TRADITION AND CHANGE: KHMER IDENTITY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE 20TH CENTURY AND BEYOND

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For my father
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understanding.
This dissertation presents an analysis of Cambodia as it wrestles with the structural changes involved in its transition to democracy. I argue that the Khmer wish both to embrace the tenets of contemporary democracy, yet also to reclaim the ancient culture the Khmer Rouge set out to destroy. The physical and psychological tolls of decades of civil war and upheaval in Cambodia can never be adequately measured, and will never cease to inform the Khmer experience. Yet the Khmer are resilient, and have navigated centuries of uncertainty, incorporating new practices and adapting Khmer ways of life as a constant strategy for maintaining their kindred identity, superseding changes in leaders, occupiers, explorers, and settlers. Moreover, Khmer cultural values and traditions are shaping the ways in which democracy is incorporated into society.

My thesis is that Khmer, as part of their identity renegotiation process, do and will continue to draw upon various cultural traditions and stories to make sense of their positions as members of a society now built upon a new framework—that is, they can and will “Khmerize” democracy by recognizing the old within the new (and vice versa).

I suggest that Khmer are making choices about their futures, rather than allowing their neighbors or the international community to choose for them, and that the Khmer in my study are choosing democracy. This dissertation examines the ways in which Khmer actively participate in the dialogue about democracy and how it fits into their political, economic, social, and cultural futures.
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NOTE ON THE TEXT

Following most contemporary scholars of Cambodia and Khmer studies, in transliterating Khmer words into English, I use the transcription system developed by Franklin Huffman in 1983, without the diacritics. Khmer transliterations in this dissertation are italicized, followed by the English translation or a brief explanation in parentheses.

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Table 1. Khmer transcription system

The term Khmer, pronounced *khmaer*, with the final “r” silent, is used in Khmer language as both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, it refers to both Cambodia and the people of Cambodia. *Sruck khmaer*, for example, refers to the country of Cambodia, and *khmaer yeung* means “we Khmer.” As an adjective, it translates as “Cambodian.” For example, *khenhom khmaer* translates as “I am Khmer,” and *mehope khmaer* means “Khmer food.” In this dissertation, for consistency, I use “Cambodia” when referring to the country or nation-state, “Khmer” adjectivally, and “Khmer” or “the Khmer” when referring to the people of Cambodia. I do not use “Cambodian” unless quoting or unless it is part of an organization’s name.
CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

Cambodia is a nation in the process of remaking itself. Cambodia’s history extends at least two thousand years into the past, yet within the past decade, momentous changes have occurred.¹ The extremist Khmer Rouge regime, whose horrific and baffling policies caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands between 1975 and 1979, essentially dissolved, and many Khmer Rouge soldiers were absorbed into the national armed forces.² Thousands of refugees who had lingered in camps on the border with Thailand throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as well as those who had left the country to escape the horrors of the civil war, repatriated to Cambodia. With the aid of the international community, national elections were held in 1993, followed by additional, domestically-managed elections in 1998 and 2003. Cambodia became the site for several major American films, such as Tomb Raider and City of Ghosts, sparking a resurgence of interest in and travel to the temples of the northern provinces, including Angkor Wat. Cambodia today is a fascinating amalgam of centuries-old pagodas, noisy motorcycles, serene farming villages, cellular phones, Buddhist chants, and crowded markets. One can interact with members of an older, French- and Khmer-speaking generation, practice English with high school students, and take classes in Japanese, within the space of but a few hours and a few blocks. Cambodia is a precarious balance of old and new, native and foreign, tradition and change (Figure 1). Daily, Cambodians, or Khmaer, as they are known in their own language, must negotiate what it means to be Khmer.
This dissertation presents an analysis of Cambodia as it wrestles with the structural changes involved in its transition to democracy. I will argue that the Khmer wish both to embrace the tenets of contemporary democracy, yet also to reclaim the ancient culture the Khmer Rouge set out to destroy. The physical and psychological tolls of decades of civil war and upheaval in Cambodia can never be adequately measured, and will never cease to inform the Khmer experience. Yet the Khmer are resilient, and as shall be examined in this dissertation, have navigated centuries of uncertainty, incorporating new practices and adapting Khmer ways of life as a constant strategy for maintaining their kindred identity, superseding changes in leaders, occupiers, explorers, and settlers. The categorical construction of Khmer is informed by its variegated history, and will continue to be informed by its present and future. Moreover, Khmer cultural values and traditions are shaping the ways in which democracy is incorporated into society. This dissertation explores these processes of interpretation and negotiation.

The American Connection

The United States has long believed that it is at the forefront of democracy, as part of a campaign for good and the betterment of the world. Thus any discussion of democracy, including a dissertation on Cambodia, touches on issues central to the discipline of American Studies. In American Studies, scholars examine traditions, patterns of thought, and philosophies that are part of American ideology. A fundamental principle of that ideology is democracy.
Figure 1.
Map of Cambodia
The United States believes that it stands for the democratic ideal. While America's own history perhaps does not provide the best example of democracy in action, liberal democracy is America's image of what its (and the world's) political future should be. The U.S. Department of State confirms the latter part of the previous statement, declaring that

Democracy and respect for human rights have long been central components of U.S. foreign policy. Supporting democracy not only promotes such fundamental American values as religious freedom and worker rights, but also helps create a more secure, stable, and prosperous global arena in which the United States can advance its national interests [. . .] Democratically governed nations are more likely to secure the peace, deter aggression, expand open markets, promote economic development, protect American citizens, combat international terrorism and crime, uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crises and refugee flows, improve the global environment, and protect human health. ("Democracy")

Thus Cambodia provides a case study, an experiment as to the efficacy of democracy. As perhaps the most ardent promoter of democracy, the United States can look to Cambodia to shed light on the democratic process: Does it work?

The history of United States' foreign affairs is speckled with examples of "exporting the American dream"—often under the rhetoric of democracy--with little attention to the inclinations of the recipients. We hoped to recreate the Philippines "in our image" following the Spanish-American war, and in post WWII-Japan, superimposed an American-styled system, for example.3 "When historians write about U.S. foreign policy,” the U.S. State Department asserts, “they will identify the growth of democracy [. . .] as one of the United States’ greatest legacies” ("Democracy"). While this dissertation does not focus on U.S. foreign policy in Cambodia, it is
significant that much of that policy developed from the United States’ stated rhetoric of supporting democracy in “Indochina.” I explore questions that are of interest to policymakers as well as ethnographers.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, much of American foreign policy sought to promote democracy for the purpose of thwarting communism throughout the world, particularly in Asia. In the 1950s, the United States became involved with Vietnam, hoping to build “a separate, non-Communist nation” in southern Vietnam, which “they would create as a magnet to draw the North out of the Communist orbit” (Cohen 149-51). Cambodia soon became caught in America’s “‘game plan’ for Indochina” (Cohen 196), and over the next several decades endured American undertakings to control communism, becoming a “sideshow” to the war in Vietnam (Shawcross 7).

During their involvement in Southeast Asia, the United States wanted a Khmer regime “amenable to its strategic interests”—that is, unmistakably non-Communist—and then-Prince Sihanouk’s “policy of neutrality was unacceptable to Washington.” Subsequently, the United States eventually helped to encourage a coup to wrest power from the monarch (Peou, Intervention and Change 125). Unfortunately, as Khmer scholar and political analyst Sorpong Peou notes, “what is negative about the U.S. intervention [in the 1960s and 1970s] is that it failed to eliminate the politico-military challenges from the communist forces.” Nor did it create a situation “that would be more conducive to democratic agreements” (128). Indeed, the United States adopted a relatively passive role after 1975, when the communist Khmer Rouge (which called itself, ironically enough, Democratic Kampuchea), took over Cambodia. Furthermore,
in the late 1970s and 1980s, when the Vietnamese occupied Cambodia, the United States was more concerned with its relations with China, and "the U.S. position on Cambodia was based on little more than the rationalization of a desire not to get closely involved in the problem and simply to defer to China's priorities" (143).

In the 1980s, and particularly after the breakup of the Soviet Union, U.S. priorities shifted from preventing communism in Southeast Asia to maintaining peace and stability therein. A statement by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) about U.S.-ASEAN relations asserts, "The ASEAN-U.S. dialogue relationship began in 1977. During the early stages of the dialogue, priority was given to commodities, market and capital access, operation of transnational corporations, the transfer of technology, the development of energy resources, shipping and food security." With the end of the Cold War, however, "the ASEAN-U.S. Dialogue has also focused more and more on political and security discussions over the years," and "the principle focus of the ASEAN-US security dialogue has been the role of the US in maintaining stability in the region" ("Asean-U.S. Dialogue").

Furthermore, the United States watched carefully as Cambodia attempted to and eventually succeeded in joining ASEAN in 1999, bringing the ASEAN total to ten countries. Certainly, the economic potential of the area was captivating. "With a market of 500 million people and a total GDP of more than US $700 billion," stated Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, and then-Chairman of ASEAN, "ASEAN-10 is emerging as a dynamic economic space" ("Opening Statement 2000"). For the United States, however, at least as attractive as the economic possibility was the notion that a free and open market system is "an important factor for
peace, stability and development in Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific and the world”—for
democracy (“Opening Statement 2000”). Well-aware that the United States views a
capitalist, free-market system as amenable to democracy, Prince Norodom Ranariddh
asked the U.S. to resume direct aid (earlier suspended following an internal conflict in
1997) to the Royal Government of Cambodia, stating that in becoming a member of
ASEAN, “the democratic process has positively developed in the country” (qtd. in
“Pacific Forum”).

Beginning in the 1990s, the United States became more closely involved with
promoting democracy in Cambodia, though not through military engagement. Thomas
Carothers, Vice President for Global Policy at the Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace, suggests that in the last two decades, the United States began to use
international monetary aid, as part of American foreign policy, to promote democracy.
Robert Sutter, former chief of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, wrote
in 1991 that when discussions about a peace settlement for Cambodia began to arise,
“U.S. officials actively sought to monitor, and participate when appropriate, in these
efforts in order to insure U.S. interests would be safeguarded in any possible
settlement” (The Cambodian Crisis 40). Much American “participation” was effected
via monetary aid. And indeed, Carothers notes, “Cambodia has been the single largest
recipient in Asia of democracy aid, as part of the broad U.S. effort to promote a
democratic outcome based on the 1991 peace accord” (43).

While actions have often belied rhetoric, powerful members of the international
community, and in particular, the United States have proclaimed democracy the
preferred *modus operandi* in the modern era, as demonstrated by our recent involvement in Iraq. Woodrow Wilson’s vision of “making the world safe for democracy” is echoed most recently in President George W. Bush’s 2003 State of the Union Address as justification for invading Iraq:

> The qualities of courage and compassion that we strive for in America also determine our conduct abroad. The American flag stands for more than our power and our interests. Our founders dedicated this country to the cause of human dignity, the rights of every person, and the possibilities of every life. This conviction leads us into the world to help the afflicted, and defend the peace, and confound the designs of evil men [. . .] As our nation moves troops and builds alliances to make our world safer, we must also remember our calling as a blessed country is to make this world better. (“State of the Union” 28 January 2003)

Immediately following President George W. Bush’s election in 2001, Freedom House, the New York-based democracy research and advocacy group, stated that it had great hopes for President Bush’s efforts in promoting democracy. Freedom House president Adrian Karatnycky noted that “the new, incoming president has an opportunity to shape U.S. foreign policy, in an environment where there is an increasing number of democratic states that share America’s commitment to open political processes, the rule of law and economic freedom rooted in property rights.” He remarked that President Bush’s early public comments seemed to indicate that he “recognize[d] the growing trend of worldwide democratic advancement.” (“Freedom House Survey”). *Time* reporter Michael Elliot suggests that whatever President Bush’s initial intentions, his Wilsonian rhetoric certainly solidified following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. “The Bush Administration did not come into office intent on changing the world,” he writes, and in fact,
Bush himself, when a candidate for the presidency, seemed leery about pushing American values on other countries. His administration, he said in a 2000 presidential debate, would not "go around the world saying, 'We do it this way, so should you.'" But Sept. 11 changed everything. The attacks on that day underscored how some nations had resisted the seductive call of peace, democracy and freedom -- and that we had paid for the resistance.

Some point out strong parallels between the situations in Iraq and Cambodia. In the wake of Cambodia's most recent elections in July 2003, for example, Peter Brookes, a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, asserted that "last week's elections in far-off Cambodia offer a glimmer of hope to the whole world, especially Iraq." In rhetoric, at least, the United States also purports to value Wilsonian self-determination—"a people's freedom to determine its own fate"—and to govern itself, as delineated in his "Fourteen Points" near the end of World War I (Iriye 46). While America's twenty-first century actions in Iraq may belie such rhetoric, ideally the United States would champion attempts by all nations, including Cambodia and the Khmer, to govern themselves. 4

Brookes suggests that Cambodia's embracing of democracy could serve as an example for Iraq, and continues,

Should Americans care about the health of democracy in Cambodia? Absolutely. Democracies bring peace and stability to a region and hope to its people [. . .] American democracy didn't start out perfect—it still isn't. Be we try to make it a little better everyday. We have seen this in Cambodia and we will see it in Iraq.

Thus, this dissertation, in addressing what democracy is, and how Cambodia and the Khmer are incorporating and indigenizing it, explores a viable topic, addressing issues and beliefs central to the American experience. From an American Studies
perspective, analysis of democracy in Cambodia speaks to critical questions about what the United States represents, about what America values. It is important for Americans to watch to see if citizens of other nations choose to pursue democracy for themselves. The world awaits the outcome of this experiment, and thus, the results of this study will contribute significantly across disciplines, from American Studies to International Relations.

Moreover, the discipline of American Studies, particularly in Hawai‘i, explores the multicultural nature of the United States, and the development and maintenance of ethnic identity of individuals from various nations. While not the focus of this dissertation, the experiences of Khmer-Americans are of interest to, and are in fact underrepresented in American Studies. The ties between Khmer in Cambodia and Khmer in the United States remain strong, and the identity of the latter is intimately linked to that of the former. Particularly in the past decade, too, many Khmer in diaspora—including Khmer in the United States, France, Australia, and other modern democracies—have returned to Cambodia, either episodically or permanently, and their views undoubtedly influence Khmer therein. Khmer-Americans absolutely contribute to the democratic dialogue currently transpiring in Cambodia. In fact, Khmer-Americans constitute a vital component of Cambodia’s civil society: there are several educational institutions, think-tanks, and civic associations in Cambodia founded by Khmer raised or educated in the United States, for example. In this dissertation, while certainly represented in my sample, Khmer-American endeavors are not separated from other democracy-related work in Cambodia. The relationship between Khmer-
Americans and Khmer in Cambodia vis-à-vis democracy does, however, provide fertile ground for further research.  

Safeguarding Khmerness

In August of 1996, the Royal University of Phnom Penh held its first International Conference on Khmer Studies. Conference organizers invited speakers from all fields, including archaeology, history, linguistics, literature, and political science. All, however, were asked to address a common theme, which in fact formed the conference title: “Khmer Studies: Knowledge of the Past and Its Contributions to the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia.” That the various speakers were asked to organize their talks around a theme is not unusual; such is the organizing principle for most conferences. Contextually, however, the choice of theme is significant. In 1993, Cambodia held democratic elections, sponsored and overseen by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). While certainly not without numerous challenges, the elections ushered in a period of renewed optimism, and fostered a less restrictive environment in which many Khmer began to express themselves openly for the first time, engaging in international and intercultural interchange. Following UNTAC, Cambodia experienced a rush of economic investment by those who wished to explore a new Southeast Asian market. Young Khmer students found an increasing number of international academicians and courses at Cambodia’s universities, and an unprecedented number of English-language and business schools opened. Several “think-tanks” emerged, offering both training opportunities for Khmer and exchange of ideas between Khmer and French, Irish,
Australian, Japanese, and American professionals and students. Yet amidst the newness of “democracy” in the aftermath of the UNTAC-sponsored elections, Khmer scholars were eager to look to the past to reconfigure Khmer identity in the present.

“The main purpose of the conference will be to exchange knowledge about Cambodia’s past,” noted Sorn Samnang, dean of the history department and the conference organizer, “and how this information can be used in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country” (Lor 1). Indeed, the initial call for conference papers listed potential topics speakers might address, including “democratic tradition in the history of Khmer institutions,” and “the struggle for democracy through traditional Khmer literature.” While Cambodia had emerged from a period of darkness to begin anew, Khmer should not throw away all vestiges of the past. There is much in Khmer history that some would just as soon forget, but also, the conference notes indicated, much Khmer should revive and sustain.

Participants in the 1996 conference discussed the tensions between past and present, and expressed concerns about maintaining national identity in the face of great change. In an opening address to the conference participants and guests, Chea Sim, then-Chairman of the National Assembly, commented,

I wish to give my strongest support to the goals and objects of this conference which plans to open an ‘Enlightenment Era’ for Cambodia. It is true that this is the first opportunity in history for the University of Phnom Penh to [...open] the door toward the well of valuable resources and treasures and to recognize and expose again these treasures to shine on their own, with the aim of preserving the Khmer soul and its lasting values. This also will jump-start the spirit of each individual Khmer to turn his concern to national problems, to give his love to his motherland, and to refrain from immersing himself in foreign culture. (12)
Anthropologist Chou Meng Tarr, a speaker at the conference, noted that in revitalizing the Khmer economy, “localised knowledge stands the risk of being swept aside in the name of agricultural modernisation, being based as it is on a rationality ill-suited to newer forms of commercialised agriculture.” But “knowledge about traditional agriculture is just as an important aspect of indigenous cultural knowledge as knowledge of traditional art, drama, music, literature, and poetry,” she continued, and “we should take a more holistic approach to culture than many exponents of development appear capable of understanding.” (109-110). Noted ethnomusicologist Sam Sam-Ang cautioned against exploitative economic development and tourism during his talk on the Angkor region: “We do not want ‘development’ while destroying ‘traditional culture,’” he remarked (90). The words of these articulate scholars represent the concerns of many Khmer, who fear that in adopting democracy as the path of its future, Cambodia risks losing its past. They seek reassurance that democracy in Cambodia will indeed be a Khmer democracy, that the future will be a Khmer future.

The apprehension of the Khmer about these futures is rooted in the association of democracy with globalization. While imprecise, this association is neither unique nor surprising. Certainly, the UNTAC elections, the landmark “introduction” of democracy into Cambodia, ushered in a period of political change. Never before had a peacekeeping effort been attempted on such a grand scale, and thus, this great experiment, if successful, would serve as a model for future efforts. Nearly ninety-six percent of the population registered to vote, and approximately ninety percent of those registered actually voted in the 1993 elections (Ledgerwood, “UN Peacekeeping” 4). The UNTAC mission was regarded worldwide as a triumph for democracy.
Yet UNTAC also meant unprecedented (though benevolently intended) intrusions into Khmer life, and subsequent reverberations in Khmer society. UNTAC meant the appearance of a new, multinational community in Cambodia (ordinarily more than ninety percent ethnic Khmer), an enormous influx of capital during the occupation, hundreds if not thousands of Toyota land cruisers roaming provincial roads usually frequented only by oxcarts, the beginnings of the information revolution (radio programs, and later television programs, karaoke videos, and the Internet).

Furthermore, irresponsible behaviors on the part of some UNTAC staff (intoxication, fighting, etc.) showed foreigners in a negative light. UNTAC brought participatory elections, to be sure; however, many Khmer feared that it would also bring unwanted social and cultural metamorphosis.

In “Globalization and the Process of Khmer Culture,” philosophy professor Chhay Yiheang articulates this fear. “There is massive development work that needs to be done [in Cambodia],” writes Chhay, and “Khmer must be up to the challenge of rebuilding their nation, taking advantage of the opportunities and prospects for development at hand” (2). He notes that globalization, effected via an open international trading system, for example, can bring technological advances and effect positive changes: better health care, more efficient agricultural production, and improved communication. However, it can also generate social chaos. Chhay remarks that “the introduction of these innovations into Khmer society has one visible impact: to modify traditional Khmer culture and to align it more and more with the rest of the world” (9). Whereas traditional Khmer culture reveres the past, today Khmer youth move to the cities “to work in factories and enterprises that earn them money to buy the
latest amenities,” and in the countryside, people watch science fiction movies and other cable television programs (9). Khmer, he cautions, must “sustain our unique cultural identity and avoid being swallowed up simply into the global arena” (2).

Certainly, Chhay is not the sole critic of globalization. Peter Berger, a sociologist and theologian at Boston University, notes that “if there is economic globalization, there is also cultural globalization.” The globalization process brings with it an understandable “fear of a worldwide ‘airport culture’ in which the rich diversity of human civilization will be homogenized and vulgarized” (qtd. in Harf and Lombardi 235). Yet are the possible effects of globalization, an economic process, properly conflated with those of democracy, a political process? Admittedly, “these two trends have been interrelated and, for the most part, mutually reinforcing” in the twentieth century (Plattner 54). However, they are not synonymous, and without discrediting the aforementioned concerns, for the purposes of this dissertation, I differentiate between them. Indeed, I argue that the Khmer with whom I discussed these issues make this distinction, and in their work, hope to make it clear to other Khmer.

Marc Plattner, coeditor of the Journal of Democracy, asserts that globalization may even be a threat to democracy. Liberal democracy, Plattner affirms, with its emphasis on individual freedoms and the right to information, favors an open market economy, and therefore encourages economic globalization. However, democracy “involves an uneasy marriage of two components”: 1) the liberal element, which encourages individual freedoms and places limits of the powers of the government, and 2) the democratic or self-governing element, “which requires that the people be the
ultimate authors of the laws that they obey,” and as such “implies special bonds linking the members of the political community” (59-60, emphasis mine). The self-governing element, based on belief that in becoming part of a political community, individuals enter into a type of Lockean social contract, predicated on a sense of loyalty and obligation towards others who have entered such contract, supports national autonomy. It is not possible to have a global political community or “world citizenship” of six billion, he argues; thus, political obligations “are owed only to those with whom one enters into the social contract”—others in a given political community, a given nation-state. Moreover, he posits, “in fact, one may say that globalization, carried to its logical conclusion, is hostile to self-government as such. A borderless world is most unlikely to be a democratic one. Thus the preservation of democracy may well require certain limits on globalization” (60-61).

Plattner’s argument is complex, and the relationship between globalization and democratization warrants examination in greater detail, perhaps as the subject of another dissertation. For the present study, however, it is significant in that I contend that many of my respondents realize themselves that although aspects of globalization seemed to accompany democratization initially in Cambodia, the two need not occur concurrently. Chhay acknowledges that globalization is “new parlance” in Cambodia, and there is not yet an appropriate translation of the term into Khmer (3). While such confusion is a complicating factor for some, it is not necessarily a defining factor for the acceptance of democracy in Cambodia.

Hence the conference organizers’ (and others’) desire to establish links between democracy and Khmer history. They wish to remind fellow Khmer that although free
and fair elections came to Cambodia in 1993, many of the principles underlying democracy have their roots in cherished ancient Khmer ethics and precepts. Thus, the adoption of democracy need not obligate Khmer to relinquish that which makes them unique: their “Khmerness.” The task at hand, they believe, is to elucidate the connection between tradition and change, between Khmer identity and democracy. With democratic principles made more recognizable to the Khmer people as ideas already embedded in their culture and their thinking, and not linked indelibly to globalization, they can choose, from both new and old, that which they will accept, that which they will discard, and that which they will modify to suit their needs. In the transition, Khmerness need not be lost.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the meaning of democracy in Cambodia in the modern era. I suggest that Khmer are making choices about their futures, rather than allowing their neighbors or the international community to choose for them, and that the Khmer in my study are choosing democracy. This dissertation examines the ways in which Khmer actively participate in the dialogue about democracy, about how it will affect their political, economic, social and cultural futures. This dissertation presents an original contribution to the existing literature on Cambodia, for while there are excellent accounts of the various regimes, studies of democracy from an international viewpoint, and outstanding analyses of Khmer culture, to my knowledge there is no comprehensive discussion of how Khmer themselves view democracy, and how they believe it affects Khmer culture, and vice versa.
Adventures of a Kaun-Kat

The impetus for this dissertation project is both personal and professional. As the kaun-kat (biracial) daughter of a Khmer father and a Scottish mother, as I grew up I witnessed first-hand both the conflicts and confluences of two very different cultures, both literally and symbolically. While my mother often regaled us with stories about her journey to the United States, her numerous brothers and sisters, parents and grandparents, and aunts and uncles back in Scotland, my father has, since my childhood, remained eerily reticent about family matters. He is vague and elusive when questioned about his family, and rarely speaks of his homeland. In 1969, the year of my birth, President Richard Nixon authorized secret bombing of northern Cambodia, with the aim of destroying Vietnamese bases located in Khmer territory (Cohen 176). For nearly three decades thence, Cambodia suffered repeated assaults from both without and within, and my father was never able to return home, neither literally nor figuratively (Figure 2). Thus I grew up knowing I was Khmer, but without any understanding or insight as to what that designation means. It is my curiosity about my father's history, his ancestry, and my unanswered questions that led me to address the current topic of my dissertation.

In 1993, I relocated to Honolulu to accept a position as a degree fellow in the East-West Center's Program on Education in Training. Here, in conjunction with senior researchers and other students, I began to study intercultural communication, positing many of the questions I raised both consciously and subconsciously during my childhood in theoretical and conceptual form. While I do not wish to reduce the complexity of human relationships to the playing-out of cultural interaction formulas, I
found and continue to find it fascinating and frankly, cathartic to interpret scenes from my childhood within the framework of models of acculturation and adjustment of immigrant and refugee populations, and related work on interracial/intercultural relations and ethnic identity development. The curiosities I had buried in the interests of both physical and emotional safety surfaced in scholarly papers and presentations. I continued this line of inquiry throughout my graduate courses and East-West Center research, and specifically, began studying Khmer language and culture. Eventually, I was able to undertake an emotional and physical journey to Cambodia, to explore my paternal ethnic identity at its source.

