain his position (Kiernan 2008). Sao Phim, Secretary of the East Zone, was unofficially ousted as a member of the Standing Committee in 1974, but his “widespread popularity” (Kiernan 2008, p.206) kept him in a leadership position and allowed him to take a moderate line on the implementation of ideology.

The ideology of Ros Nhim in the Northwest aligned with the ideology of the Standing Committee, while the ideology of Sao Phim in the East differed significantly. Their respective ideologies affected both their relationships with *Ângkar* and the policies they enacted in their respective zones. This, in turn, affected the intensity of violence within the Northwest and East Zones. Cambodia’s relationship with Vietnam, the role the former prince would play after the revolution, and the purpose of the revolution differentiated the two factions (the East Zone Faction and the Communist Party of Kampuchea Faction) prior to forced unification under the CPK (Etcheson 1984). Ros Nhim and the Standing Committee were anti-Vietnamese and anti-monarchy, and both sought an agrarian revolution in Cambodia that would eliminate the vestiges of capitalism (Kiernan 2008; Etcheson 1984). Sao Phim, on the other hand, had been trained in Hanoi and maintained a friendly relationship with Vietnam. He supported the former prince (though not necessarily his return to power) and believed that the revolution’s main purpose was to improve the lives of the Khmer people (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999).



Further separating the two Zone Secretaries was the fact that the center's Standing Committee isolated the East's secretary, while embracing the Northwest's Secretary. East Zone Secretary Phim was ostracized from the Standing Committee because of his pre-war affiliations with the Issarak movement, a Vietnamese backed communist organization that occupied the eastern part of Cambodia prior to the CPK led coup. Rather than implement the most extreme policies advocated by the Standing Committee, Phim chose to implement policies in-line with his more moderate ideology, which he had inherited from his training with Vietnamese communists in Hanoi (Kiernan 2008). In fact, in 1973, United States intelligence identified the East Zone faction of the communist revolutionaries as the most ideologically motivated of the communist groups in Cambodia (CIA 1973). This faction posed the greatest threat to the Lon Nol regime that was in power at that time (CIA 1973). As a result, the Standing Committee viewed Sao Phim as a threat to their power (Kienan 2008).

The zonal leaders' involvement in cadre recruitment, development, and promotion varied between the zones and this led to different types of cadre. The cadre within each zone also had an effect on the intensity of violence as well, mainly based on their ties to the zonal leaders. The Northwest, under the control of Secretary Ros Nhim, was significantly larger than the East. Nhim was heavily involved in the activities in three of the seven sectors within the Northwest Zone (Chandler et al. 1988). However, sectoral secretaries in the four sectors where Nhim was not actively involved, were given more freedom for interpreting the information he passed down from the Standing Committee. The East, a comparatively small zone, was headed by Secretary Phim, who actively visited sectors and districts throughout out the zone to observe conditions and likely had more of

a hand in controlling the local implementation of policy within his zone (Y03078). With only five sectors in the East Zone, Phim had the ability to manage his cadre more closely than Nhim could in the Northwest Zone. Given his involvement in cadre development, Phim tended to promote cadre who were loyal to him and ideologically aligned with him (Y03078). The result was that Secretary Phim's more moderate policy and ideology were present in lower-level leadership within the East Zone.

### *Interpretations and the Creation of Communes*

The quality of life varied across zones and this can be attributed to the policy choices resulting from interpretation of script. Perhaps the most affected arenas in this regard were food and labor. The interpretation of script by zonal leaders can be seen in the implementation of communes. The speed and intensity at which communes were implemented varied between the two zones. Ideological proximity to the Standing Committee can account for these variations. Interpretation of the goals with regard to communal living resulted in differences in labor policies. The amount pressure felt by leadership to meet the arbitrary goals set out by the Standing Committee further differentiated the food distribution by lower level leadership. Finally, the freedom of the masses to forage and grow additional food was heavily dependent on the ideological leanings of Zone Secretaries and their policy implementations.