I had the opportunity to live and work in Cambodia for extended periods in 1995 and 1996, a critical period in the renegotiation and reformulation of identity not only for myself, but as discussed, for Khmer in general. During this time, I worked as an English-language teacher and an occasional writer for the Phnom Penh Post, and through the Preah Sihanouk Raj Academy (now the Center for Advanced Study) in Phnom Penh, became part of a research team tasked with assessing the status of interethnic relations within Cambodia, and subsequently making recommendations about these relations to the Khmer government. This project formed the germ-seed for my dissertation. I traveled throughout urban and rural Cambodia, and although I used Phnom Penh as my home base, I explored ten provinces. I became familiar with Khmer people and culture. I admired their resilience in the face of extraordinarily unfortunate or challenging circumstances. I became particularly interested in how Khmer negotiate their identity in a rapidly changing world, and thus decided to pursue this line of inquiry for my dissertation.
Figure 2.
Leaving Cambodia
Outline of the Present Study

I begin this dissertation by outlining the parameters of the study (chapter 2). Then, with the goal of exploring how Khmer will process the structural changes inherent in a transition to democracy at cultural and social levels, I present and analyze what I believe to be the key elements of Khmer culture (chapter 3). I draw from a number of anthropological, historical, and sociological studies, but pull primarily from my own interviews and observations. In particular, I present Khmer cosmology—Khmer perceptions of their world and their places within that world—via discussion of specific signifiers of Khmer culture as delineated by my respondents. I posit that historically, (and here I mean in both recorded history and in mythography/cosmology), Cambodia has shown itself to be flexible, both selective and open to ideas from outside influences and, its small size and seeming global inconsequentiality notwithstanding, in its own way an adroit player. I conclude the chapter by establishing the thesis that Khmer cultural aspects are conducive to democracy.

Next, to the extent possible, I seek to answer the question, “What is Democracy?” (chapter 4). I provide an overview of the history and development of democracy as discussed throughout the literature on the subject. In particular, I discuss the difference between democracy and liberty—a key element in the current debate on American democracy (e.g., Zakaria, The Future of Freedom). Finally, I delineate some key factors that may be used to ascertain whether a given nation or state is a democracy, and apply this democratic litmus test to Cambodia.

I then turn to an examination of the ways in which individuals active in the debate wrestle with democracy, and how they seek to incorporate democracy into the
Khmer way of life (chapters 5, 6, 7). I discuss in detail the methods they use to teach Khmer about democracy. The next chapter (chapter 8) continues the discussion initiated in chapters 5, 6, and 7, but goes beyond description and narration of the methods used to analysis of their effects and consequences. In chapter 9, I offer my conclusions and recommendations.

For the Khmer, as citizens of a country which spent centuries evading encroachment by both other rival kingdoms as well as colonizers, and endured more than thirty years of civil war, it is not surprising that Cambodia and the Khmer seek to ensure they will not simply be absorbed into a modern world, albeit it a safer and more secure one. While it is important to resist essentialist notions of Khmer culture as something static, it is as important to acknowledge and respect what May Ebihara, Carol Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood call survivors' “need to recreate an orderly universe,” by returning to events, traditions, and practices that connect them to and mitigate the world around them (8). To rediscover and redefine themselves, "they need both to understand what it is that has happened to them," Ebihara et al. continue,” and to have a sense that they now live in a structured, ordered world” (8). Perhaps they will find that structure and order in democracy.

Such rooting of identity, however, does not necessarily imply fixity—identity is continually negotiated, contested, changed. Arjun Appadurai finds it helpful to think about identity as a project:

That is to say, one can see ethnic identity as projected, so that it has a future, without entirely giving up the idea that it is produced by histories that are marked, and that identities are particular, and cannot therefore be completely expansive. Moreover, if one looks at identity
movements, and sees them as *projects* that have futures, then one has a completely different sense, first, of the question of the past in relation to those projects and second, to put it simply, of who can join. This allows a kind of openness to inclusion in the project, although not necessarily to inclusion in the history. (qtd. in Bell 27)

My thesis is that Khmer, as part of their identity renegotiation process, do and will continue to draw upon various cultural traditions and stories to make sense of their positions as members of a society now built upon a new framework—that is, they can and will "Khmerize" democracy by recognizing the old within the new (and vice versa). Thus, rather than cast off old beliefs and begin wholly anew, as per J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s American, the “new” Khmer rediscovers and reconfigures them to fit new historical and institutional realities. Democracy as defined by the Khmer may look very different from the American model—it may, for example, include the election of a leader, but that leader coexists with a monarch whom the people do not elect. For Khmer, at least for now, the definition of democracy simply expands to include both.

This process, moreover, is currently simply that. It is highly selective and imperfect, and while definitions are expanded to embrace certain aspects of democracy, they are also restricted to reject others. Some Khmer scholars, such as Sorpong Peou, who has chronicled the anti-democratic tradition in Khmer systems, go to great lengths to show why democracy cannot work. Yet such systems now can also be examined for elements that *will* allow democracy to take root and flourish; it is this work I chronicle here. It is important for Khmer to be able to look to the past to help to define whom they are in the present. In order for democracy to work in Cambodia, they must be able to recognize democratic elements in and from their past, albeit the same past that gave
rise to the Khmer Rouge and a string of anti-democratic leaders. Only then will they be able to embrace it as meaningful, and truly incorporate it into their lives beyond the institutional skeleton.
CHAPTER 2.
METHODOLOGY

This dissertation effort involved several methodological phases. First, as discussed in the introduction, my work in Cambodia in 1995 and 1996 sparked my interest in writing on Cambodia. Knowing I would need to eventually return to Hawai‘i to take my comprehensive exams, I used the time I was in-country to become proficient in Khmer language. I intermittently studied with a teacher from the Royal University of Phnom Penh, and lived for several months with a Khmer family, and while I have yet to master the language, I developed the ability to converse colloquially. During this time, I kept detailed journals of places I visited, festivals I attended, new phrases I learned, friends I made, and unwritten rules of conduct I unknowingly broke. I collected newspaper articles, in both Khmer and English, describing current events and chronicling the amazing development of that period, read popular Khmer magazines, and gathered non-governmental organization (NGO) reports. I also informally surveyed the NGO community, to get a sense of what kind of work they had undertaken and how successful it had been thus far. Mostly, however, I focused on developing relationships with those I met, out of sincere longing to know Khmer people and Khmer culture.

Next, upon returning to Hawai‘i, I conducted an extensive literature search on Cambodia, including ethnographic and cultural studies, U.S. government and policy reports, memoirs of survivors of the Khmer Rouge, and histories of the country. I was fortunate in that the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa library has an excellent Asia collection, with materials on Cambodia in Khmer, French, and English. The East-West Center, where I was a degree fellow, had several Cambodia scholars, including Judy
Ledgerwood, Lindsay French, and Toni Shapiro, who guided me to some excellent background materials. As I grew up neither in Cambodia nor within a Khmer enclave in the United States, these readings provided much-needed frameworks for the current project. Furthermore, William Chapman, director of Historic Preservation in the University of Hawai`i at Manoa’s American Studies department, began several unprecedented projects in Southeast Asia, including Cambodia. For me, as a student in the American Studies department, the Thailand- and Cambodia-related courses and field efforts offered by Chapman presented a unique opportunity for me to become involved both in historic preservation and in Southeast Asian studies. I took advantage of this opportunity, gearing some of my supplementary reading and writing for these classes toward my specific interests in Cambodia and Khmer identity. I have called upon the scholars involved in the research described above and utilized their resultant publications in formulating the current project.

I then designed the initial structure for my dissertation project, outlining groups and individuals whom I might interview, survey questions, and a timeline for the research. All of the aforementioned were discussed with my committee and subsequently refined, and I made plans to return to Cambodia to conduct the research. The details of this process are discussed below.

While the majority of the analysis took place after my return to Hawai`i, while in Cambodia, in addition to conducting the interviews, I continued to gather newspaper and journal articles, to listen to Khmer radio and watch Khmer television and live programs, and to engage many Khmer in conversation about current issues. The final account as it appears here was informed by my multifaceted experiences in Cambodia.
Historical Background

Four major periods in Khmer history serve as necessary background for understanding the negotiation of Khmerness in the present: the Angkor period, the French occupation, the Khmer Rouge regime, and the Paris Peace Accords/UNTAC occupation. I can only sketch history here, and then allow my respondents to fill in the gaps. An abbreviated timeline of Khmer history is included in Appendix E.

For background information on Cambodia and Khmer culture, May Ebihara’s seminal study of a Khmer village of the 1960s (Svay), provides insight about rural life in Cambodia before the Khmer Rouge. Her detailed discussion of social, economic, and religious patterns and customs is an excellent starting point for the student of Cambodia, as it details actual interpersonal relations, rituals, and other aspects of Khmer life. Ian Mabbett and David Chandler’s The Khmers, organized both chronologically and thematically, provides an overview of Khmer customs and history. Whereas Ebihara’s is a micro-study of one village, Mabbett and Chandler provide a macro-analysis of Khmer culture and history, from the early Funan and Chenla periods to post-Khmer Rouge People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and State of Cambodia (SOC) regimes. Chandler’s A History of Cambodia, which offers a comprehensive review of Khmer history up to the 1993 elections, unsurprisingly proved invaluable. Ebihara, Carol Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood’s Cambodian Culture Since 1975: Homeland and Exile acquaints the reader with analyses of Khmer culture from several different perspectives: linguistics, anthropology, literature, art. Toni Shapiro’s dissertation on Khmer dance is an excellent resource for Khmer arts, and the importance of those arts in Khmer identity. She interweaves beautiful imagery, including a photographic essay,
with the technical intricacies of Khmer classical dance, and the stories of the dancers. I refer to all of these works throughout the dissertation.

**The Angkor Period**

Ancient Cambodia was a time of kings, strong leaders who consolidated disparate territories throughout the Mekong Delta region of Southeast Asia into kingdoms. As Mabbett and Chandler assert, "what began as a small constellation of small principalities has in modern times become a community, a people" (The Khmers 12). The early centuries witnessed various expansions and reductions of territory, as rulers' armies battled both each other and the armies of what would later be called Thailand and Vietnam. As a Khmer community emerged, its rulers constructed massive temple complexes both to venerate their gods, such as the Hindu trinity of Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver/sustainer), and Shiva (destroyer), and to liken themselves to the gods. The Angkor period, as it is described by historians, covers the 9th to the 15th centuries (802-1431), during which a succession of kings built hundreds of temples that became for Khmer in the twentieth century a reminder of their culture's greatness. The temples used various blendings of Hindu and Buddhist elements, and served various purposes, as Mabbett and Chandler assert:

These monuments represent a pattern that was to recur often in the question for legitimacy: a group of shrines to previous rulers and their wives, and then a pyramid representing the mountain of the gods, destined to receive the king’s own relics—jewels, gold leaf, hair locks, nail parings, and so forth—after his death. (96)

In particular, King Jayavarman II in the ninth century instituted the cult of the *devaraja* (god-king), whereby ritual ceremonies were performed to observe the linking
of the king with Shiva. Jayavarman and his successors, including Suryavarman II in the
12th century, who constructed Angkor Wat, built massive reservoirs and irrigation
systems, by which they both controlled rice production and reaffirmed their association
with the gods (Figure 3). The temples sought to re-create on earth Mt. Meru, the center
of the mythical home of the gods.

Buddhism also took hold in Cambodia in the early centuries, and while
overshadowed by Hinduism in the early Angkor period, the two did not conflict.
Chandler notes that 10th-century Sanskrit inscriptions telling of King Rajendravarman
indicate that the monarch studied Buddhism and that one of his ministers was Buddhist
(41), but Hinduism remained as a significant influence. Buddhism became the
dominant religion beginning in the 12th century under King Jayavarman VII, who
studied Mahayana Buddhism. The magnificent Bayon, built by Jayavarman VII, is
distinguished by “the smiling faces of the bodhisattva (future Buddha) Avalokitesvara,
whose head is sculpted with four faces gazing north, south, east, and west” (Figure 4).
Jayavarman placed a Buddhist image at the center of the Bayon (Mabbett and Chandler
122). Mahayana Buddhism would be replaced by Theravada Buddhism in later
centuries, but for Khmer today, the monument represents many of the tenets and beliefs
common to both sects (see also chapter 3 of this dissertation).

The rulers and the accomplishments of the Angkor period are viewed with great
pride, and Chandler has noted, the Khmer flag has featured a picture of Angkor Wat
since Cambodia’s independence from the French in 1953 (“From ‘Cambodge’ to
‘Kampuchea’” 38).
Figure 3.
King Suryavarman II, Angkor Wat temple
Figure 4.
Smiling faces of the *bodhisattva*, Bayon, Angkor Thom
Cambodia’s experience of the French

Cambodia became a protectorate of the French in 1863. French missionaries and traders had visited what is now known as Southeast Asia as early as the 17th century, and in the wave of European colonialism that swept the globe in the 19th century, moved into Cochin China (southern Vietnam). Great Britain moved into Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand), and the Netherlands into Java (in modern-day Indonesia). The French realized that Cambodia could serve as an excellent buffer zone between their expanding dominion and pro-British Siam, and thus, Cambodia was swept up into “Indochina.”

In 1847, King Duang took the Khmer throne, and throughout his reign welcomed French missionaries and allowed French exploration. Indeed, Frenchman Henri Mouhot explored and documented the ruins at Angkor (which he later claimed to have “discovered”). In the 1850s and 60s, the French began to filter in greater numbers into Indochina, including Cambodia, and when King Duang died in 1860, his son, Norodom, maintained cordial relations with them. Fearing encroachment by neighboring Thailand and Vietnam, in 1863, Norodom signed a treaty, by which Cambodia became a French protectorate. According to the treaty, Norodom would remain the monarch, and the French would protect Cambodia from its neighbors in exchange for a share of Cambodia’s natural resources, including timber and minerals (Chandler, History of Cambodia 141). Despite revolts by the Khmer people at various points during Norodom’s rule, the French remained in Cambodia for nearly a century, gradually taking more and more control of its administration.
The French came to influence the Khmer in several ways. First, they began to change Cambodia’s political and social structure, particularly by abolishing slavery. As Chandler notes, “by cutting the ties that bound masters and servants—or more precisely, by saying that this was what they hoped to do—the French were able to justify their interference at every level of Cambodian life” (History of Cambodia 144). They began to appoint French officials (through Norodom) to significant positions within Cambodia, and by 1897, installed a resident supérieur, with the authority to promulgate decrees and tax citizens (146). Second, in addition to their own officials, the French began to place Vietnamese, whom they perceived to be better suited to bureaucratic work, in administrative positions in Cambodia. The Khmer had a long-standing concern about Vietnamese invasion, and the French move to encourage Vietnamese to enter Cambodia reinforced their displeasure. These stratagems served to engender Khmer nationalism and thoughts of independence which would play themselves out during the next several decades, until Cambodia actually gained its independence in 1953. Third, the long French occupation caused the indigenization of many French institutions, words, customs, and mannerisms.

Basil Fernando, executive director of the Asian Human Rights Commission, comments that Cambodia is not a post-colonial society of the same sort as are some other nations, such as India or Malaysia. Fernando comments that “newly independent states [...] almost always begin with the old structures used during colonial times,” but “in Cambodia the situation is different” (“Post-Revolutionary Society”). Rather, Cambodia is a post-revolutionary society, which rather than building upon or modifying colonial institutions, must reconstruct institutions or create them anew. And indeed, the
Khmer Rouge regime, discussed below, did destroy much of the administrative structure left by the French. Still, there is undeniable French influence, evident in Khmer architecture, educational systems, foods and enhanced division between rural and urban lifestyles. Generations of Khmer (including my father) were educated in French, and some schools, such as the Institut de Technologie du Cambodge in Phnom Penh, continue to offer their classes only in French. As in previous centuries, when Cambodia greeted travelers from India, China, Java, and Portugal, incorporating elements of these cultures into theirs, so too did the French leave lasting impacts on Khmer society.

The Khmer Rouge

Isolated from nearly all Western contact for four years, the throngs of refugees fleeing to the Thai border after the Vietnamese deposed the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and the horrific stories they shared, shocked the outside world. In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge had "revolutionized" Khmer life, removing all Khmer from Phnom Penh and relocating them in the countryside to work, and to follow the ways of the angkar (organization, the vague term for the Khmer Rouge power). The Khmer Rouge destroyed schools and temples, and forced everyone to work long days in the fields, planting and harvesting rice. Ostensibly, the Khmer Rouge reorganization would make Cambodia a self-sufficient nation.³

The plan failed, and Cambodia did not become a glorious, self-sufficient nation. Rather, the Khmer Rouge effected shocking brutality and genocide. During their control, by separating parents from children and husbands from wives, destroying Buddhist temples, outlawing private property, and randomly executing any who
disobeyed orders, the Khmer Rouge fractured Khmer spirits. Khmer rarely saw the fruits of their labors, and thousands starved to death. The trauma suffered by both those who did and did not survive will never adequately be ascertained. Economically, physically, psychologically, and emotionally, Cambodia was left shattered. Perhaps more than a million people, including ethnic Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, Chams, and others perished at the hands of Khmer Rouge madness. In 1984, American movie director Roland Joffé chronicled the terror of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in The Killing Fields. While brilliantly directed and produced, arguably no film can adequately depict the sorrow and pain felt by the Khmer during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Though outwardly overshadowed by present-day events, the memories of that time, and the destruction left in their wake, will never fully disappear.

UNTAC

Frederick Z. Brown, fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, notes that “after 1975 [Cambodia] became a regional theater for cold-war politics and Sino-Soviet rivalry” (4). After the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, the then-Soviet Union supported the Vietnamese-backed People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) installed in 1979, and acquired military bases in Vietnam. This, notes Brown, “irritat[ed] China and directly challeng[ed] the United States in the South China Sea and the western Pacific.” As a result,

China, the United States, and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) began to lend encouragement to the three exiled Cambodian factions (the Khmer Rouge and the two
noncommunist groups), and in 1982 these factions joined in uneasy alliance against the Vietnamese occupation. As the anti-Phnom Penh insurgency grew, the situation in Cambodia became simultaneously a civil war, a regional war, and a great-power war by proxy. (4)

The Khmer continued to suffer. The international community, led by the five Permanent Members of the Security Council of the United Nations, decided to map out a strategy of international intervention to end the conflict (Peou, Intervention and Change 248-49). A series of meetings ensued, and in October 1991, nineteen nations involved in the meetings, including the four Khmer factions, signed the “Agreements on a Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict,” which became known colloquially as the Paris Peace Agreements, or Paris Agreements.

Part of the Paris Agreements specified that an international organization, the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), would guide Cambodia on the first leg of its journey toward democracy: free and fair elections. “Deployed in early 1992,” Brown writes, “in March 1993 UNTAC comprised 15,764 military personnel, 3,584 civilian police, and 991 civilian administrators, plus about 700 ‘U.N. volunteers’” (5). UNTAC poured into Cambodia to scout out areas for and later set up polling stations for the election. It enacted an Electoral Law, specifying who was eligible to vote, and oversaw the voter registration process. It set up a radio station to disperse information about the election process (Radio UNTAC).

The elections took place in May 1993. The end result of the election was a coalition structure made up of four different parties. This multi-party government became officially known as the Royal Cambodian Government (RCG), and promulgated the Constitution of Cambodia in September 1993 (see also section on
“Democracy in Cambodia” in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. The positive and negative consequences of UNTAC continue to be debated, but the 1993 elections undeniably mark a turning point in Khmer history. As he left Cambodia, Achmand K.P. Mochtan, a former UNTAC Human Rights officer, reflected, “With a Constitution and a King in place, and hopefully also a continuous support from a number of friends, Cambodia looks ready to chart a new history as a peaceful and unified country” (21).

Khmer identity today is informed by all of the above events and circumstances: the legacy of Angkor, that of French romanticism, genocide, post-revolutionism, international intervention, and survival.

A Qualitative Paradigm

I began this dissertation effort knowing that I would use a qualitative approach. One could learn much about democracy in Cambodia by approaching it quantitatively, by examining voter registration and ballot reports, and analyzing the data by commune or village, for example. Certainly, I could have designed a survey in which respondents rated their feelings about voting, assigning their feelings a numeric value, and subsequently analyzed the responses. However, I wanted to learn the sense Khmer have about given issues, their definitions of terms and concepts, the interpretations they assign to events and circumstances. I agree with sociologist Bruce Berg, who suggests that “qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to,” and allow the researchers “to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives” (6).
Research questions. In formulating my study, I delineated several broad research questions about modern-day Cambodia: First, the preamble to the 1993 Constitution asserts that Cambodia is a "multi-party liberal democratic regime." Is it, in fact, operating under the principles inherent in such a regime? What are Cambodia's other options? In the 20th century, does Cambodia follow the American model, or that of England or Thailand, in what might be termed a democratic monarchy? Would Cambodia be best served by a benevolent dictator? By a network of regional governments? As a protectorate of another country? If Cambodia does wish to become a democracy, what has it done or is it currently doing to establish it? To sustain it?

As background for the present project, I searched for studies of democracy in Cambodia. One of the first is a Yale university monograph series, entitled Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations, and the International Community, edited by Ben Kiernan. This collection of essays serves as an excellent resource, discussing effects on the overall population and village life, for example; however, as the title indicates much of the focus is on the Khmer Rouge period and the period following the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge, up to the UNTAC occupation (circa 1975-1991). At the time of the text's publication, Cambodia had just held the 1993 elections, and UNTAC was still present. The series of essays in Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood's Propaganda, Politics, and Violence: Democratic Transition Under United-Nations Peacekeeping includes analysis of UNTAC, including an overview of the voting process, the situation of ethnic minorities during the UNTAC occupation, and the positions and actions of various political parties involved in the
1993 elections. They provide the reader with much-needed background about the political parties and their relationships to each other. This study, too, is (rightly) limited, here to the UNTAC period.

Sorpong Peou’s Intervention and Change in Cambodia: Towards Democracy? provides an overview of the workings of Khmer political systems in the 20th century, beginning with Cambodia’s independence from French control in 1953, through the elections of 1998. His study, which “seeks to identify the ‘thorns’ that ‘choked’ the democratic seeds sown in Cambodia” (2), is one of the most comprehensive. However, Peou dedicates much of the book to comparing various regimes; for example, he distinguishes Lon Nol’s “republican authoritarianism” from the PRK/SOC “socialist dictatorship.” Peou posits that given the recurrent political milieu (the lack of what he terms a “hurting balance of power”) in which Cambodia continually finds itself, democracy will not work in Cambodia.

David Roberts also examines the appropriateness of democracy (which he terms the “liberal project”) in Cambodia, and thus, his study was essential to my research. Roberts’ approach, however, focuses on Cambodia’s various factional leaders—Norodom Sihanouk, Hun Sen, Khieu Samphan, and other high-ranking officials—and how leaders’ concern with power-building and control hindered democratic efforts. He examines leaders’ patterns of behavior and how these were basically ignored by the international community in its intervention. “Democratic transition,” he writes, “was quite clearly impeded by resistance from elite political culture” (138).

These and other analyses of Khmer politics, including Grant Curtis’ Cambodia Reborn: The Transition to Democracy and Development, informed the present project.
I refer to these authors and their theories throughout the dissertation. However, I felt that in order to ascertain what Khmer are thinking about democracy, it was necessary to ask and listen to the responses of the people themselves. Thus, beyond the institutional components came questions that move the research from rhetoric and/or policy to people. What does kar bracheathhibtey (democracy) mean to Khmer? What do Khmer believe is important for their survival, sustenance, and success in the 21st century and beyond? Are the key concepts of democracy synchronous with these requirements? What are the implications of democracy for sociocultural issues: human rights issues, education, religion, economics, and gender relations, for example? How do Khmer think political or structural changes will affect Khmerness?

In May of 2000, as I was preparing my dissertation proposal, I discovered a very brief, yet critical document, entitled Democracy in Cambodia: Theories and Realities. In this 1995 monograph, Khmer scholar Aun Porn Moniroth articulated the basic premise of my project: that the “general characteristics” of Khmer society affect how democracy will or will not take root. For Aun, eight characteristics—1) economic, technical, and material bases; 2) social structure; 3) racial characteristics; 4) cultural conditions; 5) tradition in governance; 6) psychological and moral values of society; 7) legal environment; and 8) political characteristics—affect democracy in Cambodia. I agree with Aun that Khmer history, religion, and the like do and will continue to guide the path democracy takes in the 21st century. Aun’s analysis, however, focuses on the “many contradictions and objective difficulties bearing strong influence” on democracy. Cambodia, he asserts, unfortunately lacks the prerequisites for democracy. I believe—
and my respondents in this study tend to agree--that there is much in Khmer culture that will allow democracy to take root, if not flourish therein.

My study differs from those of Kiernan et al., Roberts, Peou, and Aun, moreover, in that in addition to discussing structural changes, I also introduce the perspectives of the individuals who are living through these structural changes. In a sense, I pick up where the authors leave off, as I examine what Khmer, given yet another regime—here, an at least skeletal democratic structure—are doing to promote democracy on-the-ground (and perhaps to achieve Peou’s “hurting balance”). Thus mine is as much a study of intercultural relations as it is a comparison of civic policies. As a student of American Studies, moreover, I engage an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to the topic.

**Research design.**

Knowing the types of questions I wanted to ask, I needed to determine the scope of my research. How does one take the pulse of a country of nearly twelve million? (Cambodia Statistical Yearbook 2001 3).

**Data sources.** Within the confines of this dissertation, I simply could not conduct a random sampling of people in Cambodia. Rather, I conducted what Barry Glassner et al. call purposive sampling, in which I selected subjects who represent a particular segment of the population—here, those with knowledge of and/or access to the formal processes by which democracy functions in Cambodia (qtd. in Berg 110). I selected the respondents for this survey with respect to the likelihood of their (or their organizations’) involvement in the democracy debate. From the initial purposive
sample, I wanted to further limit the interviewees to persons and organizations not resolutely linked to the government of Cambodia, nor to any political party. I do not wish to suggest that representatives as such would not have provided valuable information. However, “official” party lines or government stances may be garnered from speeches, decrees, and publications, and indeed, I refer to these throughout this dissertation. Various parties’ positions are neither ignored nor discounted in this study as a whole; however, in my thesis I hoped to provide a more impartial environment for dialogue about an oftentimes volatile topic. To the extent possible, I wished to interview nonpartisan, neutral respondents, and those interested in and involved in the democratic process. 5

The NGO Community in Cambodia

The term non-governmental organization, or NGO, refers to an organization that is neither based in nor run by government, and is not created to earn profit. As such, NGOs may include voluntary associations, charitable organizations, community associations, women’s rights groups, and others. The organizing principle for “NGOs” in this study therefore also includes non-partisan media associations, think-tanks, and student organizations in addition to human rights and democracy groups specifically identified as NGOs.

An Asia Development Bank (ADB) study of NGOs in Cambodia divides their involvement into six periods, three of which are relevant for discussion here: 1979-1982: Emergency Aid; 1982-1990: Reconstruction; and 1991-present: Liberalization (A Study of NGOs 6). 6 After the Khmer Rouge fell from power in 1979, the first NGOs to appear in Cambodia—in fact, the only NGOs allowed in Cambodia—were
humanitarian organizations, emergency aid and relief-oriented groups. All were international in origin, and focused on delivering medical treatment, food, water, sanitation, and the like. Due to government restrictions in place at that time, most of the aid could only be administered through United Nations’ agencies, and even these were limited in terms of the type of work they could do and even where they could administer help. Between 1982 and 1990, the environment in Cambodia became even more restrictive, and little NGO activity, again all international, took place. ADB states that less than fifteen international NGOs were permitted to operate in Cambodia during this time, and because many Western countries did not recognize the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, the presence of the NGOs was carefully monitored.

Beginning with the UNTAC occupation, however, and particularly after the 1993 elections, the number of NGOs in Cambodia blossomed. Within the last decade, the number of international NGOs grew and then stabilized at approximately two hundred (NGO Statement, 2001). The first local-national NGO, Khemara, was formed in 1991, and the number of local NGOs has since skyrocketed to six or seven hundred, by some estimates (NGO Statement, 2000).

The question of funding remains complex. As the 1999 ADB report asserts, “No comprehensive information is available concerning the disbursement of funds by local NGOs, but it may be assumed that a majority of these funds are part of international NGO disbursements” (A Study of NGOs 17). Practically speaking, there are few local NGOs which could operate (at least initially) solely on their own funds, as the cost of maintaining staff and providing services is enormous (see Table 2). However, there are different levels of international funding. The ADB study delineates
these as “adopted-” versus “independent-” level NGOs. On one hand, the adopted NGOs are those which are derived directly from parent international organizations. The Cambodian Health-Education Development NGO, for example, was developed by the International Red Cross, from which they may receive direction, and from which they enjoy protection and support. One the other hand, the independent NGOs were formed in Cambodia, and do not have headquarters stationed in another country. The local independent NGO hires its own staff, creates its own bylaws, develops and manages its own projects. While the independent NGOs may receive funding from larger, international organizations, the local-national staff have the authority to make decisions about how such funding is used. Moreover, ADB establishes, “there is a tendency among local [independent] NGOs to become less dependent on one single funding agency and to diversify their activities,” and also, to receive funding from expatriate Khmer living in the United States, Australia, France, and Canada, and to attempt to generate their own funds (A Study of NGOs 17). They are therefore less likely to feel compelled to follow non-Khmer directives based on monetary obligations. This study draws from the latter, independent group.

I used existing sources to identify and contact local agencies, associations, and individuals whose names and/or actions could be linked to democracy in some way. For example, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC), a network of organizations in Cambodia “committed to facilitating the exchange of information among the development community and to providing a forum for co-ordination on issues of common concern,” publishes a paper directory and maintains a website with
Table 2. NGO Disbursement, 1998-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NGO disbursement (in US dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>$82,858,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$74,573,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$76,602,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>$71,322,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$93,300,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$398,658,748</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from NGO disbursement by sector, 1998-2002 Council for the Development for Cambodia

links to agencies and personnel concentrating on specific issues, including democracy and good governance (CCC homepage). I began the process with a rather lengthy list; suffice it to say that in the end, I did not interview many individuals who could have provided excellent and significant information. While they certainly could have provided insight into the working of NGOs in Cambodia, I narrowed the list by first eliminating NGOs dealing directly with disability and rehabilitative efforts (e.g., recovering from landmine injury), and those providing direct medical services. I also excluded organizations whose primary focus is environmental or wildlife conservation. Again, were time and resources not of concern, I would have been happy to interview a representative of every NGO in Cambodia, but this was not possible. Upon reviewing the question areas I wished to cover, I decided to interview two groups of Khmer.
The first group of respondents includes the directors and founders of NGOs in the broad definition discussed above: educators, intellectuals, citizen groups, and civic associations that devote their efforts to democracy, human rights, and civil society. Khmer political scientist Kao Kim Hourn has noted the importance of think-tanks in discussing democracy in Cambodia. A general fear still manifests itself in Khmer society, notes Kao, and there is a great need for a forum in which popular concerns are discussed, a “need for a new pole or a new center of neutrality in which the people could trust.” As “the emergence of think tanks and civil society in Cambodia could in part serve the needs and interests of the people and society,” it was imperative that I speak with participants in these think-tanks (6). Also, among the many NGOs in Cambodia, I focused on indigenous local-national groups. While there are certainly international NGOs working on democracy, as Anne Rademacher asserts in her discussion of NGOs in Nepal, “national NGOs are closer to the target communities and probably have cultural and social insights which foreigners lack; they have the potential to be better mobilizers of resources within local communities” (10). I chose individuals in positions that allowed them both to be aware of the current democratic dialogue, and to be able effect change as a result. In total, I interviewed 32 NGO directors, association presidents, and other representatives. The list of organizations from which I selected my respondents appears below (Figure 5). The breakdown of each organization by number of staff, location of headquarters, rural branches, mission statement, and other information is included in Appendix A.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of organization</th>
<th>Name of organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>1. Buddhist Institute (newly reopened 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Royal University of Phnom Penh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Royal University of Fine Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. The Royal Academy of Cambodia (Graduate school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THINK-TANKS</td>
<td>5. Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. The Center for Advanced Study (CAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Center for Social Development (CSD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Star Kampuchea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIA ASSOCIATIONS</td>
<td>9. Khmer Journalists Association (KJA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. League of Khmer Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Women’s Media Centre (WMC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Khmer Writer’s Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATIONS</td>
<td>13. Khmer Women’s Voice Centre (KWVC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Khmer Women’s Cooperation for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Cambodian Institute for Human Rights (CIHR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“DEMOCRACY-RELATED” NGOs</td>
<td>18. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. Volunteer Youth Congress for Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. The Forum for the Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21. Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22. United Neutral Khmer Students (UNKS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.
Data Sources
University Students

In formulating the study, moreover, I wanted to ensure that I was getting a fair sense of how most Khmer feel about their lives and these issues. I wanted to proceed relatively confident that the individuals and groups interviewed were indeed acting in the interests of Khmer people. But against what control should I measure? Obviously, within the confines of time, human resources, finances, and space to report, a dissertation is not sufficient to cover a truly representative sample of Khmer across geographic, age, gender, and socioeconomic variables. However, I did wish to interview additional individuals who were not part of the first group (hereafter, "NGO group"), such that I could informally triangulate their responses with those of the NGO group. Thus, I chose a second focus group: university students in Phnom Penh.

Again, while not a random sampling in the technical sense (cf. Berg), university students in Phnom Penh come from throughout the country, from both towns and villages, and represent a variety of geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds (see Figure 6). University students tend to fall into the 18-25 year-old age group, which on the whole is younger than the representatives of the NGO group (see Table 4, below). In asking questions such as, “What is a Khmer?” and “What do Khmer want?”, I wanted to feel confident that I was not simply hearing nostalgic remembrances of pre-Khmer Rouge days. A group of university students likely includes those who are aware of and discuss current issues with each other. Students have a vested interest in helping Cambodia prosper, and plan to be actively involved in Cambodia’s future post-graduation.
I gathered information from Khmer university students from three of the major institutions of education in the country: the Royal University of Phnom Penh, the Faculty of Law and Economic sciences, and the Faculty of Business (also known as the National Institute of Management). In total, I analyze the responses of 76 students. The breakdown of respondents by group, gender, and age appears below.\(^9\)

There were a significantly higher percentage of males than females in the study (see Table 3). This imbalance reflects the overall imbalance of Khmer men to Khmer women in higher education, and in positions of authority, even within non-governmental organizations.\(^10\) The females who were included, however, are dedicated and tireless, and their responses should not be discounted.
Table 3. Breakdown of respondents by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Group</td>
<td>71% (54)</td>
<td>29% (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;NGO&quot; Group</td>
<td>75% (24)</td>
<td>25% (08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>72% (78)</td>
<td>28% (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Breakdown of respondents by gender and age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-21</th>
<th>22-25</th>
<th>26-29</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-21</th>
<th>22-25</th>
<th>26-29</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey. In order to assess democracy in Khmer society, with the help of my committee, I developed a questionnaire which emerged from the issues generated by my broad research questions. As is common in developing surveys, particularly those that address controversial topics, the survey begins with general questions, designed to be mundane and not exceedingly probing, yet still informative for the researcher. It would not have been prudent to begin immediately with questions about either identity or democracy, as shall become clearer in later chapters of the dissertation, for both are delicate issues. Rather, I planned to begin with questions about what things Khmer were happy about in their lives today, and what issues were most important for them in contemporary Cambodia. I would ask each of the respondents if he or she had a vision of Cambodia’s future—how Cambodia could be, and how he or she might be involved in creating that future. I would then move the questions toward those which focused on Khmer identity issues, and finally, on democracy.

The complete list of questions, originally formulated in English, is included in Appendix B. As the respondents were Khmer, however, I then translated the questionnaire into Khmer language for use in the field. I speak, read, and write Khmer well; however, as it is not my native language, I enlisted the help of several Khmer research assistants to translate and “test” the questions, to ensure that correct translations of both vocabulary and concepts were used, and that the questions would be easily understood by respondents. I used a form of back-translation, similar to that described by organizational psychology professor Richard Brislin, in which one bilingual person whose native language is English (me) translates the questions to Khmer, followed by another bilingual person whose native language is Khmer (my
research assistants) independently translating the questions back to English. We then discussed the results, and modified the questions as necessary. The list of survey questions in Khmer is included in Appendix C.

**Data collection.** After several months of preparation—setting interview appointments, refining the survey, completing background research, etc.—the actual interviews were completed from June to August 2002. Notably, several respondents followed-up their interviews via telephone and email, and as a result I conducted one final interview in June 2003. The additional information gathered therein also appears in this dissertation. I used a semistandardized interview approach, by which I conducted the interviews with a number of predetermined questions, as noted above. I functioned as an “announced” researcher, meaning that before beginning each interview, I identified myself to the potential respondent as a doctoral university student seeking to ask a series of questions about Khmer society. All interviews were voluntary, and respondents retained the right not to answer any question(s). Most of the interviews with members of the NGO group were arranged in advance, for practical reasons (most keep very busy schedules) and cultural reasons (I wished to show respect for the individual by introducing myself via an initial visit, telephone or email inquiry, or letter, the purpose of which was to arrange a second visit during which I would conduct the interview). Some in the NGO group permitted an on-site interview during the initial visit, and oftentimes, the target respondent would suggest another individual for interview, and that person was brought directly into the interview process by the original interviewee.
Figure 6.
Breakdown of student respondents by province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banteay Meanchey</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battambang &amp; Pailin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampot &amp; Kep</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koh Kong</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kompong Cham</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kompong Chhnang</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kompong Speu</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kompong Thom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kratie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mondulkiri</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oddar Meanchey</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preah Vihear</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prey Veng</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursat</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratanakiri</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siem Reap</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sihanoukville</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stung Treng</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svay Rieng</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takeo</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not indicate</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews with members of the student group, for the most part, were not scheduled in advance. Rather, I observed when large numbers of students congregated before and after classes, and approached individuals during these times. At times, an individual would request to meet at another time, and schedule in advance. Also, sometimes students I had already interviewed had friends and acquaintances who wanted to be interviewed, and I would arrange in advance to meet with them at given times.

Although the interviews were conducted during June, July, and August 2002, I maintained contact with many of my respondents via email and telephone subsequent to the interviews. The survey questions used for students were the same as those used for the NGO group (see Appendix B). While some of the respondents spoke some English, it immediately became clear that they were more comfortable responding in Khmer, and with few exceptions, the entire set of interviews was conducted in Khmer. For each interview, I was accompanied by a native Khmer speaker (one of my research assistants), who explained Khmer terms with which I was unfamiliar, and elaborated on issues as necessary. I asked the questions systematically and consistently for each interviewee; however, I allowed each respondent to answer the questions as concisely or as prolifically as he or she saw fit. Although I formulated the questionnaire to address certain issues, the questions were open-ended, and the respondents were free to digress, relating personal stories or examples as part of their responses. The positive and negative consequences of this methodology are discussed below (see “Limitations of the Research”). All of the interviews were conducted in Phnom Penh.
Data analysis. Analysis of qualitative data is not an exact science. Berg comments that "there are no easy ways to describe specific tactics for developing categories," and basically, "the development of categories in any content analysis must derive from inductive inference," identifying "patterns that emerge from the data" (115). Following other ethnographers, I chose to analyze the content of the interviews using open coding, checking for patterns in vocabulary, phraseology, and theme. I then made the link between what Anselm Strauss has called "in vivo codes," the literal terms and phrases used by the interview respondents, and sociological constructs, explanations and interpretations formulated by me as the researcher (qtd. in Berg 108). These constructs formed the framework for the discussion throughout the dissertation.

Notably, these constructs do not follow the original schedule of questions; that is, in this dissertation I do not simply provide, in order, an amalgamation of all of the respondents' answers to each of the questions. Rather, I draw from the material to recreate the pictures of Khmer identity and Khmer society as they impressed me.

All interview responses for the student group are identified by gender and age only. Those in the NGO group were accustomed to being interviewed, and expressed no reservations about being identified by name and organizational affiliation.

Limitations of the research.

My research efforts are intended as an initial endeavor to illuminate the issues of democracy in Cambodia, as related by Khmer. I do not purport to capture all of the issues which concern Khmer, nor do I purport to capture the concerns of all Khmer on any one given issue. There are several limitations to the research.
I was generally very well-received in Phnom Penh. Most of the organizations contacted agreed to interviews, and the respondents did not indicate any unease with my presence. However, the very presence of a researcher undoubtedly affects the ways in which individuals respond in that setting. First, consciously or unconsciously, respondents may have reacted to me as a foreigner and an American, answering questions differently than they might to an indigenous researcher. A certain amount of distrust was to be expected, particularly given both the history of U.S.-Cambodia relations, and recent interactions of Khmer with foreigners. There are undoubtedly cultural implications for me as a female researcher, as ordinarily, in Cambodia males achieve higher education much more commonly than females (see Tables 3 and 4, above), and some may have been surprised to see a female conducting a major research project. I attempted to minimize this first set of limitations by being open about the purposes of my research, and agreeing to provide individuals (by request) with copies of my final report. As mentioned, I also conducted the interviews in Khmer, and my primary research assistant, who accompanied me to most of the scheduled interviews, is male. Perhaps his presence mitigated the effects of an outspoken female (relatively speaking).

Second, representatives of organizations may have had specific goals and philosophies about achieving those goals in mind, and thus geared their responses toward those goals. I attempted to offset these limitations in the study as a whole by interviewing individuals from various types of organizations (e.g., media associations, human rights associations, etc.), and by interviewing the second, student group.
Third, the current study was limited to Phnom Penh. While many of the organizations had affiliates or branches in provincial areas, most democracy-related activity is rooted in Phnom Penh (see chapters 5, 6, 7). The timeline for the study did not allow for extensive travel to provincial areas. I do, however, anticipate visiting these areas in future research efforts.

Fourth, my background as an interdisciplinary researcher proved both beneficial and disadvantageous. I was not bound by any set of theories or research strategies going into the research, and I utilized different techniques as situations warranted. During the data collection, for example, I found it helpful to draw upon both anthropological strategies and my training in intercultural communication. However, as an interdisciplinarian, my methodology as a whole—design, data collection, and analysis—does not follow the tradition of any one field, and thus may be difficult to weigh against other studies. My hope is that despite this latter point, I let the respondents tell me what democracy is, what its effects have been, how it should be worked out, etc., rather than molding the data to preconceived notions. The following chapter weaves together a narrative based upon the responses of those I interviewed. First, it addresses Khmer identity, past, present, and future. Second, it discusses the issues and concerns Khmer have about their present life in Cambodia, and inquires about their hopes for the future. Third, it sets the stage for questions I asked about kar bracheathibtey (democracy) itself.
CHAPTER 3.
WHAT IS A KHMER? BOUNDARIES AND CENTERS

Many, many years ago, our great ancestor, Kaundinya, an Indian Brahman priest, dreamt that if he sailed to the shores of a great lake, he would find fortune. So Kaundinya took his magic bow and arrow and set out to sea, and eventually came upon a Great Lake. There he saw a young woman in a small boat. She was Princess Soma, the beautiful daughter of the Naga King. Kaundinya shot an arrow from his divine bow, and pierced the side of Princess Soma’s boat. She was frightened at first, but eventually Soma and Kaundinya fell in love and married. As a wedding gift to the couple, the Naga King drank the water of the lake, leaving an immense fertile plain behind. This land would become Nokor Phnom, the first Kingdom of Cambodia, and together Kaundinya and Soma formed the beginning of the royal dynasty, from which all Khmer kings are descended.

The Origin of the Khmer, oral legend

This legend tells of the origin of Kampuchea, or Cambodia, as the result of the union between a Brahmin prince and a naga (dragon or sea-serpent) princess. Into this first kingdom, which became known as Funan (possibly a Chinese pronunciation of the Khmer Phnom, meaning mountain) in later chronicles, Kaundinya introduced Hindu and Indian elements, including legal traditions and the Sanskrit language, which blended with local customs to form a unique Khmer realm (Knappert 164).

To the academician/historian, such rendering of Khmer origins may seem unsound. Admittedly, one might look to scientific data, such as archeological finds, as more conclusive records of the Khmer past. Whether all of the details of the story have counterparts verifiable by carbon-dating or other objective techniques, however, does not impact its authenticity for Khmer as part of their identity narrative. Stories, or myths, are part of an explanatory system, and can be viewed as a culture’s means of
resolving critical binary oppositions: life-death, male-female, nature-culture (Levi-Strauss). Moreover, the importance of a “myth,” as a sacred narrative, as a cultural story, is its salience for those who are part of, or identify with it.

From legends and folk stories, to the chronicles of kings inscribed on temple walls, to the Jataka tales of the life of Siddhartha Gautama before he became the Buddha, to memoirs of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge, Khmer narratives help to explicate Khmer worldview, unifying disparate complexities into an integrated whole.² Thus the Khmer origin legend, as a narrative of the people, gives expression to some of the elements of what it means to be Khmer. While there are different versions of the legend, inherent in each is the blending of two different entities, foreign and native, human and animal, “culture” and “nature,” and their attendant belief systems (Chandler, History of Cambodia 13). From the very beginnings of Khmer narrative history, we see the incorporation and reconciliation of divergent worlds to form “Khmerness.” This theme recurs throughout the Khmer journey.³

Niels Mulder, an independent anthropologist, appropriately observes that since all cultures are dynamic, “emphasizing mixing and blending may reveal precious little about the culture under study, perhaps no more than ‘boats float’ does as a statement about shipping” (17). So why should we examine Cambodia’s syncretism and flexibility?⁴ What does knowledge of this blending add to our understanding of democracy in Cambodia? I argue that it is the ability and willingness of the Khmer to blend different, seemingly incompatible philosophies and ideas that will enable them to integrate democracy into an ostensibly impermeable hierarchical society.⁵
This chapter seeks to recount the narratives illustrating what it means to be Khmer today, focusing on the motif of cultural blending while still retaining Khmerness. I seek to answer the question, What are the “boundaries and centers” of Khmer culture? (Spickard, personal communication). All cultures have processes by which they order and interpret their environment. Mary Douglas, a renowned (and now retired) anthropologist who has taught at Princeton, Northwestern, and the University College of London, comments that “the universe is a system of imputed rules,” and using our own distinctions, we can distinguish firstly, physical Nature, inorganic (including rocks, stars, rivers) and organic (vegetable and animal bodies, with rules governing their growth, lifespan, and death); secondly, human behavior; thirdly the interaction between these two groups; fourthly, other intelligent beings whether incorporeal like gods, devils and ghosts or mixtures of human and divine or human and animal; and lastly, the interaction between this fourth group and the rest. (qtd. in Lehman and Myers 66)

We all seek to make sense of our surroundings. Accordingly, the Khmer observe a system that encompasses hallmarks, norms, rituals, and rules that tell people they are Khmer. This “cultural glue,” as it were, holds people together in a common group identity (Spickard, personal communication). I argue that the “centers” of Khmerness are broad, and this breadth has allowed Khmer to integrate various influences into a “Khmer” culture, and that this cultural approach will allow them to adopt liberal democracy as a system. Yet Khmer centers are not unlimited. There are rules or codes of conduct, boundaries beyond which one cannot go. Indeed, it is the negotiation between the boundaries and centers, tradition and change, retaining and transforming, which forms the core of an important debate for Khmer today. It is this
negotiation that shapes how democracy in Cambodia will be established and experienced as a Khmer democracy.

From the interviews I conducted with Khmer, from both the NGO and student constituents, I grouped the responses about their views on Khmer identity into seven major themes that recur throughout. These are major groupings, those that came up most consistently in the responses, and are not exhaustive. What is clear, however, is that one is deemed a Khmer on the basis of these criteria, and in fact, one can be deemed “more” Khmer than another. Khmer identity is determined not by a checklist of physical attributes, but rather, by the extent to which one manifests the state of being Khmer. The elements of Khmerness are taught to young children by their parents or other respected individuals, such as the Buddhist monks, reiterated by school curriculums, reinforced by the beliefs of their peers, and codified in both laws and social mores. The seven criteria are as follows:

1) **Ancestry:** To be Khmer is to be born in Cambodia.
2) **Religion/Philosophy:** To be Khmer is to be Buddhist.
3) **Language:** To be Khmer is to speak Khmer.
4) **Knowledge:** To be Khmer is to know Khmer arts, literature, music, dance, and history.
5) **Attitudes and Behavior:** To be Khmer is to be respectful, polite, patient, gentle, modest, honest, and innocent.
6) **Loyalty to and love for country:** To be Khmer is to love Cambodia and the Khmer.
7) **Flexibility:** To be Khmer is to be flexible, to understand the impermanence of things and thus to be able to adapt to changing situations.

As mentioned above, the indicators are simply that—signs that point to characteristics that identify one as a Khmer. The indicators may certainly vary according to individual responses and interpretations, and none should be acclaimed as irrefutable or definitive. They are also ideals. They reflect what and how my
respondents presented Khmerness to me. I introduce them here, however, because as we shall see, they guide how Khmer define and implement democracy in Cambodia.

**Ancestry:**

To be Khmer is to be born in Cambodia, to be descended from ancestors who were born in Cambodia.

**Centers**

As related in the epigraph to this section, an origin myth tells of the birth of the Khmer people from the union of a Brahman prince and a naga princess, and the subsequent creation of Khmer soil from beneath the sea. Quite important to those interviewed is that to be considered Khmer, one should be born on that soil, referred to as *teuk-dey Khmaer* (water & land of the Khmer). As in Angkorian times, the majority of the Khmer people live in rural areas today—nearly 85 percent, according to the most recent census (1998), and more than 75% of the total number of those employed (both urban and rural) during that year relied upon agriculture, forestry, and fisheries for their livelihoods (Cambodia Statistical Yearbook, 2001 21). Thus it is not surprising that an important component of Khmer cosmology is their special connection to land. 7

Correspondingly, in answer to the questions, “What does it mean to be Khmer?” and “How do you know you are a Khmer?,” my respondents referred to a connection to *teuk-dey Khmaer*. Their allusions often differed from each other, but all hearkened back to a sense of greatness, a sense of kinship to “those who built Angkor,” and related connection to the land. In the words of a 23-year-old female student, for example:
Khmer comes from khemreak—khem + reak. Khem refers to a land, or a place. Reak means braveness. So the whole word means a place or country of brave people.

“Khmer=Kambu (‘priest’) + Mera (‘angel’),” added a 22-year-old female, who then recounted another variant of the creation story and the birth of Khmer land. “We are their descendants.” Mabbett and Chandler relate a similar version, in which “some kings of Angkor traced their descent to the union of a solar line with a lunar one, with Kambu and Mera figuring as founders of the solar line and Kaundinya and Soma [. . .] inaugurating the lunar” (8). Said a 21-year-old male: “I was taught that Khmer land is older than other countries’ territory. Khmer people struggled to fight enemies who invaded Khmer territory.” Khmer are very protective of Khmer land; in fact, maintaining “territorial integrity”—that is, not allowing foreigners to usurp Khmer land nor encroach upon Cambodia’s borders—was listed as one of the major issues Khmer must address today.