The engineering of communal living situations by zone leaders varied between the Northwest and East Zones. This contributed to significant variations in the quality of life experienced by the masses. Communes were implemented more aggressively in the Northwest than in the East (Kiernan 2008, Vickery 1999). In the Northwest, despite

popular support for the CPK in rural areas, cities were still under the control of the Lon Nol government until 1975 and collectivism had yet to be implemented in most areas of the Northwest (Kiernan 1983). After the takeover of Phnom Penh, it was still common for families in the Northwest to eat and live together. After 1975, however, the CPK forced people in the cities to move to rural areas where they were immediately required to live communally (Vickery 1983). In contrast, the leaders in the East, a communist stronghold prior to 1975, did not ever fully implement collectivism (Kiernan 1983). This can be attributed to the influence of a leadership that trained under the Vietnamese in the previous decade (Kiernan 2004, 2008; Etcheson 2005; Vickery 1999).

The zones also varied in terms of their labor policies and responsibilities. Collective labor was a part of life in every zone; however, the type of labor in each zone was dependent upon the zone's leadership. Bordering Thailand, the Northwest Zone contained Battambang and Pursat provinces, which prior to 1975 were the most productive agricultural areas in Cambodia (Chandler 2008). The Four-Year Plan established by the CPK in July and August of 1976 determined that the Northwest Zone would be responsible for harvesting 40 percent of the new national rice production target (Chandler et al. 1988). The target level of production exceeded the previous year's harvests across all of Cambodia (Kiernan and Boua 1982). To achieve this the average production would need to increase from one metric ton of paddy per hectare to three. Additionally, a portion of the land was to be harvested twice per year for a total of six metric tons of paddy per hectare in those areas (Chandler et al. 1988). By most standards, this was an unreasonable expectation in terms of production.

Not only was the Northwest Zone expected to produce an unreasonable amount of rice, the masses were also expected to build dams and irrigation canals. Irrigation projects were prioritized in the Northwest Zone because the regime dictated that these lowland areas needed dikes and canals most, as controlling the water in those areas would increase rice production (CPK n.d.). The largest of the irrigation projects was the Trapeang Thma Dam in Region Five of the Northwest Zone (Vickery 1999). Tens of thousands of people were forced to help in constructing the dam and, although a precise number of deaths is unknown, death was a common occurrence (“Trapeang Thma” 2014). A worker in the children’s unit at the dam recalls that “some of them [workers] collapsed there, and then they tried to resuscitate the worker but to no avail, and the person died on the spot. And some died from starvation, lack of food” (Transcript 29 September 2015 p. 77-8). Other workers recalled people dying from dysentery due to unsanitary conditions and a lack of medical treatment and medicine (Tyner 2016). Conditions varied from one work location to another along the dam, many workers recalled episodes of punishment and disappearance. In the children’s unit some workers were hung by their feet with ropes and dropped onto the ground or into water head first (Transcript 29 September 2015). Others recalled being whipped if they failed to wake up on time (Transcript 28 July 2015). Violence was pervasive at these work sites in the Northwest Zone.

In the East, large scale irrigation works were not the first priority of the zone leaders; instead, light industry and agricultural development took precedence (Kiernan 1983). The canal and dam projects in the East tended to be smaller in scale. Rubber manufacturing, a one-time staple of the Khmer economy, continued over the course of CPK rule (Jackson 1989). Rubber production was one of the priorities listed in the Party’s Four-

Year Plan and they believed that the exportation of rubber would help increase capital and boost economic growth (Tyner et al. 2014). Factories and plantations located in the East Zone of Cambodia also continued to be maintained (Jackson 1989). Prior to CPK rule, rubber plantations were run predominantly by ethnic Vietnamese. However, given the anti-Vietnamese sentiments in the CPK government, the Vietnamese were removed from or left these positions beginning in 1975 (Jackson 1989). Many ethnic Vietnamese fled to Vietnam and those who did not were often the victims of execution (Chandler 1999).