While the term Khmer often evokes the image of a rice-farmer, and rightly so, Mabbett and Chandler note that for much of their history, Khmer were forest dwellers (23). Khmer lived at the mercy of the elements; the conditions in Cambodia range from extremely hot with tendency toward drought, to monsoon rains and flooding. For Khmer, nature is powerful, and that power must be respected, feared, and appeased. Illness in Khmer culture is attributed to an imbalance in one’s natural environment, expressed, for example, as an excess or lack of khchal (wind). Elements of nature—trees, rocks, rivers—are living creatures, often infused with spirits, the neak-ta (guardian spirit) and meba (ancestor spirit), both benevolent and malevolent.9 “The wilderness was never far away,” write Mabbett and Chandler, and “the immortal and invisible
spirits that dwelled everywhere in the natural environment are fundamental to an understanding of the mental universe of the Khmer” (26).

The connection of the Khmer to the land is a spiritual one, which manifests itself in both devotion and fear. Thus are the ancient Khmer kings recalled with such admiration. As Chandler has noted, with their immense barays (reservoirs) and irrigation systems, the Angkorean kings were able to harness nature’s power, for the benefit of all. One interpretation of the major temples of Angkor Wat is that it reflects the king’s devotion to Shiva (also Siva), the Hindu god of power and destruction, often called upon to protect humans from nature or to bestow mild weather (Figure 7). Siva “was a literary form of an ancestor spirit, held responsible for fertilizing the soil by inducing rain to fall on the region under [the king’s] jurisdiction” (46). King Jayavarman II’s devaraja ceremonies were “unquestionably [part of] a cult linking the monarch with Siva,” and confirmed his control over nature (Chandler, History of Cambodia 34).
Figure 7.
Entrance to Angkor Wat, a temple dedicated to Siva
Throughout the Angkor complex, one sees naga figures, set at the entrances as temple-guardians, as well as apsara (celestial nymphs or heavenly dancers), who mediate between humans and the gods. Royal dancers sought to emulate the movements of the apsara (Figures 8 and 9). As Toni Shapiro comments in her work on Khmer dance, “Indeed, in the Angkor Empire, it was through the medium of the dancers that royal communication with the divine world was effected to guarantee fertility of the land and well-being of the people in the king’s domain” (96).

And yet, inherent in Khmer respect for land, and therefore, inherent in Khmer identity, is an understanding that the borders of what is sruk-Khmaer (Cambodia) have changed in the past, and continue to change. Khmer history is replete with both victories and failures to maintain control over land and water. Thus, they recognize that there are those who were not born within current political boundaries who may indeed be Khmer. There are ethnic Khmer born in the Mekong Delta of what is now (by political boundary) Vietnam, for example. Many Khmer fled to the United States, Australia, the Netherlands, and a host of other countries. Are not their children, although born on foreign soil, still Khmer?

Yi Thon, a Khmer scholar formerly of the Buddhist Institute, told me, “We are not a pure-blood nation. We are a mix from India, indigenous people, and Chinese. And, from the end of the 17th century, we started mixing with Europeans.” In fact, he continued, “while I was researching I found the name Fernandez mentioned—we had Portuguese Catholic missionaries starting in the 15th century” (Personal interview, June 14, 2002). But things are different now, Yi conceded, because now, “it is very difficult to accept outside influences without knowing the dangers of that acceptance. Khmer
culture needs to be strengthened, not diluted. [Otherwise], it's like using a new weapon or medicine without knowing what it is.” The borders of Khmerness are elastic; however, they are not limitless.

**Boundaries**

According to my respondents, in addition to being born in Cambodia oneself, ideally one also should be born of parents who were born in Cambodia. This added generation serves to ensure true Khmerness, they say. One of the Khmer’s greatest fears is that they are disappearing, that their land is being invaded and taken over by foreigners, particularly by the Vietnamese. Thus, just as being born outside of Cambodia’s political boundaries does not exclude one from being Khmer, being born within them does not guarantee that one is a Khmer. For example, Khmer believe that Vietnamese cross the border into Cambodia specifically to give birth, so that their children will be considered Khmer. Their parents are not Khmer, so they are not “real” Khmer, they say. Yet, as many birth records have been lost or destroyed, and as mentioned, many Khmer are displaced, how can one know for sure whether one is born in Cambodia?

It is this difficulty of codification, I believe, that has led to the tripartite categorization of sunhcheat khmaer, chuncheat khmaer, and kaun-khmaer, used in discussions amongst Khmer today. The system as I describe it is imperfect, and there will certainly be those who disagree with the classification. However, as a kaun-kat, one who is the child of one Khmer (and Cambodia-born) parent, yet born herself in the United States, I wanted to know whether or not I am Khmer. At various points during my visits, I heard the above terms used, and wondered just what they meant.
The dictionary definitions of the terms are more similar than not: both
sunhcheat and chuncheat are defined as “nationality,” and kaun-khmaer as simply, “the
Khmer” (Hippocrene Standard Cambodian-English Dictionary 145, 34, 6). In practice,
however, use of the various terms expresses the nuances of Khmerness. I asked my
interviewees whether and what the differences are between chuncheat, sunhcheat, and
kaun-khmaer. For my respondents, to be chuncheat Khmer reflects a physical aspect of
Khmerness, including being born in Cambodia and being of Khmer ancestry, with the
phrase “with/of Khmer blood” sometimes used. The chuncheat Khmer are the Khmer
people, the “true Khmer” with an implied claim to all that is Khmer—land,
employment, schooling, rights, etc. To be sunhcheat Khmer is to be Khmer in
nationality, but not necessarily a “true” Khmer, or one with an original claim to
Khmerness. While chuncheat Khmer are certainly sunhcheat Khmer, the reverse is not
always true.

“Sunhcheat refers to any people who live in Cambodia and then become
nationals even though they were not born in Cambodia,” related an 18-year-old female
from Phnom Penh. “Chuncheat Khmer have Khmer ancestors, Khmer blood, and
Khmer traditions,” added a 20-year-old male, while “sunhcheat Khmer are those who
seek asylum in Cambodia.” A 20-year-old female from Prey Veng noted that
“sunhcheat could be a foreigner who lives in Cambodia for years and becomes a Khmer
national.” This is a great fear—that others realize the greatness of Cambodia (including
natural resources and rich land base), and will become Khmer in nationality, though not
in spirit, and usurp or exploit Khmer land, and flaunt its traditions and customs.
The label of *kaun-khmaer* is more intricate, and will likely play an important role as Cambodia struggles with democracy. Some respondents used *kaun-khmaer* to refer to individuals whose parents are Khmer, and those who are true Khmer by ancestry or genealogy (the term *kaun* means “child”). Some described *kaun-khmaer* as a reference to an early Khmer tribe, or the original Khmer people. Most, however, used the term to denote a state of being, one that embodies the most desirable qualities of Khmerness, such as gentleness, humility, and politeness. “*Kaun-khmaer* originated from Khmer ancestors,” remarked a female student, “and respect and know Khmer culture and history.” A 22-year-old male from Kandal province suggested that “*kaun-khmaer* are known through behavior and tradition.” Comments such as “*kaun-khmaer* love the nation and the homeland,” and related indications that these individuals understand and respect Khmer culture, are typical of those my respondents made. A 22-year-old male from Phnom Penh noted that “*chuncheat* are people born in Cambodia, *sunhcheat* are those who live in Cambodia, and *kaun-khmaer* are ‘the real family of Khmer.’” And another: “*chuncheat* Khmer means those who live in Cambodia and know about Khmer; *sunhcheat*—I don’t know; but *kaun-khmaer* embody national ideals, know about Khmer identity, and are children of the Khmer ancestors” (20-year-old male, Phnom Penh).

While as mentioned above, I did not attempt to validate the linguistic or historical accuracy of any of these assertions, it is obvious that the respondents wanted me to know that to be Khmer means to have a history—one cannot simply show up and “be” a Khmer. Moreover, there is stratification within Khmerness. To be a Khmer, one must connect with *teuk-dey Khmaer*, respect it, and protect it. Cambodia is not for
just anyone who happens to be born there, but rather for those who are descended of
great ancestors who first inhabited it, and who understand and appreciate it. As
Cambodia democratizes and Khmer begin to mix, collectively and individually, with
others, the definitions of Khmer have become politicized, codified by laws and
designated by government-issued cards, for example. As such, it is perhaps the kaun-
khmaer, who may or may not be sunhcheat khmer or chuncheat khmer, or may shift
from one category to the other as legal definitions change, who still in their broad
characterization love, understand, and appreciate Cambodia and Khmerness, who will
act as guides for Cambodia as it enters a new era.

Religion/Philosophy: To be Khmer is to be Buddhist.

Several noted scholars of Khmer history and culture have recorded that “To be
Khmer is to be Buddhist” (e.g., Ebihara, Svay; Ebihara, Mortland, and Ledgerwood;
Smith-Hefner). The significance of Buddhism in the lives of Khmer people cannot be
exaggerated. Importantly, however, Khmer Buddhism reflects the fluid nature of
Khmer belief systems generally, incorporating Hinduism, animism, and other
influences. Buddhism emphasizes a “middle path” between the extremes of self-
mortification and self-indulgence, while also encouraging followers to cultivate a
questioning mind and to search for one’s individual truth.14 As such, the nature of
Buddhism itself is rather flexible, and while there are guidelines one should follow in
life, “it is a faith which focuses on individual consciousness and state of mind rather
than acting as an institutional religious force” (Meagher 41).
This section argues that Buddhism provides both liberties and purlieus for Khmer. The Khmer Buddhist design is flexible enough to allow for individual freedom (and related responsibility); however, Buddhist thinking is not so porous as to fully accept any or all other religions or doctrines to permeate it. There are both centers and boundaries to Khmer Buddhism, and these condone individual freedom, yet also restrict lack of respect for others’ rights and inhibit lawlessness. Similarly, democratic thinking supports individual choice, yet encourages one do to so within the context of responsibility to others within society, rather than license to simply do whatever one pleases.

**Centers: General Principles of Khmer Buddhism**

The state religion in the present day, Theravada Buddhism came to dominate Cambodia in the 13th century. Theravada Buddhism teaches the writings of Siddhartha Gautama (also spelled Siddhattha Gotama), an Indian prince, who renounced his right to the throne to become a religious seeker early in his life. He first sought out and studied the meditative and ritual practices of Brahman and other spiritual teachers, and later with the ascetics, who taught him the disciplines of self-mortification. But Gautama attained “enlightenment” of his own volition, via meditation under a Bodhi Tree. After reaching enlightenment, he became known as the Buddha, and became a spiritual teacher. The basic teachings of the Buddha are known as *dhamma*.

The *dhamma* teaches that the physical universe is comprised of many planes of existence (e.g., heavenly, human, animal). In all of these planes, life is subject to impermanence, caught in a cycle of birth and death. Because of this impermanence, existence is inherently unsatisfactory, since all forms of life are changing.
(impermanent), without any inner core or substance. Thus, the dhamma states that there are “Four Noble Truths” in life: 1) existence is sorrow; 2) the origin of sorrow is desire; 3) sorrow ceases when desire ceases; 4) the way to end desire is to follow the Eightfold path. Recognizing the four noble truths and subsequently following the Eightfold path can lead one away from impermanence and suffering to nirvana, a blissful eternal state in which there is no suffering.

The Eightfold path, in turn, is most easily described in terms of three themes: first, wisdom, involving 1) right understanding of the nature of existence, of the four noble truths; and 2) right intention of conducting one’s life and relations with compassion and loving kindness, avoiding sensuality, ill-will, and cruelty. Second is the theme of moral discipline, involving 3) right speech, speaking quietly and gently, refraining from lying, angry words, or idle gossip; 4) right action, respecting the lives of all others and following the Five Precepts of abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication; and 5) right livelihood, in which one earns an honest living through an occupation that does not cause harm or injustice to others. Third, the theme of concentration involves 6) right effort, attempting to avoid or reject “unhealthy” qualities, while developing healthy ones; 7) right mindfulness, or awareness of one’s body, feelings, and mind, and ideas, so as not be led astray; and 8) right concentration, achieved through meditation, which involves both the active state of practice and the passive state of realization. By following this path, one can eventually attain nirvana.

Finally, the dhamma teaches that one must proceed through a series of lives before he or she can reach nirvana, because of kam (karma), “the notion that one’s
actions in previous lives and the resulting store of merit \((bon)\) that one has accumulated determine one’s current life situation” (Smith-Hefner 34). The Venerable Maha Ghosananda, a renowned Khmer Buddhist monk, suggests that Khmer are reincarnated sixteen times. One’s \(kam\) (karma) determines whether one is reborn as a human or as an animal, and into what level or status. Thus, one is reincarnated over and over, endeavoring to balance his or her \(kam\), until he or she “gets it right,” as reflected in the following proverb:

\[
\text{Thwoe bon ban bon, thwoe bap ban bap:}
\]

If you sow goodness, you will receive goodness in return; if you sow evil, so you will receive evil.

Observing the proverb above, the guideline is that if one follows Buddhist or other moral teachings, one will be reborn in a higher state. If one practices evil, however, one will be reborn in a lower state. Those who are powerful now are seen to have accumulated a lot of merit in previous lives (e.g., the King). Most young males, including H.M. King Norodom Sihanouk, become monks for a short period of time during their lives, as this act is believed to help one accumulate merit and honor for one’s family (cf. Ebihara, Svay).

Until the Khmer Rouge abolished the \(sangha\) (monkhood) in 1975, the \(wat\) (temple) served as the conduit for disseminating cultural knowledge to the community, through Pali chants, the \(chhap\) (didactic verses), the \(Gatiloke\) (folktales), and epics such as the \(Reamker\) (the Khmer version of the Ramayana story). According to David Ayres, “the bonzes taught the children to read sacred Cambodian texts, such as the satras, instructed them in the precepts of Buddhism, informed them about Cambodian oral and
literary traditions, and provided them with the opportunity to develop vocational skills, such as carpentry, that could be easily associated with their rural lifestyle” (12-13).

When asked when or in what situations they felt “very” Khmer, my respondents mentioned “going to the temple,” or making offerings at the temple during different Buddhist holy days, which punctuate the Khmer calendar and give meaning to their lives. While one ostensibly can follow the dhamma in seclusion, usually the wat is (with a noted resurgence in the past decade) the focal point of Khmer life. Located centrally in every village, the wat functions as a shrine, a school, a social center, and a place of refuge (Figures 10 and 11). Most Khmer worship in and support the wat nearest their homes (Mortland 61). There are nearly 4,000 wat in Cambodia today, including more than 90 in Phnom Penh. Important Buddhist holy days mentioned by my respondents include Chol Vassa, commemorating the beginning of the season when young men join the sangha and go into retreat, held in July; Bon Kathen, a ceremony for presenting new robes to the monks, after they come out of retreat in September or October; and Bon Phchum Ben, a festival of spirits for the dead ancestors, held in September.

Khmer Buddhism encompasses rituals and offerings to the neak-ta and other spirits of Khmer folk religion. Shrines to the neak-ta may even be found within the temple grounds, and it is not unheard of to ask Buddhist monks to take part in rituals involving the neak-ta. Furthermore, neither Hindu gods, such as Indra, Shiva, and Vishnu, nor Hindu narratives, such as the Ramayana (depicting the class battle between good and evil), disappeared when Jayavarman VII moved Buddhism to the forefront of Khmer life. Rather, these blended with and continue to form an important part of
Figures 10 and 11.
Khmer monks bless villagers at a *bon* (festival)
Khmer cosmology. Indeed, as one author commented on the Buddhism of Cambodia, “What is this religion? It is a unique blend which we may call Buddhism by rule of thumb, but to get locked into such a tag is to miss the facets and fascinations of its eccentricity” (Eliezer 8).

Rituals and ceremonies themselves reflected and continue to resonate with the multiplicity of Khmer Buddhism. In her study of Khmer-Americans in the Northeastern United States, Nancy Smith-Hefner, a linguistics faculty member at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, describes an exorcism of a couple in which the husband was having an extramarital affair. Both monks and Khmer achaa (ritual specialists), who traditionally work with Khmer folk spirits, participated in the ceremony. Though lengthy, the account is worth repeating here:

The monks performed their prayers and were fed. The head monk offered some commentary, which included an admonition to the husband to “listen to his wife if she tells him something is wrong.” After the monks finished, the achaa began the exorcism, fashioning two “corpses” to represent the couple. The effigies were made of flour paste and were shaped into small human figures on flat sheets of cardboard. To ensure their proper identity, each was dressed with articles of clothing from their living models. Offerings of food, alcohol, and cigarettes were set out, and incense was burned to entice the evil spirits to enjoy the food and drink. The spirits would then be “tricked” into inhabiting the effigies, rather than staying with the host couple. (38)

The Khmer do not see the elements of the different belief systems—Buddhism and the indigenous animism—as contradictory. Rather, Khmer incorporate dualities—animism—in fact multiplicities—into their worldview. Such is quite practical: Mulder comments that “the acknowledgment of a multifarious cosmos would seem to be closer
to life’s reality than is a reduction of everything into one integrated concept to explain the often contradictory experiences of life” (43).

Thus Buddhist venues could certainly be amenable to modern or democratic considerations. Indeed, recent years have seen the wats become the central sites for celebration of International Children’s Day and Women’s Rights Day—not traditional Buddhist celebrations, but new occasions, based upon liberal democratic principles, that Khmer believe deserve commemoration. Monks preside at such celebrations, offering prayers and guidance, and Khmer make present food and burn incense, as during Buddhist festival days. There is no contradiction between secular and sacred, for both are manifestations of Khmer beliefs.

**Boundaries**

Heretofore I have discussed the elasticity of Khmer Buddhism. Yet one should not confound elasticity with illimitability. While flexible, the precepts of Khmer Buddhism establish moral principles, norms, and rules necessary for social harmony. Buddhist precepts, rituals, and festivals bind Khmer together in a common identity. Abandonment of Buddhism, moreover, is interpreted as abandonment of Khmer identity (Smith-Hefner 16). Recent years have witnessed tension between Khmer and Christian missionaries and groups, in part because Christianity is less flexible in terms of accepting multiple doctrines, requiring Khmer to relinquish Buddhism in order to become “true” followers, for example.19

While a small number of Khmer have sampled various denominations of Christianity, the majority of Khmer (more than 90 percent) self-identify as Theravada Buddhist. Accordingly, Christianity is associated with foreigners, particularly
Westerners—and also, Vietnamese. Indeed, some go so far as to compare Christians to the Khmer Rouge. A recent article in the Phnom Penh Post quoted a letter from an anti-Christian protest in Prey Veng province: “We, the Khmer citizens throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia, propose to reject Christianity called Jesus Pol Pot Number Two, which is carrying out activities in the country every day” (Green and Lon). While Khmer Buddhism is eclectic, incorporating Hindu, Brahman, and animist elements, the boundaries beyond which one should not go are unwritten (i.e., not in Khmer law), but understood.

Language: To be Khmer is to speak Khmer.

All of the 108 respondents in the sample asserted the following: “I know I am Khmer because I speak Khmer.” While upon first reading this relationship between one’s national language and one’s national identity may seem obvious, note that Americans do not necessarily say, “I know I am American because I speak English.” English is not specific only to Americans, the way Khmer language is to Khmer. This section explores the role that language plays in shaping Khmer life.

Centers: Semantic and conceptual categories

Piasa-khmaer, or Khmer language, is a source of great pride for Khmer. Khmer language is part of the Mon-Khmer language family, and while other Mon-Khmer languages are scattered throughout Southeast Asia, piasa-khmaer is unique. It is atonal, in contrast to the tonal dominant languages of neighboring Thailand and Vietnam. Its structure and vocabulary are relatively homogenous throughout the country, though there are slight dialectical differences in different areas. The language is comprised of
33 consonants, 31 vowel configurations, and 14 “independent” vowels, and involves a complex system of subscripts and diacritics (Huffman 6-8). Khmer language reflects Cambodia’s Brahmanic and Hindu past through its numerous Sanskrit and Pali words. Huffman notes that Khmer borrowed and indigenized many French words introduced during the colonial period. Also, one finds “a smattering of Chinese and Vietnamese loanwords in colloquial speech,” and more recently, English words as well (3). In short, *piasa-khmaer* is a fascinating conglomerate reflective of Cambodia’s colorful past.

Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf posited that language, thought, and culture are interrelated. While neither Sapir nor Whorf formally wrote up a hypothesis supported by empirical research, their work did point to two main ideas. First, the theory of linguistic determinism posits that the language one speaks absolutely determines the way he or she will interpret the world and experiences therein. Second, the theory of linguistic relativism, a variant of the aforementioned, suggests that language does not necessarily predetermine one’s thoughts about the world, but certainly influences them. What has become known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is controversial, and linguists, psychologists, philosophers, and anthropologists continue to debate its validity (cf. Hoijer). Whether language determines culture or vice-versa is unresolved; however, for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that *piasa-khmaer* certainly influences Khmer social interaction.

Most Southeast Asian languages reflect the significance of status in their respective societies. Hierarchy is evident in terms of reference, and also in the verb choices speakers of these languages make (Neher 19). Likewise, the Khmer language,
both in its pronouns and honorifics and its verbs, provides insight into the structure and relationships of Khmer society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term of Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>To indicate Gender or further classify</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bang</td>
<td>&quot;older&quot;, relatively close in age, respectful</td>
<td>Bang-pros</td>
<td>&quot;older brother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bang-srey</td>
<td>&quot;older sister&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P’aun</td>
<td>&quot;younger&quot;, though usually relatively close in age</td>
<td>P’aun-pros</td>
<td>&quot;younger brother&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P’aun-srey</td>
<td>&quot;younger sister&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boo</td>
<td>&quot;uncle” (general), older</td>
<td>Lok-Boo</td>
<td>&quot;uncle” (more respectful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>&quot;aunt” (general), older</td>
<td>Neak-ming</td>
<td>&quot;aunt” (more respectful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taa</td>
<td>&quot;grandfather”, elder</td>
<td>Lok-Taa</td>
<td>&quot;grandfather” (more respectful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiey</td>
<td>&quot;grandmother,” elder</td>
<td>Lok-Yiey</td>
<td>&quot;grandmother” (more respectful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oewpuk</td>
<td>&quot;father”</td>
<td>Oewpuk-thom</td>
<td>Uncle, older than one’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oewpuk-mia</td>
<td>Uncle, younger than one’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mday</td>
<td>&quot;mother”</td>
<td>Mday-thom</td>
<td>Aunt, older than one’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mday-ming</td>
<td>Aunt, younger than one’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neak</td>
<td>&quot;you”, parallel status, used only among friends</td>
<td>Eyeng, or neak-eyeng</td>
<td>&quot;you,” very casual, may be considered slightly derogatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. Terms of address

The primary criterion individuals follow in addressing one another is age (Huffman 85-86). The chart above (Figure 12) delineates some of the rules one would follow in determining which pronoun to use. The selections is based on the speaker’s relationship to the person spoken to, primarily in terms of age, but also in terms of gender, status, and wealth. In addition to kinship pronouns, there are also verbs specific to status, as below (Figure 13):
Variations of the verb “TO EAT”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KING/other high status person</th>
<th>MONKS</th>
<th>PEOPLE of EQUAL/approximately equal status (polite)</th>
<th>PEOPLE of EQUAL/approximately equal status (informal/less polite)</th>
<th>ANIMALS</th>
<th>KHMER ROUGE directive (for all—regardless of age or previous status)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Saoy”</td>
<td>“Chan”</td>
<td>“Nyam”</td>
<td>“Hope”</td>
<td>“Si”</td>
<td>“Hope”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Hierarchy in verb choice

The traditional Khmer speaking system reflects the Buddhist view that gods rank above humans and humans rank above animals, as indicated by forms of address, honorifics, and special vocabularies. Additionally, within these broad categorizations are more specific differentiations according to wealth or power. Anthropologist Louis Dumont wrote about the nature of the Hindu caste system in the 1960s, and while Khmer society is certainly not as rigid as that of India, Dumont’s comments are applicable here:

If one asks someone, ‘What is your caste?’ (jati), he may indicate either which of the four varna he belongs to, or a caste title, or his caste, or his subcaste, or even the exogamous section (clan to which he belongs[...]) It is what is called a reference group: I identify my nature by indicating the group to which I belong, and one must make clear at what level the question is asked. (62-3)

Smith-Hefner, writing about Khmer in Massachusetts, comments that “although many say they appreciate the equality of social relations in the United States, Khmer feel that recognizing social distinctions through appropriate speech and behavior is essential to harmonious relations” (139). Khmer do not see their ranked system of speaking as demeaning or confining. On the contrary, it enables one to know what to say and how to say it. It also makes piasa-khmaer unique, for although as mentioned
other languages are hierarchical, neither their systems nor their vocabularies are identical to that of the Khmer.\textsuperscript{22} As Dumont comments (in another context), "So we shall define hierarchy as the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole" (66). Thel Thong, a professor of education at Monash University who spoke at the 1996 Khmer Studies conference, comments that "language serves as a means of social cooperation, mass interaction, and individual expression. To make these three means of communication effective, it requires some forms of uniformity and consistency" (675). In other words, in the worldview of the culture, the language system makes sense.\textsuperscript{23} Khmer language functions as the glue that holds Khmer culture together.\textsuperscript{24}

Notably, one can change from 'bang' to 'aun' (short for p' aun) to 'neak' to 'boo' in the course of a single conversation among several people, depending upon who is speaking to whom. Thus, Thel notes, it is also important to "[plan] for diversity as well as for uniformity, for change as well as stability" (675). While piasia-khmaer retains its hierarchical pronoun and verb structure, the language as an aggregate is not static, and therefore Khmer linguists and other interested parties can allow and should in fact plan for changes. "This evolution happens in response to the need to catch up with the world, the freedom of speech and expression, the Western influences, and the opening border to the ASEAN nations," says Thel (675).

In support of this need for language flexibility is a personal anecdote. During the summer of 2002, I attended a seminar on environmental activism, for which a friend of mine, a Khmer who had received his graduate education in the United States, was the keynote speaker. Though he gave the keynote speech in Khmer, approximately ten
percent of what he said was in English—specifically, the technical or specific terms related to the subject at hand. In speaking with him afterward, he related how frustrating it was to give the talk, because there were important concepts he really wanted the (mostly Khmer) audience to understand, but that the Khmer language did not have precisely equivalent terms.

But Khmer can create new terms. As Thel comments, “[We can coin] new Khmer terms to express new concepts and ideas to be able to pass the alien knowledge to the Khmer language users.” (681). Hean Sokhum, president of the Center for Advanced Study, notes that today’s political environment demands a new vocabulary reflective of unprecedented situations, different and alternative relationships, and a dynamic global order (“Khmer Socio-Political Terminology” 2000). The Khmer language, he states, must be flexible enough to incorporate these new realities. And indeed, in 2001, a new English-to-Khmer Dictionary of Politics and Government was published in Phnom Penh.

**Boundaries**

There are, of course, conditions and principles Khmer wish to be observed in the use of Khmer language and in coining new terms, such that its integrity is preserved. Khmer recall with disdain the Khmer Rouge’s insistence that Khmer call each other mit, meaning “comrade” or “friend,” and use the term hope for “to eat” for everyone, rather than the terms of reference noted above (see Figures 12 and 13). Thel suggests that first, new terms should not be mere translation of foreign terms, and that new terms be coined only if necessary; second, that words be created based on “the principle of progress” and “the principle of rationalization;” third, that words coined are consistent
with the traditional structure of Khmer language—phonology, morphology, and syntax (681). Attempts to modernize Khmer language such that new situations are comprehensible to Khmer is one issue, an acceptable change; subverting piasa-khmer's principal structure and processes, however, is another, and is unacceptable.

The failure of the attempt to romanize the Khmer language during the French colonial period is a case in point. Chandler writes that in 1943, Georges Gautier, then the new French resident superieur, revealed plans to replace the Khmer alphabet's traditional script with a Romanized one. Gautier believed such a reformation would both allow non-Khmer to more quickly understand Khmer language, and aid Khmer in learning the structure and pronunciation of Roman characters, such that they might subsequently learn French. Yet “what the French saw as a self-evident improvement in the status quo,” notes Chandler, Khmer interpreted “as an attack on the essential character of their civilization, defined in part as what had been passed down from Angkorean times” (History of Cambodia 169). To change the written representation of Khmer language, replacing it with a Romanized one, was to disconnect the language from its heritage. The Khmer rejected Gautier’s proposal. Whether linguistic determinism or linguistic relativism properly describes the nature of Khmer language is still up for debate; however, what is unmistakable is the connection Khmer make between Khmer language and Khmer identity.

Furthermore, one cannot simply speak Khmer, but must speak it clearly and correctly: “We can tell if someone is not Khmer, because that person does not speak Khmer clearly,” said a 20-year-old female. For some, Khmer language is more important than place of birth or bloodlines: “Those who are born in Cambodia and
speak Khmer are Khmer,” noted a 22-year-old male, “but those who only bear Khmer
nationality, but do not speak Khmer, are not really Khmer. Still, as Khmer embrace
democracy and democratic principles, so too will piasa-khmaer echo these acceptances
in their culturally-particular forms, and express culturally-appropriate linguistic
additions to the language.

**Knowledge:** To be Khmer is to know Khmer arts, music, literature, dance, and history.

Khmer culture is a story culture, and a culture of the arts. In order to
comprehend what it is to be Khmer, one must know Khmer stories, as told orally,
through music, through dance, through literature, through art. “Khmer know the value
and advantage of arts and other Khmer traditions—music, national songs, national
statues, etc.,” said a 20-year-old male. Indeed, to be Khmer is to be aware that one is
part of the *kaun khmaer neak kosang angkor*—children of the Khmer who built Angkor
(Sam, “Role of Khmer Culture” 84). To be Khmer is to be a descendant of the world’s
finest architects and craftsmen, the most creative and talented artisans. A 22-year-old
male student noted that “*Khmer comes from kom, or khom, which became khem, then
khemara, then khmer ... it means powerful, big, and full of potential.” Artisans lined
the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat with dancing *apsara*, with the musicians of the *pin peat*
ensemble—oboes, xylophones, gongs, and drums—playing in stately accompaniment.
Their melodies were passed from generation to generation for hundreds of years,
testament to Khmer resilience and commitment.

When the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh in 1975, the artists—musicians,
dancers, painters—were directed to go to the countryside with their families and
neighbors. No one knew of the terror to come, in which most of the country’s artists were killed. By some estimates, 90 percent of the classical dancers perished; musical scores, texts of plays, instruments, and recordings were destroyed (Sam, “Khmer Traditional Music” 42). Thus it is not surprising that in seeking to rebuild their culture, their Khmerness, Khmer seek out the arts—the sounds and images that recollect “the spirit of Cambodia.” These arts are integral to Khmerness, and as such, are one of the best avenues for conveying messages to Khmer people. In chapters 5, 6, and 7, I detail transmission of democratic principles using traditional arts, detailing specific approaches used by local NGOs. First, however, I shall briefly describe some of these art forms.

**Centers**

Even to sketch the multitude of Khmer art forms is an Herculean task. I defer to the works of Sam-Ang Sam, whose chronicles of traditional music in Cambodia are unparalleled, William Lobban’s research on Khmer dance, music, and theatre, and Toni Shapiro-Phim’s writing and performance work with Khmer dancers, all of whose projects inform the present discussion. Still, in order to provide insight into Khmerness, it is necessary to at least mention, albeit in broad categories, the arts Khmer love so dearly. In this writing, I have chosen to focus primarily on Khmer performing arts, for as shall be described in the following chapters, it is through performing arts that Khmer transmit civic messages and teachings about democracy.

**Dance**

In 1995, I participated in an event for the opening of a gallery at the East-West Center—the *robam trolout* (coconut dance), which I learned especially for the occasion.
As I had never danced before, I was quite nervous, and only halfway through the dance did I dare look up at the crowd. To this day, I remember the faces of members of Hawai‘i’s Khmer community, tears streaming from their eyes, and whispering to each other, “Neuk sruk” (I miss my country). Perhaps more than any other art form, Khmer dance, with its unique movements and symbolic meanings, has the power to transcend thousands of miles, thousands of years. Young Khmer students at the Fine Arts University practice for hours each day, seeking to emulate the graceful movements of the apsara (Figures 14 and 15), and the comic movements of Hanuman, the monkey king.

There are two major categories of Khmer dance: classical court dance and folk dance. Of classical court dance, Shapiro-Phim writes,

[Khmer] dances of this tradition are populated with princes and princesses, male and female deities, giants (often evil) and monkeys (often good-hearted). (Girls dance the roles of princesses, princes, gods and goddesses, and giants; boys dance that of the monkey.) While some works are complex dance-dramas of love and war and magic, others are considered “pure” dance pieces, meant to evoke a sense of reverence without telling an explicit story. (“The Dance”)

Folk dances, which include ceremonial dances, differ in style from court dance yet reflect similar themes of the agricultural cycle, religious beliefs, ancestors, and connection to the land (Shapiro 101). Popular forms of folk dance include roam vuang, roam kbach, and saravan, all of which are most visibly performed at weddings and other community gatherings. Folk dancing is integral to several forms of Khmer traditional theatre, including sbaek, or shadow puppet plays; both are vital components of Khmer village life.
Figures 14 and 15.

Young dancers seek to emulate the graceful movements of the *apsara*
Instrumental Music

Sam-Ang Sam delineates six styles of Khmer instrumental music: 1) *areak ka*—“considered the most traditional and used for spirit worship or ceremony); 2) *kong skor* (funeral ensemble); 3) *pinpeat* (ensemble accompanying court dance, masked dance, shadow plays, as well as religious ceremonies); 4) *mohori* (ensemble to accompany Khmer folk dances); 5) *yike* (another type of folk ensemble), and 6) *basak* (an ensemble which accompanies *lkhaon basak* plays) (“Khmer Traditional Music” 40). Khmer music, in its various forms, cuts across class stratifications, and while in the past certain music was reserved strictly for royalty, all of the above are considered distinctly Khmer. The act of listening to or playing Khmer music evokes a sense of connectedness with other Khmer, with the imagined community (I borrow the term from Benedict Anderson) of Khmer not only nationally, but worldwide. Sam remarks that Khmer music consists of polyphonic stratification and is based predominantly on the pentatonic (five-tone) scale. It is built linearly, devoid of harmony in the Western sense. Musicians in a music ensemble have a collective melody in mind that no single musician actually plays. Rather melody provides a kind of road map that directs the musicians to a common destination and serves as a guideline around which musical embellishment or ornamentation takes place. (46-47).

Vocal music

One of the most fascinating musical traditions in Cambodia is the singing style known as *ayai*. Performed most often during the Khmer New Year festival and other village celebrations, *ayai* requires vocal dexterity and quick wit, and is one of the favorite arts of the Khmer. *Ayai* involves two singers in constant dialogue, usually one male and one female, and usually begins with one singer posing a question to the other,
who sings an answer in response. *Ayai* is unscripted, and oftentimes, the questions and responses are required to rhyme, so the singers must react quickly and creativity. The colorful description of *ayai* by Prak Samnang, contributing writer for the Khmer tourist company Leisure Cambodia, follows:

Two singers stand at the front of the stage while musicians sit playing instruments behind them. The vocalists describe a story and tell jokes directly to the audience. These singers need to sing humorously and in rhyme. One singer begins the story then the other starts a new sentence that rhymes with the other singer's line... *Ayai combines the art of story telling with jokes, legends, politics and history.* Singers do not need to look that attractive, as they need only to project their sweet voice. But it is a bonus if a singer is attractive as well as talented. Sometimes *Ayai* is performed on the radio, so there is no need to even see the singers' faces. People enjoy listening to *Ayai* on the radio, and several Cambodian stations broadcast programs late at night. When *Ayai* is boring, it can make people fall into deep sleep. But it can also keep people awake and very well entertained, when performed well. (Prak, emphasis mine)

**Theatre**

*Lkhaon*, or theatre, is the source of much enjoyment for Khmer (Figure 16). There are many types of *lkhaon*, including *lkhaon niyeay*, or spoken theatre, which originated in the 1940s. Older *lkhaon* forms usually include some sort of musical accompaniment. Lobban writes of a theatre troupe outside of Phnom Penh, which performs *lkhaon khaol*, or masked theater, in which episodes of the *Ramayana* epic are performed. While the actual palm-leaf text of the *Ramayana* used to teach the *lkhoan* was destroyed during the Pol Pot regime, one of the survivors of the troupe from the village remembers the chants, and has passed it on to other villagers.
Figure 16.
Scene from *Ikhaon niyay*, 2002
Writes Lobban:

The seven survivors of the original troupe are now all over sixty years of age. They had all played a variety of roles, but each had a preference for a certain role he had performed for a number of years. All had begun to learn their respective roles when they were between twelve and fifteen years of age and apparently continued to play those characters over the years (50-51).

Of note is that unlike classical dance performances in which narration for the dances is sung while the dancers perform, during *lkhaon khaoul*, several individuals sit to the side of the stage, and sing their narration first, with the actors performing what is being sung after each segment of narration.

*Lkhaon basak* is a form of traditional opera theatre. According to Suon Bun Rith, *lkhaon basak* originated in Kampuchea Krom, in what is now under the political boundaries of Vietnam. Performed in the Bassac region, it reflects Chinese and Vietnamese as well as Khmer influences, and its performances include traditional legends and Buddhist stories (*jataka*), and it is often comic as well as dramatic (Suon 1).

*Sbaek*

*Sbaek* (shadow puppet theatre) is a beautiful Khmer art form in which artists perform narratives using the shadows cast by figures cut out of leather. The narratives are often comic, and are usually based on stories of ordinary rural life. May Titthara, another journalist with Leisure Cambodia, describes a duo of comic puppets called *Ayong*. One of the characters is named Ayong, writes May, a “hunch-backed man with a bald head, [and] who always carries an axe.” Ayong has a partner named Ayao, “who is a man with a bare head and a long mouth like a beak.[...] Traditionally, the duo help
people who are in difficulty, save them from harm, and help get rid of their enemies”

(“Khmer Shadow Theatre”). A favorite of Khmer, sbaek is nearly always performed at night. “Performers use torchlight or electric light to cast shadows of their leather puppets’ engraved designs,” May continues:

The performers build a small theatre at about head height, with a covered roof and walls. In the front, they tie a white cotton sheet like a screen, and put a banana stem behind it to hold those puppets not in use in between scenes. Before a performance begins, the players conduct a ceremony known as Hom Rong. The performers offer candles, incense, flowers and food to the spirits of the people who used to perform shadow puppet theatre in ancient times, and ask them for good luck in that evening’s show.

Ceremonies like the Hom Rong are common before many performances, and are not specific to sbaek theatre. The prevalence of the Hom Rong further underlines the importance of art in Khmer life. Khmer also perform rituals to invoke Bisnukara, a character from Vedic mythology, believed to be the spirit of all Khmer artisans and craftsmen. Individuals and communities make offerings to Bisnukara before beginning new creative projects—such as building a house, or beginning a play or a painting. Bisnukara “is usually depicted with four hands and is surrounded by numerous tools. Additional attributes include a water jug, a lasso, a book, and sometimes a club,” and he is said to be the son of Brahma, the creator god of Hindu mythology.

Textiles and other crafts

Other important Khmer arts include creation of unique textiles of silk and cotton, and metal work, particularly of silver. Khmer use silk to make cloth for sampot, skirts for women in colorful patterns with silk or gold threads woven throughout. Cotton is used to weave krama, a rectangular scarf with colorful checks and stripes.
The French in Cambodia revived metal work in the early 20th century. Animal-shaped boxes that hold betel, a nut chewed by community elders as an herbal remedy, were popular items that silversmiths produced.

Figure 17. Shaek

Literature

Judy Ledgerwood delineates five major types of Khmer literature: 1) “classical” works, written between the 16th and 19th centuries, set to memory by professional storytellers and spread through traveling performances; 2) Jataka tales; or stories of the lives of Siddhartha Gautama before he became the Buddha; 3) chbap, or didactic codes, including chbap srey (codes for females) and cbap proh (codes for males); 4) folktales; and 5) the modern novel (Ledgerwood, “Cambodian Literature”).

You Bo, president of the Khmer Writer’s Association (KWA), spoke excitedly of its reestablishment in 1993, after nearly twenty years of closure due to war. He told
me, “This association represents fourteen generations of teaching! We celebrate writing here—we have festivals of literature!” (personal interview July 02, 2002). The KWA sponsors festivals honoring the Monarch, the Prime Minister, the 7th of January [the day the Khmer Rouge were overthrown]. “Through our writing and our festivals,” he asserted, “we honor our country, and thus we have many.” Indeed, You invited me to a writing seminar the following Saturday, which interestingly enough, was entitled “The Heart of Peace.”

Khmer literature is a celebrated art form, and it is often performed much in the same way as, say, a piece of music. However, much of Khmer literature is didactic, and informs Khmer about proper behavior. I therefore choose to address its importance mostly in the next section, on Khmer attitudes and behavior.

Khmer identify these various art forms as key components of Khmerness. Khmer encounter and/or study these art forms beginning in childhood, as they are woven into Khmer socialization processes. They are thus familiar and trusted venues. While international efforts to introduce democratic concepts relied on institutional changes or philosophical instruction for Khmer, local NGOs have long recognized the importance of traditional forms as venues for new ideas. The arts as described above prove extremely important in the dissemination of democracy and democratic ideas therein.

**Boundaries**

“Khmer art” is a broad category whose basic elements run the gamut from comic to horrific, from quick-witted to solemn. Art, by nature a creative venture, is
flexible and can refer to a multitude of forms and styles, which in turn change over time. The folk dances of the 1950s and 60s are certainly as Khmer as court dance, for example (Shapiro). Thus, art proves a useful venue for discussing democracy with Khmer. Within a familiar format, novel themes can be discussed, new characters introduced, new topics debated. An interesting on-line dialogue by Khmer artists suggests that “to impose limits on what can be accepted as ‘Khmer’ is to risk creative stagnation.” For “if ‘Khmer art’ is taken to mean only ‘art in the style of Angkor,’” writes one, “artists are discouraged from expressing their ideas in new ways [. . .] The critical question is a simple one: Does it speak to the heart?” (Ven).

Flexibility is part of the magnificence of Khmer art, yet it is also important to Khmer to “know” that their legacy is unique and unrivaled. It is distinct from the legacies of other countries, whether Western or Asian or Southeast Asian; it is not Thai, and especially not Vietnamese. Thus, the integral structure of the art form should not be altered.

“What is a Khmer?” repeated a 20-year-old male. “Khmer are the people of a nation which has a good culture and civilization . . . sruk-Khmaer is a country which has real history . . .” Sam-Ang Sam comments:

the instruments and the composition of ensembles of present-day Khmer music are similar to those we see represented on the bas-reliefs of Angkor. We thus have every reason to believe that present-day Khmer musical forms are the living continuation of the musical tradition of the ancient Khmer. (“Khmer Traditional Music” 41)

That sameness, that sense of “things Khmer,” either of peasant life and everyday fears, or of the Khmer past and Khmer greatness, is a source of pride for Khmer. Sam
describes Khmer arts as both free and conservative; artists are not censored, yet should be creative within the bounds of the expressible. Foreign forms, such as karaoke music, or Western “pop” music, are discouraged and seen to contribute to the destruction of Khmer culture.

**Attitudes/Behavior:** To be Khmer is to be respectful, polite, patient, gentle, modest, honest, and innocent.

Khmer believe there is something special and exemplary about their attitudes and behavior. One’s deportment is extremely important in determining Khmerness. Descriptions of Khmer attitudes and behavior, in both formal texts (e.g., the Constitution) and informal banter contain specific references to morality. As one of my respondents offered, among the things that make one a true Khmer are “morality of living, the way we greet each other, attitude, respectability” (21-year old male). We know whether or not someone is Khmer through his “[manner of] speech, politeness, helpfulness, tolerance of each other, obedience to elders, teachers, parents. We have a code of ethics” (20-year-old male). Khmer children are taught the *chhap*, a set of moral codes of behavior emphasizing humility, patience, honesty, modesty, and respectfulness both from their families and in schools, and Khmer see their children’s good behavior as a source of pride. Folktales passed down from generation to generation teach them accountability and responsibility. School curriculums include an important moral component. Radio and television programs reserve time slots for “moralizing” and “good manners” in between “song requests,” “sports news,” and “boxing.” (see Figure 18, below). This becomes important vis-à-vis democracy in Cambodia, for those
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<td>05:00-05:30</td>
<td>103 Morning - Buddhist Prayers, Traditional Khmer songs, and exercise tips</td>
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<td>05:30-06:00</td>
<td>Healthy Show &amp; Traditional Songs</td>
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<td>Read Raksmei &amp; Koh Santhepheap Newspaper</td>
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<td>07:00-08:30</td>
<td>Moralizing (Sponsored by Pop Cream &amp; Cable Optic)</td>
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<td>08:30-09:00</td>
<td>Good manner</td>
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<td>PSI Show</td>
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<td>Song Requests</td>
<td>Women Program</td>
<td>Talk back show with pop stars</td>
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<td>Cell Card Talk back Show (Sponsored by Mobitel) (DJ Sope)</td>
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<td>Tour Show</td>
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<td>13:30-14:00</td>
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<td>Women Development</td>
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<td>14:00-15:00</td>
<td>Birthday Wishes, Funny Stories</td>
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<td>15:00-16:00</td>
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<td>Life and Happiness</td>
<td>&gt;Hello Ozone Live Show</td>
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<td>Guess The answer (Sponsored by Luxury)</td>
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<td>23:00-24:00</td>
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<td>Talk back, Song Requested by phone, Funny Stories</td>
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<td>03:00-05:00</td>
<td>Talk back, Song Requested by phone, Funny Stories</td>
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Figure 18. A typical day’s programming for Radio FM 103, (excerpted from Phnom Penh Radio 103 MHz’s website).

involved in promoting democracy call upon that “something” in Khmer character, a basic morality and goodness, to support human rights and uphold the democratic principle that all members of a society deserve the right to be heard.
Centers

"Khmer means a group of people who live simply, using Khmer belongings and equipment," states a 19-year-old female. "Khmer attitudes are gentle, polite, loyal, sensible, and patient." A 22-year-old male contended that "Khmer citizens are people who are brave and friendly, who have compassion and overcome every obstacle."

Upon meeting one another, Khmer offer the sompeah, a gesture of respect in which an individual’s hands meet in front of the face, often accompanied by a slight bow and the phrase, "Chumreap suor" (a very polite greeting). Traditionally, those of lower status take the initiative to sompeah those of higher status, who sompeah in return. Correspondingly, younger individuals sompeah older individuals, and the elderly are especially reverenced. Khmer are respectful of custom and tradition, and particularly of those who embody that tradition—i.e., elders. As a 19-year-old male related, "If you don’t respect your grandparents, you are not a Khmer." Another, 20-year-old male, asserts: "First, we have to look at someone’s attitude, characteristics—how they speak: do they know how to respect old[er] people? Are they polite?" Yet another, 22-year-old male, relates, "I was taught to respect others, to ‘salute’ the elderly." An oft-quoted Khmer proverb states, "The immature rice stalk stands erect, while the mature stalk, heavy with grain, bends over," indicating the importance of humility as an indicator of proper behavior, particularly in the presence of one’s elders.

Another important characteristic is politeness and respect for others’ feelings. Said one 21-year-old male, "I can tell whether someone is Khmer or not, because [even if] they can speak Khmer and have the same-colored skin, but their characteristics are different, that person is not Khmer... Khmer have a modest mind and modest behavior.
They respect Buddhism. They respect elders. They respect each other.” Khmer are socialized to value gentility. Such qualities bring merit not only to oneself, but also to one’s family (Keo 10). One should also act such that he or she will not anger others. Ideally, angry or loud face-to-face confrontation is to be avoided at all costs. One of the most despised acts a Khmer can commit is to thvoe reuk, to act overly proud or arrogant. Khmer often act to avoid becoming khmas ke (shamed by others) and also, to avoid making others mien khmas ke (made to feel ashamed), as reflected in the following proverb:

Ke khos kom al a ke kom al out.
If one makes a mistake, don’t rejoice; if a person respects you, don’t be in a hurry to brag about it.

Khmer are advised not to act overly proud or to speak too soon. Another common proverb relates:

Chumpuap choeng kang bat baoe kampuap moat bang brak.
If you misstep, you can retrace your steps, but if you are careless with your words, it will cost you dearly.

However, prowess with one’s words and actions, especially when used in a culturally-appropriate manner—that is, by heeding the social rules governing behaviors proper for Khmer generally, and those particular to one’s “place” or social status—yet which still bring about a realization on the part of others, is admired. A folktale from the Gatiloke, illustrates this last point:
The King and the Poor Boy

In a small village near the edge of the forest, there once lived a buffalo boy who had no mother or father. His uncle, who was the chief cook for the king, pitied the poor boy. So he invited the boy to stay with him in the palace. The grateful boy worked hard to help his uncle. He washed the plates, polished the cups, cleaned the dining room tables, and mopped the floors. At the end of each month, his uncle gave him six sen as his wages.

Now the king frequently inspected the palace quarters. He often noticed the hardworking boy mopping the floor or polishing the cups, cheerfully and in good humor. One day the king asked the boy, “Do you receive wages for your hard work?”

The boy bowed and said, “Yes, I do, Your Majesty. I earn six sen every month.”

Then the king asked, “Do you think you are rich or do you think you are poor?”

“You Majesty,” the boy replied, “I think that I am as rich as a king.”

The king was taken by surprise. “Why is this poor boy talking such nonsense?” he mused to himself.

Once more, the king spoke to the boy, “I am a king and I have all the power and riches of this country. You earn only six sen a month. Why do you say you are as rich as I am?”

The boy laid down his broom and slowly replied to the king, “Your Majesty, I may receive only six sen each month, but I eat from one plate and you also eat from one plate. I sleep for one night and you also sleep for one night. We eat and sleep the same. There is no difference. Now, Your Majesty, do you understand why I say that I am as rich as a king?”

The king understood and was satisfied.

Excerpted from Cambodian Folk Stories from the Gatiloke 77-78.

In this story, the king, while of course highly respected and wealthy, is overly proud. He asserts that he has all of the power and the riches, and therefore, he is a more valuable and important person. It is instructive that a poor servant boy teaches him that all life, regardless of wealth or status, is valuable, and that at a fundamental level, all human beings are equal (78).

In the wake of the 1993 elections, and resultant influx of foreign persons and ideas, some Khmer realize that they must be flexible regarding their deportment in order
to participate in a global culture. Khmer males, particularly younger males, for example, shake hands with each other rather than using the *sompeah*, as the handshake is more widely recognized as a greeting. Yet customary venues can still be used to discuss modern issues, thus retaining traditional form and style (and fundamental codes of behavior imparted therein) while addressing contemporary concerns. Ledgerwood points out, for example, that the short story, “Mea Young” (“Our Uncle”) has in recent years changed from its earlier telling to reflect changes in Khmer society.