The zones also differed in terms of food. The consistency of adequate rations could make the difference between life and death, and the quantity of rations available was dependent on the responsibilities of the zone, the policies, the zone leadership, and the local cadre. The allocation of food to the masses was highly variable not just among zones, but also among sectors and districts within zones. This was true in the Northwest Zone (Vickery 1983). In the East Zone the allocation of food seemed to be more consistent throughout the zone at all levels (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008). Before the CPK took control of the government, the regions within the Northwest and East Zones accounted for a large percentage of Cambodia's rice production (Kiernan and Boua 1982). The Four-Year Plan stipulated that of the 5.5 million tons of rice to be produced in 1977, almost three million was to be grown in these two zones (Chandler et al. 1988, p. 54). The Four-Year Plan further allotted a percentage of the rice harvested for exportation to increase capital (Chandler et al. 1988). In the Northwest Zone, cadre failed to keep enough rice to provide adequate rations for the masses (Kiernan 2008). In the East, cadre were instructed by zonal leadership to maintain adequate stores of rice for the masses despite the Standing Committee's exportation plans (Kiernan 1983).

The amount of food and the distribution of labor was the result of zone and sector leaders' decisions on the best way to implement communal living regarding the implementation of the centers' policies on communal living. The implementation of policies regarding communal eating and the ability to forage for and grow additional food for consumption can be attributed to the policies implemented by the leaders of each of these zones. In the Northwest communal eating was implemented earlier than in the East (Vickery 1983). This may have been an attempt to better control rations among the people given the lack of food in some of the sectors within the zone (Tyner 2017). In the East, communal eating had yet to be implemented in most areas even as late as 1977 and given the greater availability of food in this zone the leadership may not have seen strict rationing as necessary. The conditions in the Northwest were highly variable from one location to the next, but foraging for food was often considered stealing and was punishable by death (Uehara et al. 2001). Such actions were considered anti-revolutionary (Williams and Neilsen 2016). However, many areas in the East allowed the masses to forage for food and grow small supplemental gardens (Kiernan 1983; Vickery 1999). Starvation and illnesses related to starvation were less frequent in the East Zone than in the Northwest Zone (Vickery 1983).

In locations where leaders kept adequate food stores for the masses rather than give it to the CPK government for exportation, people were less likely to suffer from malnutrition related illnesses and death. Further, areas that allowed individuals to grow private gardens and forage for food were also less likely to experience as many deaths due to starvation as zones that banned these activities. The East Zone was more flexible with these rules and would have been able to prevent starvation. Another aspect which resulted

in the death of the masses, was the distribution of labor and the expectations for labor. In the Northwest, people were expected to do heavy labor with inadequate food rations and worked longer hours in order to meet arbitrary goals created by the zone and sectoral leaders. Ultimately the decisions made by leadership in regard to food and labor practices could account for some of the variation in excess death under the CPK.

*Social Ties and the Treatment of “New People”*

The proportion of new people in each zone may also provide a partial explanation for variations in violence between the Northwest and East Zones. Demographic differences in the zones may have contributed to the greater violence experienced by new people in the Northwest than by new people in the East. Within days of taking control of the central government, the CPK evacuated cities and relocated residents to rural areas. The 1975 forced migration of Phnom Penh refugees from Phnom Penh to the Northwest Zone increased the population by 600,000 to 800,000 people, nearly doubling the number of people living in the zone (Kiernan 2008). Fewer individuals were relocated to the East Zone. Approximately 300,000 new people were relocated to the zone; additionally, approximately 100,000 were moved away from the East Zone to the North Zone in late 1975 (Kiernan 2008, p.205), leading to a net increase of 200,000 people. In the Northwest, new people matched or outnumbered the existing population. In the East, new people accounted for approximately thirty percent of the population (Kiernan 1983).