“Mea Yoeng,” Ledgerwood explains, is a well-known Khmer folk tale. Customarily, the tale tells of a fisherman and his wife. The wife carried the fish her husband caught in a basket, but the basket had holes in it, and the fish dropped onto the ground as she walked with it. Thus, they were always poor. The wife was beautiful, but she was careless, and never bothered to repair the basket. One day a wealthy merchant passed by the couple on the river, and saw that the fisherman’s wife was very beautiful. He insisted that she become his wife, and the merchant gave the fisherman his wife in return. While not as beautiful, the merchant’s original wife was very virtuous. As a result, she patched up the fisherman’s basket, such that they were able to keep all of their catch, and the couple eventually became rich. The beautiful merchant’s new wife, however, was careless, and squandered away the merchant’s fortune. The tale takes some twists and turns not related here, for the sake of space; the major lesson of the tale is that the virtuous woman was able to bring wealth to her family.

In the 1980s, Ledgerwood comments, Khmer used the tale to teach in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp on the border with Thailand. In the version published in the camp, the commentary accompanying the tale suggests that the virtuous wife was
educated—something not part of the original tale. In the refugee camp, the story is told in a way that encourages girls to want to receive formal education—which would also help them as they began post-Khmer Rouge lives. Ledgerwood notes, “because of this education she was able to help educate (chuoy ap rum) her husband” (“Gender Symbolism” 126). Yet another version she found in the United States, moreover, did not emphasize the importance of education at all, but rather the virtuous wife’s industriousness, as the key to the family’s success. Certainly, as new immigrants or refugees enter the United States, one of the things that is emphasized is industriousness. As the environment in which the story was used changed—from Cambodia to the refugee camp to the United States—the story also changed, “to provide innovative solutions under the rubric of ‘tradition’” (128). What is important is the recognition by Khmer that traditional works and mediums can be modified and changed to suit modern situations, yet still remain Khmer.

Chou Meng Tarr, Professor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, discusses her concerns with traditional gender roles and “proper” female behavior, particularly in dealing with HIV/AIDS issues and Khmer “shyness.” Tarr suggests that given the reality of HIV and AIDS, Khmer people, particularly youth, need to begin speaking openly about sex, something not customarily done in a culture that highly values modesty, especially for women. “If a drastic change in behaviour is called for,” she writes, “we should not hid behind the veneer of ‘cultural appropriateness’ and pretend we are simply being sensitive ethnographers” (1040).

And yet, Khmer do not want to move too far away from their ideal. Sexual issues, for example, may not be introduced in a vulgar or impolite manner—say, for
example, through pornographic videos or books. Rather, they must initiate awareness through culturally-appropriate means, via a familiar venue that is imbued with moral consciousness—such as the monks. The Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA), for example, has trained monks and other temple officials to teach Khmer about birth spacing. By introducing precarious topics through a “moral” venue, Khmer both retain their social piety and gain useful knowledge for dealing with a significant problem.

**Boundaries**

Still, however, there are boundaries. To stray too far from the ideal of politeness, patience, gentility, modesty, respectfulness, honesty, and innocence is to lose one’s Khmerness. Too much openness about sexuality is believed to lead to indiscriminate and immoral behavior, such as prostitution. The influx of “foreign materials” does include pornography and risque karaoke videos, deemed unacceptable by Khmer officials. During the summer of 2002, for example, the RCG sought to close all karaoke establishments, as they were seen to denigrate Khmer morality. Karaoke hideaways were believed to be havens of liquor and scantily-clad “beer girls.” My respondents noted that proper dress, particularly for women, which includes long skirts covering one’s legs and non-revealing blouses, is a hallmark of Khmerness (Figure 19).

Ironically, the very attitudinal and behavioral characteristics Khmer love about themselves are also those which have led to great loss. An 18-year-old female from Kandal province asserted that “Khmer love freedom, work hard and put out good effort for all [with whom] they meet. Khmer don’t harm others.” Yet, she noted, they are too trusting, “easily persuaded, gullible, easily cheated.” Many Khmer asserted that they
are *too* gentle, *too* honest, and thus prone to deception by other countries, who have attempted to take over or control Khmer. They may need to renegotiate the boundaries of Khmer behavior for their own survival.

![Figure 19.](image)

Traditional Khmer women’s clothing: *sampot* (long silk skirt) and *av sar* (white shirt or blouse). Females are expected to dress very modestly in order to be Khmer.
Loyalty to and love for country: To be Khmer is to love Cambodia and Khmer.

Centers

Khmer love their country, and other Khmer. In his seminal work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson writes that the concept of a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (5). Per such definition, Cambodia, according to my respondents, is an unmatched example of a nation.

There is something, some shared sense of belonging, that binds millions of Khmer people together, whether urban or rural, rich or poor, male or female. “[A nation] is imagined as a community,” Anderson continues, “because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (7).” Indeed, despite the hierarchy and stratification in Khmer society, Khmer do express that they feel a superlative connection to other Khmer. Thus, Khmer in diaspora—be they students researching in American universities, resettled refugees in Australia, Khmaer Krom (literally, Lower Khmer—although this is a reference to location and not to status) living in what is politically now Vietnam, or repatriated Khmer raised in Europe—remain linked to other Khmer by this devotion to country. This connection is rooted in love for their homeland, for Cambodia. “I know the value of the Khmer people,” states a 20-year-old male, “and this makes me love my nation, my land, my country.”

One’s absolute love of country, and willingness to sacrifice one’s life to prevent encroachment on Cambodia soil, moreover, is a significant indicator of Khmerness.
As discussed, much transmission of knowledge comes through Buddhist teachings, the *chbap*, the folktales, and so forth, in the temples. Young Khmer are also taught how to be loyal, good citizens, through the formal education system. I do not have adequate space to provide a history of education in Cambodia within the confines of this dissertation. However, it should be noted that civics was actively taught as part of the curriculum in the public school system prior to the civil war of the 1970s, during which many of the schools were destroyed by bombs and teachers executed by the Khmer Rouge.

The pre-1970 primary school curriculum was based on the French lycee system, writes David Ayres, who has written a comprehensive history on education in Cambodia. Notably, however, in its early days, at the beginning of the twentieth century, “education was not provided to promote the development of the Cambodian peasantry,” but “rather, the provision of education accorded with a concerted French attempt to engender indigenous loyalty” (26). Classes were taught in French, and the system was designed “to impart the knowledge needed by administrative assistants to French colonial civil servants” (40). When Norodom Sihanouk took the throne, however, he began to promote nationalism and independence, and this was reflected in schools. “For the first time,” writes Ayres, “the state assumed a genuine presence in the localized world of the country’s rural villages” (41). Moreover, teachers “were invested with the authority of the state and were in a powerful position to impart the new values of the modern nation,” (41), including a “suitable historical past” which emphasized Cambodia’s greatness.
In the post-1979 period, notes Ayres, the entire educational infrastructure had to be rebuilt. There were few buildings, few teachers, no administration, and no curricula. The new curriculum created by the People’s Republic of Kampuchea regime reflected socialist ideology, “expressly stated in the regime’s official decrees” (130). “Moral education,” writes Ayres, “had replaced the ethics and civic education of the Sihanouk era, bringing with it a socialist conception of what constituted a ‘good citizen’” (131). A good citizen, moreover, was one concerned with serving the nation following the objectives of socialism (139).

By the 1991-1992 academic year, the socialist orientation of the Cambodian government had begun to change, in the wake of the Paris Agreements, and so did the school curriculums, although they still emphasized loyalty to the state. The current Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, which has overall responsibility for establishing national policies and curriculum guidelines, makes the following statement:

> The objective of the Cambodian education system is to develop children fully in all aspects of qualities, mentally and physically. In order to achieve this objective, schools need to accomplish many tasks. They are obliged to develop in the students the spirit of self-confidence, self-reliance, responsibility, solidarity, national unity and patriotism [. . .]. Other responsibilities of schools are to nurture children to become good citizens, to live together peacefully, to be able to strengthen their responsibilities towards their families’ happiness and to make a contribution to promoting social welfare.

(MOEYS 2003)

The current education system has recently been restructured to include twelve rather than eleven years of schooling. The system includes the following levels: primary school (6 years), lower secondary school (3 years), and upper secondary school (3 years). In each of these levels, Khmer undoubtedly further internalize nationalism.
and patriotism. Additionally, the government acknowledges the importance of non-formal education, including human rights education, health education, democracy education and so forth offered by NGOs.

While analysis of democracy in countries such as Cambodia has often focused on personal sovereignty (the right of each individual to participate through voting, for example), for Khmer there is also a significant link between democracy and national sovereignty. Khmer express their belief in the rights of individuals to participate in determining their own political futures, yet also desire respect for Cambodia’s national sovereignty within the world order. The principle of sovereignty maintains that “states should be equal in privileges, even if they are unequal in wealth and power” (Lind, “Redefining Sovereignty”). A sovereign state can create and execute laws, declare war (or peace), and form treaties with other nations, and it is respected as a government in its own right (“Sovereignty,” Black’s Law Dictionary). For Khmer, such loyalty to the nation does not annul the right to dissent within the nation, but the nation must be respected as a sovereign entity.

**Boundaries**

*Ngoap jiet prueh chliet samakie.*
The nation dies due to lack of unity.
- Khmer proverb

“The important things about being Khmer are: to love Khmer, protect Khmer, do not kill Khmer, and do not sell Khmer territory,” said a 27-year-old male. Added a 22-year-old male: “I have been taught to love, to preserve, to prevent, to help Khmer citizens and to do everything for Cambodia’s interests. Khmer dare to dedicate
themselves to the nation.” Lack of concern for preserving Khmer land is treason, as one 20-year-old female commented: “Khmer must preserve their ancestors’ heritages. ‘Non-Khmer’ are those who do not see Cambodia as their country, value it, preserve its culture . . . a true Khmer is a warrior, and he will fight to recapture his territory.”

It is the exigency of this devotion to Cambodia as an element of Khmer identity that has, moreover, sustained the monarchy, particularly in the last decade. I refer here to the importance of the King for Khmer not as a politician, but rather, as a representative of Khmer greatness, a reminder of the magnanimity of Angkor. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the ancient Kings were devaraja (god-kings): human, yet of an elevated and venerated status. The Chinese emissary Chou Ta-Kuan recorded the following account of the King in his chronicles of Cambodia in the 13th century:

When the King leaves his palace, the procession is headed by the soldiery; then come the flags, the banners, the music. Girls of the palace, three or five hundred in number, gaily dressed, with flowers in their hair and tapers in their hands, are massed together in a separate column [. . .] Following them came chariots drawn by goats and horses, all adorned with gold, ministers and princes, mounted on elephants, were preceded by bearers of scarlet parasols, without number [. . .] Finally the Sovereign appeared, standing erect on an elephant and holding in his hand the sacred sword. (72)

Bas-reliefs on the walls of Angkor show similar entourages, pointing to both the opulence and the power of the king, and therefore, of the nation. “In recent times,” comments Vittorio Roveda, a scholar of Khmer mythology, “the crowds of visitors to the temple have covered the image of the king with gold leaf, in an act of respect and veneration” (104). In particular, H.M. Norodom Sihanouk has maintained the devotion of the Khmer.
While members of all current factions (i.e., royalist, socialist, etc.) profess loyalty to the nation, only Sihanouk has served as monarch. For Khmer, Sihanouk is part of “a national discourse that is founded on a sense of history, a treasured collective memory” (Mulder 212). He is seen by many as the protector of things Khmer, including Khmer territory and Khmer culture. Indeed, the motto of the Kingdom of Cambodia indelibly links the monarch to Khmerness: “Nation, Religion, King” (Article 4).

Not surprisingly, the King still has a loyal following. Julio Jeldres, Sihanouk’s former senior private secretary, wrote as recently as October 2003 that “the king enjoys wide respect and popularity, particularly with rural Cambodians. It is not unusual to see groups of farmers and rural workers, many of whom have traveled for days, outside the royal palace in Phnom Penh, asking to see the [Samdech Euv] ‘King-Father’” (“Cambodia’s Monarchy”). In my opinion, however, the Khmer are loyal to the King as a figurehead and a nationalist—and I daresay, as a family (meaning the larger Khmer family) member—rather than as an officeholder. The Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), headed by Hun Sen, for example, has harnessed the support of many (recent polls suggest even the majority of) rural Khmer as well, but the same communities which vote for CPP candidates in the elections continue to venerate the King. In fact, in 1997, Hun Sen himself rejected an offer by Sihanouk to abdicate. During a conflict between co-leaders Prince Norodom Ranariddh and Hun Sen (see chapter 4 of this dissertation), King Sihanouk offered to abdicate, therefore indicating that the royalist faction did not seek more power than that of Hun Sen. Hun Sen refused the offer, knowing that
Sihanouk’s resignation would have political repercussions among the Khmer constituency, who still highly regard the monarch.

Portraits of the King and Queen hang in shops and homes throughout Cambodia, while placards for various parties sit in their yards and at the entrances to their villages. The birthdays of both the King and the Queen are national holidays. Urban and rural Khmer alike love having their pictures taken in front of the royal palace (indeed, some entrepreneurs make a living selling these photographs).

The Khmer credit Sihanouk not only with gaining Cambodia’s independence from the French in 1953, but in so doing, with restoring the sense that Cambodia could realize its sovereignty, and again become a glorious nation. (While the legacy of Angkor was arguably reawakened by the French, Sihanouk engaged this reawakening and reinforced the possibility of Cambodia’s return to greatness). While the pre-Khmer Rouge Sihanouk years are romanticized, looked upon nostalgically as a “golden age,” it is true that during the early part of his post-independence rule, Cambodia was relatively stable, economically and politically (Neher 149). Peou remarks that

Throughout his political life, Sihanouk achieved recognition as the Father of Independence and the Cambodian nation, who ruled by the power of royal or personal prerogative and treated the Cambodian people as his naïve children in need of fatherly care. In brief, his traditional ruling style can thus be simply characterized ‘paternalistic’. (Intervention and Change 48)

While they remain confused about his political actions throughout the years, they still identify with him, for like other Khmer, Sihanouk lost many family members, including some of his children, during the Khmer Rouge regime, and thus his experiences are those of a “true” Khmer. Sihanouk is also an artist, an avid filmmaker;
the love of Khmer for their arts has already been established in a previous section. Moreover, Sihanouk has often said, “The star of my films is never an actor: it is Cambodia.” (see, for example, his remarks on the www.norodomsihanouk.org website). He is seen by many as a true patriot, and therefore has the respect of the Khmer people. Some of this obeisance is inherent in Khmer language, as discussed earlier in this chapter; however, many Khmer are reluctant to denigrate Sihanouk even creatively, despite the fact that the Khmer experience a considerable amount of freedom of expression through the arts. (Recall also that the king is a frequent character in Khmer folktales, which poke fun at royalty and invert the social order). Regardless of party loyalty, Khmer associate a more abstract loyalty to King Sihanouk with loyalty to the nation.

The Constitution of Cambodia names the King Head of State for life. He is also thereby the Supreme Commander of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. But most importantly, it reinstates him as the official symbol of unity, continuity, and true Khmerness.

Importantly, too, for modern Khmer it is not only the imagined community that is vital, but also the limited, politically delineated nation as drawn on world maps. Border violations and attacks on “territorial integrity” are among the foremost concerns of the Khmer I interviewed from both the student and the NGO groups. Border encroachments by Vietnam and Thailand constantly appear in Khmer newspapers and political rhetoric. Khmer identity is linked to one’s loyalty to and willingness to sacrifice or die for Cambodia, not only for what Anderson calls the “limited imaginings” of a Cambodia, but also for the political outlines of the kingdom (7). Thus
Sihanouk’s protective stance against border encroachments also makes him a “real” Khmer.

While undoubtedly grateful for the waning of civil war that transpired in the aftermath of United Nations’ involvement in Cambodia, Khmer nonetheless wish to remain part of a sovereign nation, one that will neither be usurped by Vietnamese or Thais, nor managed by more powerful nations, such as the United States, under the rhetoric of democracy. Other nations have intervened in Cambodia’s affairs for decades, as part of the campaign to promote democracy around the globe, most recently with the push for elections as a means of “legitimizing” Khmer government. Caroline Hughes rightly comments,

> Whereas democratic arrangements had previously been viewed as a matter for sovereign states, in the 1990s, international respect for sovereignty rather became dependent upon the ability of governments to demonstrate that they had been constituted by appropriate democratic procedures. (540)

Khmer believe in democracy, but concurrently, believe in Cambodia’s right to participate in political, economic, and social relations as a sovereign nation; this right cannot be usurped by others, however well-intentioned, nor should Cambodia be forced to adopt certain procedures or ideals. Democracy in Cambodia must be a Khmer democracy.
Flexibility: To be Khmer is to be flexible.

This "final" characteristic is perhaps the most vital and important for the current study. Actually, it is better described as a component of the previous six characteristics. Jan Knappert comments that Southeast Asians "were not merely the passive recipients of ideas, practices, and materials forms from outside the region," but rather "adapted, reworked, and transformed the raw material[s] with which they were presented" such that they "became" Khmer, Thai, Javanese, or Malay, as appropriate (paraphrased in King vi-vii). It is not surprising that Southeast Asia has been called the "crossroads of the world," yet the countries therein maintain their uniqueness (e.g., Neher 2000).

Exogenous concepts and rituals were and continue to be redrawn to accommodate local interests and predilections. No culture is static, but Khmer culture expresses extraordinary flexibility. And yet, while dynamic and elastic, Khmer culture also recognizes traditional design. This design outlines boundaries not as occlusions, but as warnings that beyond these walls, the link to Khmerness becomes stretched very thin.

The following diagram seeks to illustrate the manner in which the centers and boundaries of these seven elements interact (Figure 20). Again, I reiterate that these are not an exhaustive seven. Indeed, the structure of the diagram should indicate the elasticity of any description of culture. Six characteristics, ancestry, religion, language, knowledge, attitudes/behavior, and loyalty/love for country inform the idea of Khmerness. The seventh, flexibility, is indicated not by its listing, but by its influence on the connections between and among the six.
Notice that all of the six affect each other, as indicated by the dual-sided arrows, and that no one of the six is the definitive factor in determining Khmerness. Also notice that each of the individual characteristics are bracketed, indicating that there are centers and boundaries for each concept, yet neither are those concepts easily pinned down. There is no definitive answer to the question, “What is a Khmer?”; however, based on the responses of Khmer interviewed in 2002, these seven elements certainly inform the discourse which attempts to so answer.

This dynamic assemblage of characteristics, and the attendant constant negotiation of boundaries and centers of Khmer identity is important for this dissertation, for liberal democracy in Cambodia involves the introduction of new ideas into an “old” framework. Cultural diffusion, the process by which cultural traits spread from one society to another, is ongoing (“Anthromorphemics”). From the very
beginnings of Khmer history to the present day, we can trace the incorporation and reconciliation of divergent worlds to form Khmerness. Sam-Ang Sam comments that naturally, culture is an ever-changing system. Healthy cultures are both adaptive and integrated. They keep changing to be appropriate for new conditions in their social and natural environments, and at the same time, the various components of the cultural system undergo a process of mutual influence by which they become and maintain themselves as an integrated whole. (90)

And yet, observes Sam—as do many others involved in the democracy debate—"culture must be preserved and protected, as it embodies the nation's spirit, identity, and pride" (84).³²

Khmer psychologist Bit Seanglim remarked in 1991 that Khmer had lost their resourcefulness, that "the descendants of Angkor have lost [their] understanding of the real meaning of creativity and have embraced instead a passive belief in their past achievements and a substitute for nurturing the creative forces that would produce a new society of achievers" (800). Others, such as Ebihara et al. have made similar comments, indicating that in the early 1990s, Khmer felt that their culture was "gone," that what remained was only a skeleton of its former self. Bit also suggested, however, that

Cambodia today stands at a crossroads. To reverse the course of self-destruction, something/new mental power is needed even beyond massive efforts and rebuilding the physical and social infrastructure of the country. What is required is a revitalization of the life force that translates the [Khmer] legacy [...] into a new will for cultural success. The true lessons to be derived from the builders of Angkor are not their military conquests or their ability to create a powerful political state synonymous with their religious beliefs. Angkor Wat stands as a monument in stone to the enduring power of creativity to transform dreams into reality. (800)
I suggest, in turn, that the Khmer interviewed for this study, both the students and the representatives of the NGO group, have chosen to avail themselves of the knowledge that they are *kaun neak dael kosang Angkor* (children of those who built Angkor)—that is, that they believe in and draw upon the notion that their culture is not gone. Rather, it continues to be informed by both its history, and by the knowledge that nothing is permanent, that all things are changing, and that the flexibility within Khmer culture will allow Khmer to survive. “And it is in this very spirit,” writes Sam, “that we plan development within cultural preservation” (“Role of Khmer Culture” 97).

Moreover, it is the indicators of Khmerness, the centers and boundaries of what it means to be Khmer, that those at the forefront of democracy will rely upon both to help foster democratic growth in Cambodia, and to safeguard Khmer culture. The details of their work are chronicled in the upcoming chapters (5, 6, and 7). I conclude here with the resonant words of 22-year-old male: “*Khmer* comes from *khme* which became *khome* which became *Khmer,*” he said. “It means harmony, and it isn’t identified as race. It is happiness.”
CHAPTER 4.
INSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN CAMBODIA

No system of government is perfect, but democracy is closest to our essential human nature; it is also the only stable foundation upon which a just and free global political structure can be built. So it is in all our interests that those of us who already enjoy democracy should actively support everybody's right to do so.

-H.H. The Dalai Lama

Much of the developed world believes that democracy is the best system of government. Pro-democracy leaders suggest that democracy produces certain desirable consequences for nation-states, namely 1) avoiding tyranny; 2) providing essential rights; 3) enabling general freedom, self-determination, moral autonomy, and human development; 4) protecting essential personal interests; 5) allowing political equality, peace-seeking, and prosperity (Dahl 45). Certainly, American rhetoric strongly urges other nations to adopt it. Democracy anywhere, many Americans believe, positively impacts the United States, for democracies ostensibly “do not go to war with one another, produce refugees, or engage in terrorism” (Carothers 5). Thomas Carothers, Vice President for Global Policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggests that the United States contributes or denies aid to countries based in part upon its perception of their commitment to democracy. Indeed, there are U.S.-based agencies created for the purpose of promoting and monitoring democracy around the world, including the Freedom House (FH), the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to name a few.
Cambodia, in the preamble to its Constitution, states that it is now an “Island of Peace” committed to liberal democracy. To sustain that commitment, Cambodia has sought and continues to seek aid from the international community, including the United States. Thus it is not surprising that the United States monitors Cambodia’s democracy exchange rather closely. But in so doing, what is the United States looking for? What, for that matter, is Cambodia looking for? What is democracy? In order to discuss democracy in any meaningful way, whether the conversation involves Cambodia or not, it is necessary to develop a working definition of the term.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I “define” democracy by examining some of its key interpretations. Robert Dahl, Sterling Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Yale University, notes that democracy “has been discussed off and on for about twenty-five hundred years,” and obviously the whole of such discussion cannot be included here (2). However, there are certain explications worth recounting. I conclude the section with the compilation of a generally-agreed upon set of hallmarks seen to be indicative of democracy in the modern era: a framework for democracy.

Second, using this framework, I evaluate Cambodia. What hallmarks does Cambodia meet? Third, I discuss that while Cambodia may not yet meet all hallmarks, it has, for a time at least, committed itself to following the western liberal democratic model. The Khmer have stated this commitment in their constitution, and now it remains for them to implement the provisions delineated therein.
Definitions of Democracy

The term “democracy” itself comes from the Greek *demos* (the people), and *kratos* (to rule), and thus its literal definition is “the rule of the people.” The city-state of Athens (circa 500 BC) adopted a system of rule by the people, and “among the Greek democracies, that of Athens was far and away the most important, the best known then and today, of incomparable influence on political philosophy, and often held up later as a prime example of citizen participation or, as some would say, participatory democracy” (Dahl 12). In Athens, Dahl explains, citizens were chosen for public duties via a lottery system, wherein each (male) citizen had an equal chance of being chosen to serve. Rome, too, he notes, also subscribed to participatory government, but called it a republic, from the Latin *res* (thing, affair) and *publicus* (public) (13). In the Roman republic, citizens (again, male) took part in assemblies in which they discussed and settled disputes and public laws. Neither Athens nor Rome can be considered the authoritative birthplace of democracy, however, for “in several other parts of Europe, local conditions also sometimes favored the emergence of popular participation” (Dahl 19). Dahl and Fareed Zakaria, Harvard scholar and editor of *Newsweek International*, discuss democratic experiments throughout northern Europe, among the Vikings (circa 600-1300 AD), then in Italy, spreading to Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, in which assemblies of men participated in the political life of their communities. Yet none of these early societies would live up to the modern expectations of a democracy.

But, Zakaria points out, “there was another model of liberty and it took a Frenchman to see it” (44). Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu and other
figures in the French Enlightenment pointed to the government of England as an archetypal republic. England’s “assembly” became a representative parliament, which by the 18th century had developed into

a constitutional system in which the king and Parliament were limited by the authority of the other; within Parliament the power of the hereditary aristocracy in the House of Lords was offset by the power of the people in the House of Commons; and the laws enacted by king and Parliament were interpreted by judges who were mostly, though by no means always, independent of king and Parliament alike (Dahl 21).

The framers of the Constitution would follow England’s model (minus the monarchy) in outlining a political system for America. For although 18th century Americans believed in equality, giving all citizens the opportunity to participate in government, as in Athens and Rome, they also debated about the potential hazards of democracy, insofar as equality, given the opportunity, might overtake liberty. James Madison argued that while men perhaps did, as John Locke had proposed, exist “in a state of perfect freedom,” one of “equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another,” such power and jurisdiction still needed to be guided by a system of checks and balances in the new nation (Locke, Two Treatises). Madison warned of the “mischiefs of faction,” of the chaos that could result from the clash of numerous interests. The causes of faction cannot be eliminated from society, he noted, but its effects can be controlled.