New people were victims of unequal treatment throughout Democratic Kampuchea and were more likely to receive smaller portions of food, harder labor assignments, and less leniency than base people. Scholars have established that new people in the East were

treated less harshly than new people in the Northwest (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999; Etcheson 2005). The reasons for this variation in violence have been attributed to several factors, including, less disciplined cadre in the Northwest (Kiernan 2008), better organization and leadership in the East (Vickery 1999), and ideological differences held by leaders of sectors within each of the zones (Kiernan 1983; Vickery 1983).

In the Northwest, new people arrived in greater numbers; some were dropped into undeveloped locations and forced to build communities (Vickery 1983). This included moving land (soil, vegetation, trees), building shelters, and preparing and cultivating previously unused fields (Vickery 1983). These groups had yet to cultivate rice fields and were therefore reliant on the zone to provide them with rations. In these areas, the incidence of death from starvation and disease was much higher than in areas that were previously developed (Vickery 1983). In part, new people were placed in these rural areas because the Northwest lacked the infrastructure to accommodate them. The Northwest leadership took the least desirable people and put them in the worst environments, because their worth was directly tied to their ability to work and based on their urban background they were seen as less capable of hard labor. Since these individuals lacked adequate housing, a high incidence of malaria also resulted in a higher death toll among new people (Vickery 1983).

In general, migrants were seen as irredeemable by *Ângkar*. In other words, they could not be transformed or reeducated into peasants or workers (Tyner 2009). As a result, the migrants were treated as a disposable workforce for achieving the unrealistic goals set by the CPK (Chandler 2008). This was especially true in the Northwest Zone. To increase production, a second migration of new people was planned. In 1976, approximately one-million individuals were transplanted into the Northwest Zone from the Central and



Southwest Zones (Kiernan 2008). With the arrival of the new people, food became scarcer. The food supply was further diminished by the Standing Committee's expropriation of rice and food crops to other zones (Kiernan 2008). A 1977 report from the Northwest Zone indicated "people at the support bases eat thin rice soup (gruel)" (CPK 1977, p. 4). Recalling his treatment as a new person, one individual recalls that "the cooperative chief said that we were the 17 April People [new people] because we were new at the place and 17 April People were allowed to have only gruel not rice. Rice was reserved for Base People" (Transcript 27 July 2015). Others who were interviewed noted differences in the quality of food given to people who were new compared to the more established cadre and base people (Kiernan et al., 1982, p. 342, 356). Food was so limited that even base people and cadre were caught stealing food, a crime that in the Northwest was punishable by death (CPK 1978 "To Angkar"; CPK 1975 "Note").

New people in the East were distributed more evenly among the existing population, meaning they were mixed into existing communities. Before this integration new people in the East often spent brief periods undergoing reeducation at security centers (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008). Within the zone there was a differentiation between new people and base people, however, the disparity between their treatment was less than what was seen in the Northwest Zone (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 2008; Etcheson 2005). This could be because the new people who arrived after major cities across Cambodia were evacuated were fewer in number than in the Northwest Zone (Etcheson 2005; Kiernan 1983). This meant the food stores were less strained by the increase in population and that cadre did not have to choose who deserved rations (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999). Both new and old people were allowed to forage and grow small gardens to supplement their rations with this

food. Further, some recall that new people were eased into work in these zones, and that food was sufficient, at least at first (Vickery 1999).

### *Reeducation and Propaganda*

The use of reeducation and propagandization differed between the two zones based on Zone Secretaries' interpretations of the Standing Committee's ideology. The meaning of the term "reeducation" and the use of security centers designated for reeducation was variable. The use of these centers ranged from reeducation through propagandization to execution and torture centers. Differences in interpretation also led to differences in the indoctrination techniques used to train cadre and organize the masses. Indoctrination techniques included communal eating, communal labor, educational meetings, exposure to party magazines, and often times the placement of children in "schools" designed solely to indoctrinate children. Finally, the biggest divide between zones was the use of the "root and branch" method of elimination.

The reeducation process was exceptionally different in the Northwest Zone than in the East Zone. In the Northwest, reeducation was a euphemism for execution and individuals sent to "reeducation centers" did not consistently return. People were lured under the guise of study, promotion or reeducation to prisons or mass graves. In 1975 and early 1976, intellectuals were gathered in the Northwest Zone and asked to offer their opinions on the revolution (Vickery 1999). During this time, they were asked to support the regime and were given adequate food while at the camp (Vickery 1999). However, some individuals criticized the lack of medication and the closing of schools (Vickery 1999). Those offering the harshest criticisms were imprisoned, while the rest were taken to

another reeducation camp. In April of 1976, only a small group of intellectuals reappeared and were integrated back into collectives to experience the peasant life (Vickery 1999, p. 107-129). The reintegration or release of prisoners in the Northwest was a more frequent occurrence under Ros Nhim than under the leadership after the mass purges in 1978. It was rare for people to be released from imprisonment after the Southwest cadre took control of the Northwest Zone (Kiernan 2008; Etcheson 2005). From 1978 onward the majority of those arrested were killed, regardless of the severity of the purported crime (Kiernan 2008).

In the East, the implementation of reeducation or security centers was based on Vietnamese camps. Death was not the goal of security centers in the East, although it was a frequent occurrence. Rather, the agrarianizing of individuals through manual labor was meant to be a reeducation process through which urbanites learned the hardships of peasant life. This reeducation often included hard labor and political brainwashing, but ultimately people did reappear from this reeducation (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008). Torture was common at larger security offices (prisons), but at smaller offices, individuals were put through the “refashioning” process which consisted of hard labor and indoctrination (Path and Kanavou 2015). Interviews have indicated that wide spread killing of families did not occur until 1978 in the East Zone. This is further supported by Ben Kiernan’s interview analysis on the East Zone in which he interviewed 87 survivors of the regime (Kiernan 1983). These claims are also supported by the contents of mass graves, which in the East Zone were typically smaller than in other zones (Etcheson 2005). This might “suggest a more careful and deliberate selection of victims than do those sites with hundreds or thousands of persons per mass grave” (Etcheson 2005, p. 98). The leadership in the zone emphasized “refashioning” over elimination in most cases and at one point released a group

of prisoners after unsanitary conditions and aggressive cadre, had killed the majority of those being held (Kiernan 2008; Hinton 2005). Vickery (1999) notes that the process of reeducation in the East Zone was more consistent than in other zones. “It is interesting that most of the informants above reported an initial period in a prison, labor camp or reeducation center, which seems to indicate a more consistent effort than in other zones, both to weed out real enemies and to prepare the rest those remaining for life in Communist villages” (Vickery 1999, p. 146).

Indoctrination techniques were determined by a CPK ministry, but implementation was the job of zone and sector leaders. Efforts to indoctrinate people started from the time the KR took control of the government and continued throughout their time in power. In the Northwest, communal eating and mandatory meetings during non-working hours were not fully implemented until 1977, but many sectors adopted the practice prior to this period (Chandler 1991). The influx of educated individuals from Phnom Penh and Battambang made the task of reeducation more difficult than in areas predominantly occupied by former farmers and peasants (Chandler 1991). Tactics to indoctrinate were therefore used predominantly on children, while fear and coercion were tools for controlling the adult population (Kiernan 1998; Chandler 2008; Path and Kanavou 2015). Children were pulled away from their families and were forced to join mobile task forces, the army, or children’s collectives (Vickery 1999). After separating them from their parents, children were exposed to the regime ideology through songs, educational meetings, magazines, and DK approved supervisors (Jackson 1989). Malleable in the development of their identities, youths were susceptible to indoctrination (Chandler 1999, 33).