“If a faction consists of less than a majority,” wrote Madison, “relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote” (Federalist Paper No. 10). In a subsequent Federalist article, Madison wrote that “if angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government
would be necessary.” However, “experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.” (Federalist Paper No. 51). This debate over whether greater emphasis should be lent to equality or liberty continued into the 19th century.

The Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, even as he admired the “equality” he saw in America, expressed his concern:

I hold it to be an impious and detestable maxim, that, politically speaking, the people have a right to do anything [...] I do not contest the right of the majority to command, but I simply appeal from the sovereignty of the people to the sovereignty of mankind. (113)

While democracy is noble idea, there need be safeguards against too much democracy. “I am therefore of the opinion,” he continued, “that social power superior to all others must always be placed somewhere; but I think that liberty is endangered when this power finds no obstacle which can retard its course, and give it time to moderate its own vehemence” (114). The United States struggled with the tension between equality and liberty in its early nationhood, and as such, its definition of democracy has evolved and changed.

What the western world, including the United States, really wanted and continues to enjoin, says Zakaria, is better termed “constitutional liberalism.” Constitutional liberalism emphasizes philosophy more than procedure, with protection the rights of individuals deemed more important than holding elections (19). “For people in the West,” he explains, “democracy means ‘liberal democracy’: a political system marked not only by free and fair elections but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the [subsequent] protection of basic liberties of speech,
assembly, religion, and property” (17). While in common parlance some use the term democracy to refer to these liberties, liberty and democracy are not the same.

Democracy cannot be defined merely as rule of the people; nor can it be established solely by effecting elections. Samuel Huntington argues that, using a procedural definition of democracy, in the late twentieth century the world witnessed a deluge of democratization. As such, many states may be called democracies because their leaders and decision makers were indeed elected (7). However, “governments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic” (qtd. in Zakaria 18). Following Huntington, Zakaria posits that while (procedural) democracy has increased beginning in the late 20th century, it has not been accompanied by a related increase in liberty. Indeed, Zakaria claims that the increase in democracy has in fact given rise to “illiberal democracy”—democracy without liberty. Representative government is certainly important, but constitutionalism, the rule of law, and protection of individual liberties are imperative.

In this chapter, I observe Zakaria’s basic premise, and thus ask: Does Cambodia observe constitutional liberalism? Is Cambodia, as it states in the Constitution, a liberal democracy? Hereafter, therefore, I use the terms democracy and constitutional liberalism interchangeably. Reference to procedural democracy is so specified.
A Democratic Framework

To gauge whether Cambodia observes constitutional liberalism, the concept needs to be systematized into recognizable components. To this end, I begin with assessment criteria as outlined by three authors: Thomas Carothers, who as mentioned served as Vice president for Global Policy at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Robert Dahl, Professor Emeritus at Yale University, and the Kluwer Law International’s Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), an international democracy "think-tank." Based in Sweden, IDEA was created in 1995 as an organization to research and dialogue about democracy. IDEA, which is open to governments and inter-governmental organizations, exists for the purpose of helping countries assess where they are on the democracy continuum. All three are major players in the current democracy dialogue, and have published materials outlining democratic norms, rules, and guidelines.

First, Carothers argues that in supporting countries requesting international aid, the United States applies a type of democratic litmus test. The U.S. assistance strategy, which Carothers calls "the democracy template," is based upon three sectors. First, the United States considers a given state's electoral process, looking specifically for free and fair elections and strong national political parties. Second, state institutions are examined, and ideally should consist of a democratic constitution, an independent, effective judiciary, a competent representative legislature, responsive local government, and a pro-democratic military. Third, a state should have an active civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a politically educated citizenry, an
independent media, and strong independent unions (88). These guidelines are summarized in Figure 21.

Dahl writes of political institutions required by democracy: elected officials, free, fair and frequent elections, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, associational autonomy, and inclusive citizenship, as delineated in Figure 22 (85). Furthermore, he states that there are three essential conditions which must be met in order to have democracy: control of the military and police by elected officials, democratic beliefs and political culture, and absence of foreign control hostile to democracy (147).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Sector Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Electoral Process</strong></td>
<td>1. Free and fair elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Strong national political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Institutions</strong></td>
<td>3. Democratic constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Independent, effective judiciary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Competent, representative legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Responsive local government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Pro-democratic military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civil Society</strong></td>
<td>8. Active advocacy NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Politically educated citizenry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Strong independent media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Strong independent unions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpted from Carothers 88

Figure 21. The Democracy Template (Carothers)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Institutions</th>
<th>1. Elected Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Free, fair, and frequent elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Freedom of expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Access to alternative sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Assocational autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Inclusive citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential conditions</td>
<td>7. Control of Military/Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Democratic beliefs and political culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. No strong foreign control hostile to democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excerpted from Dahl 85, 147

Figure 22. Requirements for Democracy (Dahl)

The International IDEA Handbook of Democracy Assessment (hereafter IDEA Handbook) proffers an incredibly complex and comprehensive method for determining to what extent democracy exists in a given subject country or society. The IDEA Handbook authors present a full list of eighty-five search questions, spanning four broad areas (citizenship, law, and rights; representative and accountable government; civil society and participation; and democracy beyond the state) that may be used to locate a particular country along a democracy continuum. These eighty-five questions can be grouped into fourteen categories within the four areas. The approach as summarized by the IDEA authors is replicated below (Figure 23).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Citizenship, Law, and Rights</th>
<th>II. Representative and Accountable Government</th>
<th>III. Civil Society and Participation</th>
<th>IV. Democracy Beyond the State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Nationhood and Citizenship: Is there public agreement on a common citizenship without discrimination?</td>
<td>5. Free/Fair Elections: Do elections give the people control over governments and their policies?</td>
<td>10. Media: Do the media operate in a way that sustains democratic values?</td>
<td>14. Are the country's external relations conducted in accordance with democratic norms, and is it itself free from external subordination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The rule of law: Are state and society consistently subject to the law?</td>
<td>6. Democratic role of political parties: Does the party system assist the working of democracy?</td>
<td>11. Political participation: Is there full citizen participation in public life?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Economic/Social Rights: Are economic and social rights guaranteed for all?</td>
<td>8. Civilian control of military and police: Are the military and police forces under civilian control?</td>
<td>13. Decentralization: Are decisions taken at the level of government which is most appropriate for the people affected?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Minimizing Corruption: Are public officials free from corruption?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the three sets of assessment criteria side by side, similarities become apparent. While any one of the three could be used independently to measure Cambodia’s democracy, I chose to use the criteria common to all three. In so doing, I use what I term “consensus criteria,” meaning that all of the authors agree that the given criterion is a fundamental aspect of democracy. The combined criteria set is

Figure 23. Democracy Assessment Framework (IDEA)
summarized in Figure 24. The left column delineates six institutions deemed essential to democracy, according to the authors examined; the right column indicates the corresponding article(s) in which that institution is discussed in a particular author’s work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Corresponding article in Carothers, Dahl, IDEA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free and Fair Elections, political parties</td>
<td>Carothers 1,2; Dahl 1,2,6; IDEA, 1, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of powers and the rule of law: separate executive, legislative, and independent Judiciary; autonomous local govt. all subject to/accountable to the law;</td>
<td>Carothers 3, 4, 5, 6; Dahl 6, 8; IDEA 2, 7, 12, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil/Political Rights, including freedom of expression, freedom to form associations, freedom of assembly, etc.</td>
<td>Carothers, 3, 4, 5; Dahl 3, 4, 6; IDEA 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of military/police, subordinate to government</td>
<td>Carothers, 7; Dahl 7; IDEA, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society: NGOs, independent media, civic associations, labor unions</td>
<td>Carothers 8, 9, 10, 11; Dahl 3, 4, 5, 8; IDEA 3, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24. Consensus Criteria for Assessing Democracy

Using the above as a guide, next I discuss the current status of democracy in Cambodia. The information presented in this chapter is garnered from the 1993 Constitution of Cambodia and subsequent amendments to said Constitution, public laws, government and NGO reports, official party statements, newspaper articles, and scholarly literature about democracy in Cambodia.
Background

The Cambodia-specific democracy assessment for this chapter has as its initial benchmark the period directly preceding and including the UNTAC-supported elections. While evidence of democratic concepts certainly can be chronicled in early Khmer history (see chapter 3), the 1991 Paris Peace Accords and the 1993 elections are generally recognized as a major staging post for institutionalized democracy in Cambodia’s modern period.8

From 1975 to 1979, the communist, repressive Khmer Rouge (who ironically adopted the name “Democratic Kampuchea,” or DK) held the country and its people hostage, destroying the legal system, prohibiting all media except for DK-controlled radio, and erasing all personal freedoms and any semblance of citizens’ rights.9 After the overthrow of DK by the Vietnamese armed forces in December 1978, Cambodia entered a socialist period lasting from 1979 to 1991. The new socialist government was called the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and after 1989, the State of Cambodia (SOC). While reactions to the Vietnamese occupation were mixed, it is generally agreed that during this period, the Vietnamese shaped Khmer political affairs, and that Cambodia was neither autonomous nor democratic.10 During this time, while a measure of comparative stability returned to Cambodia, various political factions continued to fight each other, and small pockets of Khmer Rouge organized resistance to the PRK/SOC government. Subsequently, the international community, long concerned about violence and uncertainty in Cambodia, convened a conference to attempt to achieve an internationally-supported comprehensive settlement which would
restore peace. The Government of the French Republic invited eighteen nations to
attend a series of meetings to discuss such a settlement. These meetings were held in
two sessions, 30 July to 30 August 1989, and 21 to 23 October 1991, and resulted in
The Paris Peace Agreements ("Agreements on a Comprehensive Settlement of the
Cambodia Conflict"—hereafter, "Paris Agreements").

The Paris Agreements, signed in October 1991, specified the following major
transactions: first, all Khmer military factions would agree to a cease-fire and
demobilize. Second, an interim Supreme National Council (SNC), composed of
members of the four Khmer major political factions (and parties to the Agreements) at
the time, and headed by Norodom Sihanouk, would become "the unique legitimate body
and source of authority in which, throughout the transitional period, the sovereignty,
independence and unity of Cambodia are enshrined" until a new government was
inaugurated (Paris Agreements 3).11 Third, UNTAC, with civilian and military
components under the direct responsibility of the Secretary-General of the United
Nations, would supervise country-wide "free and fair" elections for Khmer to choose
their leaders for the new government. Fourth, the Agreements set forth basic principles,
including statements on human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as Cambodia's
status of neutrality, which would serve as the basis of a new Constitution (Paris
Agreements 1-6)12. Following UNTAC, Cambodia would proceed along its newly-
formed democratic path.

The mechanics of the UNTAC elections have been addressed in detail by several
authors, and I will not go into much logistical detail here13. However, it should be
reiterated that via UNTAC, Khmer participated in a plebiscite to choose their leaders,
and for the first time in decades, began to feel like participants in the democratic process.\textsuperscript{14} As a result of UNTAC, a United Nations document asserted, “Cambodia has adopted a multiparty system of liberal democracy,” and “it is an independent, peaceful, neutral and non-aligned State” (United Nations, “Core Document”).

In the following section, I present information on the current status of Cambodia as a democracy, based upon the consensus criteria delineated above. This is not a definitive statement about whether or not Cambodia has “achieved” democracy; rather, it 1) summarizes the current democratic framework in Cambodia—its institutions, laws, and so forth—and 2) briefly assesses the current circumstances.

**Free and Fair Elections**

**Summary**

Cambodia has held three sets of national elections in the past decade, in 1993, 1998, and 2003. As discussed, UNTAC monitored all aspects of the first election process, from determining the location of polling stations, to voter registration, to ballot counting. Twenty political parties registered to compete in the election. The elections boasted more than 90 percent voter turnout. On May 29, 1993, the members of the UN Security Council supported UNTAC’s declaration that the conduct of the elections had indeed been “free and fair” (United Nations, S/25879). The election results, by party, included 1,824,188 (45\%) for FUNCINPEC, the Royalist Party headed by Prince Norodom Ranariddh, and 1,533,471 (38\%) for the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), headed by Hun Sen, with smaller percentages for the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), headed by Son Sann, and the Movement Pour La Liberation Nationale
Khmere (MOLINAKA), headed by Prom Neakarceach, constituting the remainder. Ultimately, Prince Norodom Ranariddh of FUNCINPEC and Hun Sen of the CPP were named Co-Prime-Ministers. This multi-party government became officially known as the Royal Cambodian Government (RCG) (see Figure 25).

In July 1998, Cambodia held its second set of national elections, independently and autonomously, although there were international observers present. This time, 95 percent of the Khmer electorate registered to vote, and 93.7 actually cast their ballots. Thirty-nine political parties registered to compete in the election. The CPP received 2,030,802 votes, taking 64 of the 122 house seats (41.4%). FUNCINPEC took 43 seats with 1,554,364 votes (31.7%), and the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), 15 seats with 699,653 votes (14.3%) and other, smaller parties made up the remainder (12.6%). (Roberts 182). Although the CPP won the most seats, it did not achieve the two-thirds majority needed to form a government. FUNCINPEC and SRP members contested the election results, and while most of the claims were determined to be unsubstantiated, numerous anti-CPP demonstrations ensued. King Sihanouk consequently intervened, and persuaded Prince Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy to cooperate with Hun Sen. As in 1993, a coalition government was formed in November 1998, with Hun Sen as sole Prime Minister, and Prince Ranariddh accepting the lesser role of president of the National Assembly. (Roberts 194-98). (Figure 26). Peou comments that “the [1998] election was freer and fairer than expected, but not as free and fair as it should have been in absolute terms” (Intervention and Change 324).
Figure 25.
Royal Government of Cambodia following the 1993 Elections
Figure 26.
Royal Government of Cambodia following the 1998 Elections

EXECUTIVE
- King Norodom Sihanouk (reinstated in 1993); the King reigns for life
- H.E. Hun Sen
  - Prime Minister
  - Council of Ministers (Royal Govt. of Cambodia)
  - T.E. Sar Kheng
    - Deputy Prime Minister
- T.E. Tol Las
  - Deputy Prime Minister
- Ministries
  - (24) Minister
  - Secretaries of State
    - (2) Ministry of Interior (6)
    - Ministry of Nat. Def. (6)
  - National Police

LEGISLATIVE
- National Assembly
  - (122 members)
  - Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Chairman
- Senate
  - 61 members
  - Chea Sim
    - Chairman
- Vice Chairman
  - Prince Sisowath Chivorn Monirak

JUDICIAL
- Supreme Court
  - December 1997
- Supreme Council of the Magistracy
  - first substantive meeting in 1999

CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL
- Court of Appeals
- Provincial Courts
  - Municipal Courts
Finally, in July 2003, Cambodia held its third set of national elections. The results, which are currently disputed, indicate that the CPP has won approximately 2,450,000 votes, approximately 73 seats (47%), followed by the SRP with approximately 1,130,000 votes (22%). FUNCINPEC is currently third, with approximately 1,070,000 votes (21%) ("Elections in Cambodia"). Again, even if the CPP wins 73 seats in the 123-seat assembly with the final vote calculation, such is still less than the two-thirds majority required for the party to rule in its own right. Thus, the likely outcome is that Cambodia will form another coalition government, with FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party dividing the remaining 50 seats evenly between them. The European Union’s preliminary observation found that “the election process so far has largely been well conducted” (EU, “Preliminary Statement”).

Assessment

Regarding the 1993 elections, David Roberts rightly comments: “This arrangement did what it set out to do in 1991, which was to create a political order agreeable to the superpowers and permit them to disengage and reinforce international rapprochement and economic integration. It did not create conditions that found acceptance for Khmer, either dogmatically or practically” (Roberts 148). Following the UNTAC-sponsored elections, the international community rejoiced, claiming that the mission succeeded. In (Khmer) reality, as Peou notes, the coalition government of 1993 was an “unconsolidated democratic regime,” with tensions brewing beneath the façade (Intervention and Change). As a result, Khmer found themselves living in uncertainty, with continuing political controversy, an unstable (though growing) economy,
widespread poverty, seemingly random violence, and continuing attacks by the Khmer Rouge.

The rivaling CPP and FUNCINEC parties, uneasily linked in the 1993 coalition government, had in their quest for control both been negotiating with remnant factions of the Khmer Rouge, who had regrouped and remained in hiding along the Thai-Cambodia border since 1979. By integrating Khmer Rouge soldiers, each party felt it could gain advantage over the other. Ledgerwood writes, “The buildup of tension finally exploded with two days of fierce fighting between July 5 and 6, 1997,” when “on the morning of July 5th, CPP forces surrounded and tried to enter and disarm the FUNCINEC military headquarters outside the capital. When FUNCINEC military officials refused, fighting ensued” (Ledgerwood, “July 5-6 1997 Events”). Just prior to the outbreak, then-First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh fled to France on the advice of his advisors; many FUNCINEC and other officials fled in the days following the episode, and foreign embassies urged their citizens to leave Cambodia. At least 60 people, including civilians, died in the fighting, and the United Nations Center for Human Rights documented the execution of at least 40 FUNCINEC officials and military personnel in the days following the conflict, with dozens more subsequently listed as missing (UNCHR 1997). The great experiment in democracy in Cambodia, said Doug Bereuter, then-Chairman of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, House Committee on International Relations, was in dire straits. “We have entitled this hearing “Shattered Dreams: The Uncertain State of Democracy in Cambodia,”” he noted, “which I think pretty well conveys our concerns at this point.” (“Shattered Dreams”).
The Human Rights Watch (HRW) and similar organizations documented continued and increasing political violence—grenade attacks, shootings, and other threats—in both the countryside and Phnom Penh throughout late 1997 and early 1998. In a pre-election report, HRW stated that “there is no way elections scheduled for July 26 [1998] can be free and fair” (“Fair Elections Not Possible”).

Nonetheless, the 1998 elections, like those in 1993, boasted an impressive turnout. More than 98 percent of eligible voters registered to vote, and of those who registered, nearly 94 percent actually voted—more than 5 million Khmer (IFES). The number of political parties registered to compete nearly doubled from that of the 1993 elections—in fact, a number unprecedented in Khmer history (COMFREL, “1998 National Assembly Elections”). While people did not go to the polls completely free of fear, most did feel their votes had been “secret” (Hughes 64). HRW also reported that while far from ideal, Khmer society seemed more open, and “large numbers of people, sometimes tens of thousands, were able to gather for political rallies, labor demonstrations, and protest marches,” and “for the most part, candidates were able to speak freely during the campaign” (World Report 1999).

More than 6.3 million persons registered to vote in the 2003 parliamentary elections, and approximately eighty percent of the registered voters actually went to the polls. While this percentage is lower than in previous elections, it is still high compared to other nations (“Elections in Cambodia 2003”). The preliminary findings of the European Union monitors did not indicate an extreme increase in violence related to the elections, nor problems within the ballot counting process.
The pattern of the elections in Cambodia suggests two things. First, the high percentage of voter registration and turnout (again, though lower than in 1993 and 1998, the preliminary count for 2003 is rather high) for the elections suggests that Khmer will participate in "procedural" democracy. Writing about the 1993 elections, David Roberts comments: "An electoral turnout that would embarrass most developed nations led to a choice being clearly stated: Khmer wanted santapheap and wattanphea—peace and development" (81). They know what elections are, and particularly following UNTAC, they know how they work. The higher turnout in 1998 likely resulted from the increase in internalized awareness about the elections and elections procedure. Notably, too, the 1998 elections were administered autonomously, by Khmer. Second, even the drop in voter turnout in 2003 does not necessarily indicate that Khmer are less committed to democracy. In fact, it may indicate the opposite. As Khmer learn more about democracy in its broader definition(s)—i.e., constitutional liberalism—perhaps they are pursuing efforts toward the pursuit of individual liberties rather than (or in addition to) now-customary elections. If indeed Khmer have participated in elections, yet not found their elected leaders accountable or responsive, they may (temporarily) turn away from the national polls and toward improving local governments and participating in civil society—efforts they believe are even more important to democracy. However imperfect, Cambodia has and will likely continue to implement the institution of free and fair elections. Yet they will simply go beyond them. Lao Mong Hy, former director of the Khmer Institute for Democracy, a think-tank in Phnom Penh, has stated that "Cambodia's Buddhist cultural values and its people are receptive to democracy. They will invariably involve themselves and participate in
elections whenever these are competitive.” He poignantly adds, however, that “obstacles to democracy lie elsewhere.” (“Democratic Cambodia?”).

Separation of powers and the rule of law

Summary

On September 24, 1993, the Constitutional Assembly adopted and promulgated the Constitution of Cambodia, which proclaimed then-Prince Norodom Sihanouk Varman as head of state, restored to him the title of King, and established the RGC within a framework of parliamentary democracy. The King is head of state for life, and reigns but does not govern, although he signs and ratifies international treaties and conventions. Based on the stipulations of the Paris Agreements, the Constitution was established as the supreme law of the land (Paris Agreements, Annex 5). Peou comments that “although not elaborated, the notion that the constitution is the supreme law of the land was based on the liberal idea recognizing the supremacy of law, which places limits on public officials in the exercise of political powers” (Intervention and Change 168). While certainly rudimentary, the Constitution, remarked legal analyst Justice H. Suresh, a retired Judge with the Bombay High Court and consultant for the Cambodia Defenders’ Project, is relatively flexible, and “a flexible constitution is easy to change to meet the needs of a changing society” (Legal Reforms in Cambodia Series).

The inaugural Constitution adopted a unicameral parliament as its legislative arm (a 122-seat National Assembly—the Senate was added by Constitutional amendment in 1999), a cabinet as its executive (the Council of Ministers), and
described a judicial system consisting of the Supreme Council of the Magistracy, the Supreme Court, and provincial and municipal courts. It established the judiciary as an independent power, separate from the executive and legislative branches, to "cover all lawsuits including administrative ones" (Article 109).

Translated as kol karanat chbap [literally, “principle of law”] and vitean nie chbap [literally, “procedure for the meaning of law”], the phrase “rule of law” is used in discussing justice in Cambodia, particularly in the academic and NGO communities. (Dictionary of Politics and Government 283). The rule of law assumes two things: 1) decisions are made according to a written law, and 2) the law is applied consistently to all (“Rule of Law: Toward Liberty”). Accordingly, article 31 of the Constitution of Cambodia proclaims that all Khmer citizens shall be equal before the law, and article 49 states that “Every Khmer citizen shall respect the Constitution and the laws.” Article 39 grants Khmer citizens the right to complain against any breach of the law by the State and social organs, or by members of such organs, committed during the course of their duties, and to have these complaints heard in a court of law. To prohibit interference in judicial matters by the executive or legislative branches (Article 130), moreover, the Constitution specifies that a Supreme Council of Magistracy will monitor, and if necessary take disciplinary actions against judges and prosecutors (Article 134). Thus, at least in the Constitution, Cambodia has a system of checks and balances to ensure no one branch of the government has more power than another, and to ensure the neutrality of the judiciary.
Assessment

As Stephen Marks notes, the rule of law in Cambodia is both accepted by Khmer people and disregarded by those who currently hold the power in Khmer society. While the Constitution guarantees an independent judiciary, Khmer have not had much reason to confide in the legal system to deliver fair and effective justice. Most lawyers and other legal professionals left Cambodia or were killed during the Khmer Rouge period, and thus few persons know how to interpret the law (Report of the Secretary-General, "Situation of Human Rights in Cambodia" 1997). Only one-third of judges and prosecutors have any formal legal education (Kato et al. 10). The government itself admits that there is a lack of procedural knowledge.

Beginning in 1994, however, the University of San Francisco (USF) Law School developed an agreement with the Faculty of Law in Phnom Penh. "To further the continued development of democratic institutions and economic growth in Cambodia," states a USF report, "a broad-based segment of Cambodian society must be schooled in basic rule of law principles" (Center for Law and Global Justice 5). The USF faculty included professors versed in Asian law (including China and Vietnam’s legal systems), international human rights experts, and criminal lawyers. Particularly in the early post-UNTAC years, "the program was seen as a vital link in helping Cambodia nurture the fragile rule of law structure that existed after the 1993 U.N.-sponsored elections (6). Notably, the Faculty of Law had been based on the French system, with more than 50% of the curriculum taught in French. The USF curriculum was based on the English and American systems and taught in English, but sought to emphasize Khmer government structure and constitutional law, as the students would likely be working in Cambodia
after they finished the program. The first USF program selected five Khmer with prior legal training and education for a year-long program, and in the past several years the program has expanded and has become increasingly popular. In the 1996-1997 academic year, for example, USF taught an “Introduction to Business Law” class to 1061 students (13). Training materials have been published in English and Khmer on legal processes, constitutional history, and criminal law, among other related subjects. An excerpt from a sample curriculum appears below (Figure 27). Unfortunately, such curricula do not yet heavily impact the system. It will be a number of years before enough trained individuals are available to lobby for judicial neutrality.

So Inn, a lawyer and provincial officer with the Cambodia Defenders Project, notes that due in part to the lack of trained individuals, among the points requiring reform is that “during trial proceedings, judges play the roles of both judge and prosecutor,” and “in that circumstance[,] it appears that the judge has presumed the accused person is already guilty” (1). In instances in which the accused are civil servants, however, “more often than not, the perpetrators do not face justice” (Kek Galabru, “Comment”). Civil servant salaries are inadequate, leading judges to accept bribes to influence trial outcomes. Furthermore, political leaders often instruct judges as to how they should rule on cases, while they themselves are nearly immune to arrest or prosecution.22

Indeed, a weak judicial system is incapable of upholding basic rights and protecting the vulnerable, and its courts do not function as a credible deterrent against crimes in the future (Amnesty International). In fact, as a result of the frustration many
IMPLEMENTING A "RULE OF LAW" IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

A. The Role of the Judge in Deciding What Is The Law
B. What Law Is Applicable to Decide The Dispute in Chuon v. Paillote?
   1. The law in Cambodia
   2. The law in the United States under the Uniform Commercial Code
   3. The law in other jurisdictions
      a. International law
      b. The law in France

DECIDING FACTS: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE JUDGE?