In the East, reeducation and indoctrination were less conspicuously applied and this likely contributed to fewer deaths from starvation and a reduction in the masses targeting of new people (Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008; Etcheson 2005). People in these zones were exposed to meetings and self-criticism sessions, however, they were not integrated at the same intensity (Kiernan 2008). Most reeducation occurred at labor camps and it was emphasized that hard work would result in a collective mindset (Vickery 1999). Communal eating was never fully implemented under Sao Phim and private ownership still existed within the sector, albeit limited in nature (Kiernan 2008). Schools were set up within the zone for children and although they mostly learned party propaganda, they were not routinely separated from their parents like the children in the Northwest Zone (Kiernan 2008).

The most significant difference between the Northwest and the East was likely in their respective implementations of the “root and branch” method of elimination. In the Northwest, enemies were often killed alongside their innocent families in order to prevent familial retribution (Hinton 2005; Vickery 1999; Kiernan 2008). The targeted individuals in this zone were far more extensive than in the East and included: Lon Nol officers, the well-educated, anyone committing a crime classified “crime,” former landgrabbers, and their families (Kiernan 1983, 2008). Retribution for past crimes committed under the capitalistic government was also common (Hinton 2005). Along with executions, the mugging of new people and the raiding of their personal possessions also occurred (Kiernan 2008). Black markets were set up and new people were forced to “pay” for extra food with possessions they had brought with them from their old lives (Kiernan 2008).

In the East, although many were executed under Sao Phim, it was rare that extended families of “enemies” were purged as well (Kiernan 2008). People targeted for elimination were intellectuals, Lon Nol officers, the well-educated, and members of the masses who were lazy or non-compliant. Black markets also existed within some areas of the East, but it was more common for new people to give up possessions in an attempt to bribe cadre (Kiernan 2008). Medicine was the most valuable commodity for bribery or sale.

Ultimately, differing interpretations of “reeducation” resulted in the implementation of two different types of security and reeducation centers. In the Northwest, there was no real differentiation between Security Centers and Reeducation Centers. Reeducation meant execution and only individuals who were believed to have information on other traitors were imprisoned and all other enemies were taken to killing fields to die (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999). Those imprisoned were ultimately tortured and forced to confess to crimes. They too were eventually executed (Chandler 2008). In the East, reeducation centers were used to prepare new people for integration into the masses. These centers used mandatory labor and education meetings that were enforced with the goal of reintegrating the new people into the masses; however, the goal of these camps was not death (Kiernan 2008). Security centers in the East were prisons used for torture and execution (Chandler 2008).

## **Discussion**

Using the performative framework, it has been possible to better understand the context and social dynamics under which violence occurred in Cambodia. The ideological script created by the CPK resulted in the creation of distinct group identities among the

people in Cambodia. The CPK was able to create and disseminate a script through the use of revised history and a hierarchical structure that prevented open communication among leaders across zones. In this way they controlled the channels of communication and were able to espouse their ideology to leaders, which ultimately led to violence, but in varying degrees. Leaders were rewarded for CPK approved interpretations with promotion and titles, while other leaders were punished for unacceptable interpretations with torture, imprisonment, and death (Kiernan 2008; Chandler 2008; Etcheson 2005; Tyner 2017; Vickery 1999).

The strength and popularity of a leader and the backing of loyal cadre allowed for greater flexibility and fewer constraints in the creation of policy. This can be seen in the East Zone, whose moderate ideological interpretations led to less violence. Interpretations showing loyalty to the center provided leaders within a zone greater protection, while also constraining leaders' choices. This can be seen in the Northwest where policies were created and implemented quickly in an effort to stay on the Standing Committee's good side (Vickery 1999).

The variations in violence within CPK controlled Cambodia can be understood better through the performative analysis above. The scripted ideology passed down from the Standing Committee left ample opportunity for broad interpretations and policy implementations. Interpretations made by the leaders of the zones affected the production of violence, ultimately producing variations. These variations can be explained by the leaders' relationships with the Standing Committee, the policies used in each zone to create communes, the integration and treatment of new people within each zone, and the reeducation and propaganda programs in the zones.

In the Northwest, the Zone Secretary shared ideological leanings with the Standing Committee and was more dependent on their guidance and approval. Cadre in this zone received less guidance and less training from the Zone Secretary and were often more volatile than their counterparts in the East (Kiernan 2008; Vickery 1999). Communal living was implemented quickly and without regard for the well-being of the people in the zone (Vickery 1999). A massive influx of new people changed the demographic within the zone which reduced food rations and led to more malnutrition related deaths. New people were given less food and more difficult labor assignments than the base people and retribution for past “crimes” was often an excuse for violent acts against new people. Life in the Northwest Zone was highly variable and more difficult than life in the East.

In the East Zone, ideological differences between the Zone Secretary and the Standing Committee contributed to fewer constraints with regard to interpretation. Whether this was because the Zone Secretary was apathetic to the Standing Committee or because the Standing Committee feared the Zone Secretaries loyal cadre is unclear. The cadre in this zone were more moderate and this is evident based on the testimonies by survivors. The East Zone was slower in implementing communal living programs and had reeducation centers that were focused on reeducation through intense labor. The East Zone also had a smaller influx of urban evacuees and the change in demographics was less apparent. New people were treated more equally in the base communities and some were even slowly introduced to manual labor. Overall, the quality of life in the East was better than in the Northwest and the masses faced less violence under Zone Secretary Sao Phim.

Variations in the interpretation of ideological script and the implementation of policy varied and is likely associated with the different levels of violence across Cambodia;



however, this analysis only offers some explanation for the variations. The data available for research on regional variations (violence across zones) is limited in the case of Cambodia. The use of a variety of interviews without similar lines of questioning, has resulted in less than ideal information for the purpose of this research. Access to more interviews and the ability to interview survivors about their zone specific experiences would provide an opportunity to look at regional variation more closely. Greater access to the archives in Cambodia would also provide resources for this research and could be used to develop a more in-depth analysis of the individual roles leaders may have played in the production of violence. The amount of time passed since the events in Cambodia and the age of the remaining survivors during this period will further limit future research opportunities. Regional variation can likely be seen in other cases of mass atrocity and should be further explored to better understand how mass atrocities vary within cases.

## APPENDIX 1. CAMBODIAN COMMUNISM

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**1940s/Early 1950s** – A communist movement emerges in Cambodia and Khmer Communists forge an alliance with Vietnamese communists in the fight against French colonialism.

**1954** – Geneva Conference occurs, and Cambodia is granted independence from France. A constitutional monarchy is set in place and power is transferred to Prince Sihanouk.

**1954 to 1970** – The Kingdom of Cambodia is under the Sihanouk government, which attempts to maintain neutrality in the ongoing war in Vietnam.

**1962** – As Vietnamese communists begin to occupy more areas in eastern Cambodia, American bombardment moves westward and enters Cambodian territory. The already tenuous power held by Sihanouk is further destabilized.

**1965** – Sihanouk officially ends ties with US government as more Vietnamese communists seek refuge within Cambodian territory.

**March 1970** – A successful coup occurs, and Lon Nol deposes Sihanouk as head of state. Cambodia is renamed The Khmer Republic and becomes a puppet government of the United States.

**1973** – Another round of American bombardment aimed at the Vietnamese communists hiding in Cambodia further destabilizes the Lon Nol government, at this point 85 percent of Cambodia is controlled by various communist factions.

**April 17, 1975** – Communist forces invade Phnom Penh and take control of the Cambodian government. Evacuations of urban Khmer begins almost immediately, and 2 million people are forced into rural areas of Cambodia. Thousands die during the forced migration. The CPK cuts all international ties.

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