A. The Importance of Fact-Finding
B. Burdens of Proof
C. Sorting Out Undisputed and Disputed Facts
   1. Determining the importance of facts not in dispute
   2. Determining the importance of facts that are in dispute
D. Determining Which Version of A Story Is Reliable
   1. Fact-finding in French courts
   2. Fact-finding in American courts
      a. Compared to the civil law tradition
      b. Common Law Rules of Evidence
   3. Fact-finding in Cambodian courts

(Excerpted from Brand, "Judicial Decision Making")
Civil and political rights

Summary

For those holding Khmer nationality or Khmer citizenship, the Constitution of Cambodia guarantees an individual civil and political rights as delineated therein, "regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religious belief, political tendency, birth origin, social status, wealth or other status" (Articles 31-50). Khmer citizens' rights include the rights to life, personal freedom and security, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, freedom of association, and freedom to own property (Articles 32, 43, 41, 40, 42, 44, respectively). Currently, freedom of religion remains unobstructed in Cambodia, likely because in Cambodia, state and religion are intertwined. Indeed, the header to all official government documents begins as follows: *Kingdom of Cambodia: Nation—Religion—King.* Capital punishment is illegal, and “the law guarantees there shall be no physical abuse against any individual” (Article 38). Cambodia recognizes all human rights guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).

In addition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Royal Government of Cambodia has also ratified the following: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), and Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Per its acceptance of the conventions mentioned above, and per the 1993 Constitution, Cambodia guarantees its citizens the right to housing (access to a safe, habitable, and affordable home with protection against forced
 eviction); the right to food (and the ability of people to feed themselves); the right to health (access to adequate health care, nutrition, sanitation, and to clean water and air); the right to education; and the right to work (to earn a living wage in a safe work environment, with the freedom to organize and bargain collectively) (Articles 31, 35, 36, 37, 44, 45, 46, 48).\textsuperscript{25} Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World” survey, which provides an annual evaluation of political rights and civil liberties throughout the world, modified its rating of Cambodia’s political rights in 1998 from “7” to “6”, with an additional “6” in civil liberties.\textsuperscript{26}

Assessment

The list of rights guaranteed by the Constitution is indeed impressive. Paradoxically, however, Cambodia still has the most atrocious list of human rights violations in the world. Stories of inconceivable torture, sex trafficking, and domestic abuse regularly appear in Cambodia’s daily newspapers as well as human rights’ watches and reports (cf. HRW reports). Prison conditions are poor, with many facilities seriously overcrowded and lacking adequate medical care, food, and water. Pre-trial detention beyond the legal limit of six months is not uncommon.\textsuperscript{27} An American lawyer with a local NGO comments, “When I came here in 1994, the courthouses were in ruins [. . . ] In the prisons there were people who had been completely forgotten. Nobody knew why they were there or whether they had already completed their sentences” (Mydans, “Shattered Legal System” 1). Craig Etcheson, professor at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University, comments that in Cambodia “torture is commonplace in police custody, prison conditions remain mostly substandard, and regular reports of extrajudicial execution by
authorities and their cooperation with ‘mob justice’ continue to accumulate.” In essence, “the people believe the courts are corrupt, and the police seem to agree” (Etcheson, “Intro”).

The rights guaranteed in the Constitution have transformed Khmer into card-carriers, in stark contrast to traditional means of identifying themselves as Khmer (see chapter 3 of this dissertation). In order to participate in political life—to vote, for example—Khmer are asked to provide identification sanctioning them as Khmer citizens. Government-issued identity cards of Khmer nationality and passports have become the de facto means of proof of the right to live in Cambodia. Article 19 of the Nationality Law notes that only those persons of Khmer nationality have the right to receive and hold identity cards, but the parameters of Khmerness can fluctuate—recall the tripartite chuncheat-sunhcheat-kaun khmaer schema. It is also common knowledge that nearly anyone can “become” Khmer as such for the right price. It should be noted, for example, that foreign investors can procure certain exemptions from the Nationality Law. A publication prepared for the investment community specifies that “a foreigner investing 1.25 billion Riels (about $330,000) can become a Cambodian citizen without satisfying the seven year Cambodian residency requirement,” although he or she must still satisfy the language and other requirements. Relatedly, “a foreigner who donates one billion Riels (about $265,000) to the state budget can obtain Cambodian citizenship without satisfying either the seven year residency requirement or the requirement that the applicant be resident at the time of applying for citizenship” (DFDL 64).

As a result, in areas with significant ethnic Vietnamese populations, some Khmer are concerned that the current obsession with identification cards (and the
related potential for profitable enterprise) allows those who are not ethnically Khmer to “become,” or at least, to be recognized, as Khmer, with the right to vote, to own Khmer land and businesses, and to attend schools in Cambodia. Alternately, Khmer are concerned they will be categorized as Vietnamese and consequently harassed or forcibly expelled. While the Paris Peace Agreements specified that “all persons in Cambodia [. . .] shall enjoy the rights and freedoms embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international human rights instruments” (Peace Agreements, Article 15), and this was later codified in the Constitution (Article 31), concern and fear have led to violence and injustice against many individuals of varying ethnicities, particularly during the elections.

In his analysis of Khmer politics, Roberts, using Noam Chomsky’s term, refers to the “bounds of the expressible” (qtd. in Roberts 172). Roberts suggests that Cambodia can remain politically stable as long as the players do not violate or cross the “bounds of the expressible”—the unwritten prescript that the dominant party, here the CPP, will tolerate opposition, to a point. There are “codes,” established by the dominant party, regarding relations between politicians and party officials, media and government, police and civilians, etc., and provided all parties adhere to these codes, the dominant party in each instance will tolerate limited opposition and expression of that opposition. If the parties do not follow the codes, “the debate would then be relocated away from private arbitration and conciliation, to one settled perhaps by guns or tanks” (Roberts 172).

Thus freedom of expression does not yet represent unrestricted freedom for Khmer. The media are particularly affected by this, for although Article 41 states that
Khmer citizens shall have “freedom of expression, press, publication, and assembly,” censure is still part of the Khmer journalist’s life. In 1994, the Ministry of Information issued a list of things the press could not print, including comments insulting or unfavorable to the king or leaders of government, “sexy stories” or “sexy pictures,” and cartoons depicting government figures and animals. The press law of 1995 is even more restrictive, and allows the RCG to close down newspapers as it sees fit, if it believes they have published information affecting political stability and/or national security. And indeed, in December 2001, the Ministry of Information ordered the English-language Cambodia Daily to suspend publication for fifteen days. In an article about the national holiday observed on January 7, the day the Khmer Rouge were driven from power, the writer described the day as “Vietnamese Liberation Day.” (Human Rights Watch World Report 2003). The RCG later rescinded its order, but the incident demonstrates the “boundaries of the expressible” for the media.31

Still, Khmer demonstrate willingness to be involved in society in a way their generation heretofore had not. A survey conducted in 2001 by the Center for Advanced Study (CAS), a Khmer think-tank, underscores this new sense of openness. Interviewing Khmer about the then-upcoming 2002 commune elections, CAS found that 66% of their sample felt free to express political opinions in the areas where they lived (21). This is a significant representation, particularly in comparison with previous years.
Control of the military and police

Summary

Under the Paris Peace Agreements, all of Cambodia’s military forces were to demobilize, having agreed to “observe a comprehensive cease-fire on land and water and in the air (Paris Agreements 23-31). Ostensibly, post-election Cambodia would no longer need a huge military force. The task of demobilization fell to UNTAC’s military component; UNTAC hoped to disarm up to seventy percent of the forces. While some of the forces did decrease, the disarmament was not successful. UNTAC forces arrived later in Cambodia than anticipated, and “the absence of the UNTAC enforcing mechanism,” it seems, “caused the parties to adjust their positions to accommodate this development” (Roberts 86). UNTAC’s delayed presence caused the various factions to become increasingly uneasy, since there was no international apparatus to guarantee each that the others were indeed following disarmament directives. First, the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm at all, and continued to launch attacks. As a result, CPP, which in fact had begun early on to surrender weapons, ceased doing so. This, in turn, left the FUNCINPEC and KPNLF forces, which were smaller and weaker than either CPP or the Khmer Rouge, feeling vulnerable. The failure to demobilize resulted in the failure to create a neutral environment in which democracy could develop. Grant Curtis, a researcher with the Brookings Institution, a private nonprofit foreign policy organization, comments that “failure to implement fully ‘Phase Two’ (cantonment and demobilization) irreparably compromised the entire UNTAC operation” (Cambodia Reborn).
In August 2001, after several years of less-than-successful attempts at demobilization, Cambodia secured US$ 18.4 million in credit from the World Bank to execute a large-scale project. The Demobilization and Reintegration Project had as its goal the demobilization of 30,000 soldiers and reintegrating them into civilian life. In June 2002, while I was in Cambodia, H.E. Sok An of the Council of Ministers announced that the project had reached its halfway point, with 15,000 soldiers demobilized. Still, much remains to be done in terms of reacclimating both soldiers to civilian life, and vice versa.

There are several categories of Khmer police: penal (or criminal) police, security police, public order police, border police, traffic police, anti-drug or anti-terrorism police, and so forth. Under the law, only units designated as “judicial police” have lawful powers of arrest, detention, search and seizure. In practice, however, all police, regardless of whether they are designated as judiciary police, exercise these powers.

Assessment.

Dahl notes that in a given state, “unless the military and police forces are under the full control of democratically elected officials, democratic political institutions are unlikely to develop or endure” (148). The attitudes of some former soldiers do not mesh well with democracy. According to the human rights watch, RCAF soldiers are “responsible for serious violations of humanitarian and human rights law,” including murder and rape, “and military intelligence officers in particular have operated, and may still be operating, secret detention centers where torture and executions have taken place.” Soldiers will have to readjust to living in a culture which respects the rule of
law, and that will not tolerate human rights abuses. LICADHO posits that violence has become normalized within military culture (and, notably, supposed infractions were dealt with in military court); with demobilization, however, there must be a solid plan for reintegrating the soldiers. H.E. Mr. Nan Sy of the National Assembly comments: “demobilization has not had good results, is still marred by corruption, and some demobilized soldiers have become criminals” (59). The receiving communities must also be prepared, for demobilization “will require provincial governments to shoulder new responsibilities involving thousands of people in a potentially long, complex program of resettlement, vocational training, land distribution, community relations, infrastructure development, conflict resolution, education, and financial management” (ADB 2000 69). Due to RCG initiatives, there were some defections from the Khmer Rouge into the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), an amalgamation of remaining CPP, FUNCINPEC, and KPNLF forces (Jeldres, in Peou, Intervention and Change 354). Still, even by 1996, Jeldres commented that the RCAF was effectively under CPP control, and that it suffered from corruption—with bands of RCAF soldiers forming bands of thieves, stealing from or killing civilians, and kidnapping them for ransom (355).

Within the police system, there are obstacles as well. Torture is permitted to flourish due to the lack of accountability before the law of criminals in positions of power or influence. Kek Galabru of LICADHO remarks that “virtually every day in Cambodia, serious rights violations are committed by State employees such as police, soldiers, bodyguards and civil servants.” Yet “more often than not, the perpetrators do not face justice.” (Kek, “Impunity”).
According to a LICADHO report, in fact, “the most institutionalised [sic] use of torture occurs in police stations.” Violence is commonplace in police custody, a danger well-known to Khmer. Because police have only 48 hours to extract a confession from an accused perpetrator, they commonly use threats and actual physical and psychological torture to secure statements (Kek, “Impunity”).

Jason Barber reports that “while Cambodian and international law may condemn torture, the reality is that many of the people responsible for upholding the law—the police—see little wrong with torture [...] torture is just part of doing your job, and even doing it well” (“Less Than Human”).

Civil Society

Summary

Finally, Carothers, Dahl, and IDEA all agree that civil society plays an essential role in democracy development. While “civil society” excludes formal political groups and private businesses, the concept “represents a broad domain—the space in a society between individuals and families, on one hand, and the state or government, on the other” (Carothers 209). As such, civil society includes interest groups, professional associations, labor unions, media associations, and other groups, particularly nongovernmental organizations that advocate for “sociopolitical issues touching the public interest” (210). Without such associations, the state dominates individuals’ socioeconomic and other affairs. By participating in civil society, however, citizens can actively help to achieve various rights and influence improvements in their communities, becoming part of the democratic process far beyond the ballot box.
Moreover, I argue that while all of the heretofore-mentioned institutions are indispensable, civil society is the key mechanism for democracy in Cambodia.

Local NGOs are vital, for they involve Khmer in their own democratic process. This is not to disdain the work of international NGOs (INGOs), who often employ local staff. However, INGOs often have their own agendas, and moreover, those in decision-making positions within INGOs are usually members of the sponsor country, not Khmer. So, who are the Khmer involved in civil society work?

Social and political theorists posit that those likely to be involved in democracy-related activities, such as civil society organizations, are members of the middle class. In a recent article about how to promote democracy in Iran, for example, Abbas Milani, chair of History and Political Science at the College of Notre Dame in California, writes that "the logical way to accomplish this is generally agreed to be the promotion of a vibrant civil society and middle class. It has been, after all, an accepted adage of political theory, going back to the time of Aristotle, that the middle classes are the most reliable champions and guardians of democracy" (1). A major proponent of this theory was Barrington Moore, a Harvard sociologist, who emphasized the role of the middle classes in social change in *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1967).35 There are different theories as to why the middle class plays a key role in democracy. Political scientist David Sobek posits that members of a middle class—tradesmen, sellers, etc.—are necessarily part of a "bargaining culture," and that as such, individuals in this class became more given to cooperation and negotiation. Speaking about democracies from 1971 to 1995, he explains,
As the middle class expanded and proletarianized the individuals increasingly needed to depend upon one another for their welfare and this increased the mutual dependence. In turn, the growing dependence increased the incentive for cooperation. Eventually, cooperation became part of the socialization process for middle class individuals [...]. Over time this cooperation eventually developed into the norms now associated with democracy. (7-8)

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Economics and the Sloan School of Management, respectively, present a complicated mathematical equation which positively correlates the existence of a middle class with democratic development, quantifying Sobek’s theory. Whether members of the middle class are morally exceptional as such is debatable; however, they are likely more educated (literate, with access to sources of information), and have adequate income to satisfy basic human needs, and can therefore devote time and effort to such goals.

In 1998, eighteen Khmer from local NGOs, including the Cambodian Bar Association, the Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), ADHOC, LICADHO, the Cambodian Women’s Crisis Centre (CWCC), the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) and Legal Aid Cambodia (LAC), participated in a seminar on democratization and human rights held in Hong Kong. In the seminar proceedings, the participants noted that a strong state structure is essential to protect human rights, but that the structure must be part of a democracy—not an absolute controlling authority. “There is a confusion,” they assert, “between what is called the need for a ‘strong State’ and ‘strong leaders’[, the latter of] which really means powers concentrated [in] individuals.” Rather, a strong state
means solid, well functioning, effective and efficient State apparatus, [to which] the public can have access [...] as of right without hindrance [...] This involves the development of democratic State structure. If the State is weak it cannot perform its functions. If the State functions are not performed it will result in anarchy. On the other hand, if rulers become personally strong outside the State structure, everything becomes unpredictable and this too leads to anarchy and violence.


Assessment

Cambodia has an extensive range of voluntary associations and citizen groups, covering issues from monitoring human rights violations (e.g., LICADHO), to involving citizens in legislative development (e.g., Star Kampuchea), to thwarting domestic violence (e.g., Women’s Media Centre). It is the work of these and related organizations that are pushing Cambodia toward the goals of constitutional liberalism. While in the ideal (i.e., on paper), Cambodia meets the consensus criteria heretofore discussed (free and fair elections, separation of powers and the rule of law, civil and political rights, and control of military and police), as illustrated, in actuality, Cambodia falls short of its goals. Certainly, these areas show marked improvement compared to a decade ago, and unquestionably compared to the Khmer Rouge era. However, for many reasons, not the least of which are continual administrative changes and power struggles, the top-down approach cannot effect democracy alone. Now that the basic structures necessary for democracy have been outlined, it is civil society which will fight to implement the stipulations of those structures. Civil society is not without its limitations, but unencumbered with direct government control, Khmer NGOs, associations, and interest groups can reach out to all Khmer citizens. Working in villages and communes, in a country in which eighty-five percent of the population is
rurally-based, they can help to sow the seeds of constitutional liberalism at the local level.

A survey by the Center for Advanced Study found that few Khmer have actively participated in their government—only 13% of those surveyed had ever contacted a local government official about a problem or issue since the 1993 election, and only 2% ever contacted the national government. None had contacted both local and national governments. “In general,” the study notes, “the survey findings suggest that [Khmer] feel disconnected from their government.” However, “civic education can foster these connections by stimulating political interest and discussion, teaching what democracy can offer to [Khmer], and encouraging participation in civil society organizations (CAS, 2001 70-71).

If Khmer want democracy, yet feel disassociated from their government, one of the ways to participate in the democratic process by becoming an active member of civil society. Democracy commands advocacy: “democratic, socially integrated and active citizens are not born, but are created (reproduced) in a socialization process,” writes Larry Diamond, co-editor of the Journal of Democracy. He continues,

The health of democracy - like the health of each of us - should never be taken for granted. Neglected, it will suffer and become vulnerable to disease. As with the human body, so with the democratic system: health requires constant exercise, vigilance, and nutrition. As with the human family, democracy must be reproduced, and its culture and institutions renewed for each generation […] Only citizens tolerating one another's differences and respecting each other's fundamental humanity and personal worth can generate a liberal society in which all citizens are respected. There is no value that is more important to liberal democracy than tolerance. And there is no value that is more difficult to learn, and to maintain. (“Third Wave”)
Given the commitment democracy requires, is democracy, as a political system, truly necessary for Cambodia? There are countries which have democratic political structures, yet are not very tolerant. For example, India, Russia, Turkey, Uganda, and the United Kingdom all have political democracy, yet minorities within these countries have suffered serious discrimination, which the United Nations Development Programme calls the Achilles’ heel of modern democracies (UNDP 2000 59). In other democracies, mass poverty, economic crisis, religious intolerance, and violence persist. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia notes, for example, that there is racism and xenophobia in all fifteen democratic member countries of the European Union—“though the situation varies across countries” (60). Such begs the question: is it necessary to have democracy, if in fact the political structure of a democracy allows social disharmony, whereas an alternate political structure (such as a dictatorship) might better provide residents with basic needs and protect them from bodily harm? For the Khmer in my study, the answer is yes. For the unique combination of structural democracy and Khmer culture, they say, will allow democracy to succeed.

The following chapters chronicle how local NGOs are developing a vibrant civil society in Cambodia, by teaching Khmer what democracy, for them, truly is.
CHAPTER 5.
THE FIRST STEP TOWARD DEMOCRACY: HUMAN RIGHTS

Negotiate a river by following its bends; enter a country by following its customs.
-Khmer proverb

There is an implicit understanding that certain preconditions must be present in a society that intends to abide by a democratic system, if that system is to take root and flourish. Fundamentally, before we can have a society governed by the people (or elected representatives of the people), every member of that society must be deemed a person, each possessing inalienable rights—human rights. While this precondition may seem obvious to an American audience, the horrific events of Cambodia’s recent past have conveyed (and repeatedly reiterated) to Khmer that not all members of their society were persons, neither as individuals, nor even as humans, to be counted and valued.

Many Khmer, including some of the interviewees for this study, recall an adage common during the Khmer Rouge years: “Keeping you is no profit; losing you is no loss.” The angkar (organization) was omniscient and omnipotent, and any breach of rules (which changed continuously) or expression of anything deemed disloyal to angkar warranted punishment. Even after the Khmer Rouge fell from power, those who fled to the camps on the Thai-Cambodia border in the 1980s continued to live a rootless and tragedy-filled existence, and continued war casualties throughout the 1990s further contributed to a sense of despondency and anger.

While the Constitution of Cambodia provides most of the structural framework for democracy, structures and institutions are valueless if the Khmer people do not
understand and internalize the concept of human rights. According to the International Center for Law, Trade, and Diplomacy (ICLTD), individuals and communities in conflict sustain a sense of injustice, which augments into a desire for vengeance, which then manifests itself in social ills. Relatedly, there exists a general sense of unjustness and mistrust in conflict-ridden Khmer society, a seldom-articulated yet certainly sensed malaise, oftentimes even between family members. As in other societies, this lack of trust, and the sense of fear and isolation Khmer feel as a result, festers and manifests itself in catastrophic ways. At the extreme, attacks on others, torture, rape, murder, human trafficking, domestic abuse, and labor and land conflicts plague Khmer society. These social ills, in turn, re contribute to the sense of injustice Khmer feel, and the cycle continues.

It is the belief of those I interviewed, moreover, that the first step to democracy in Cambodia is the promotion of human rights. "Khmer today don’t understand each other, we don’t know how to understand each other . . . but if we can stop fighting each other, we will very quickly become jeun leun [advanced]” notes Ms. Sum Satum, Director, Khmer Women’s Cooperation for Development (Personal Interview, 6/25/02). While current statistics about human rights abuses abound, my respondents argue that this is the result of war and upheaval—this is not characteristic of “real” Khmer. Within Khmer society, there is an intrinsic, deep-seated integrity and morality of the Khmer spirit that they as leaders can draw upon to uphold human rights. Indeed, as noted in chapter 3, Khmer believe that it is part of their nature or culture to love other Khmer: to be Khmer is to love Cambodia and Khmer people. Khmer are neither apathetic nor passive, my respondents assert—but as a result of the past few decades,
they are frightened. Thus, the NGO respondents see it as part of their goal to reawaken the silenced conviction of the Khmer people, by making them aware of human rights. Kek Galabru, president of LICADHO, notes that when she first returned to Cambodia (after fleeing the Khmer Rouge) in 1992, “Phnom Penh at that time looked very sad [...] I was crying when I came. But I was also impressed that people had [opened] some small shops, and I could see the people had the will to live, to survive” (Downie, “Rebuilding Society” 4). In their quest for survival, however, some Khmer have moved away from Khmerness, exercising “reckless self-centered behavior: greed, corruption and disregard for other people” (Neou, “Role of Civic Organizations” 1). If civic leaders can bring individual Khmer to respect themselves, they in turn will have the ability to respect and honor others. Nhek Vannara, President of the Volunteer Youth Congress for Democracy, concurs: “Khmer have to love each other in order for democracy to work” (6/24/02).

By drawing upon and reanimating Khmer’ shared cultural narrative, which embodies many elements necessary for and indeed central to human rights, and therefore, to democracy, these resolute colleagues demystify it, and help Khmer to reclaim and reshape it. With human rights as a foundation, they believe, Khmer will feel empowered to become involved in other aspects of the democratic process, to become active citizens.

This chapter describes how Khmer NGOs explain human rights, debunk the myths associated with human rights, and reaffirm that although human rights is an element of democracy, Khmer need not lose their Khmerness in order to comply. In
fact, the themes of human rights echo those Khmer describe themselves as part of Khmer identity.

The Universal and the Particular: Human Rights in Cambodia

Universal Understandings

Human Rights are “universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions which interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity” (World Health Organization). Articles one through six of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Cambodia is a signatory, maintain that all persons, regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, have the right to recognition as a person, with inherent dignity, and as such, have the right to life, liberty, and security of person. All persons have the right to be free from slavery, torture, and cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment.

While “human rights” as a phrase came into common parlance in the wake of World War II, its meaning, the recognition of respect for the value of persons, resonates with concepts in Khmer culture.

The Eightfold Path to enlightenment espoused by Theravada Buddhism advises people to try to have “good actions” and “good efforts” as part of living an ethical life, in which people live together peacefully and act with wisdom and compassion (Carrison 13). Guidelines for such “good action” include the five Buddhist precepts of abstinence against 1) harming living beings, 2) taking things not freely given, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) false speech, and 5) intoxication (by alcohol or other substances) which
may lead to heedless behavior. The goal of these precepts is not only to develop individually, but also to develop concern for the safety and welfare of others and to have compassion for all living things. If one cares for others, he or she could not kill, steal, lie, or otherwise harm them.

A community training manual used by LICADHO in human rights training seeks to make this connection. Significantly, it opens with a chapter entitled, “So What are Human Rights?,” and first defines the word set (rights). “A right is something we have a claim to, or something that gives the power to give each individual that which (s)he must/is entitled to have” (LICADHO 1997, 1, my translation). During the Khmer Rouge period, Kek explained, there were no rights, and Khmer were not “entitled” to anything except devotion to angkar. “People have forgotten they have rights!” she noted (personal interview 7/2/02). Set menuhs (human rights), then, are “rights that give people of the world the ability to live, to follow the paths that are right for them, or that allow them to be limited to a good way of life” (LICADHO 1997 1-2). The right of individuals to follow their own paths described in the text is quite similar to the journey espoused in the Eightfold or “middle” path. By explaining it this way, set menuhs becomes part of a “universal” ethos of rights, which embraces basic elements that sustain a common understanding of human existence, also present in Khmer Buddhism. By reframing human rights, they become intelligible to Khmer.

As I read and reread and sorted through the information I had collected from the persons I interviewed, I unexpectedly discovered a very simple, yet decidedly relevant model, which may help to frame the discussion. This model illustrates the means by
which trainers explain human rights to Khmer audiences. The diagram is of course in Khmer, but I have translated it into English and reproduced it below (Figure 28).

Not surprisingly, I found during my research and my respondents confirmed that Khmer shy away from direct involvement or perceived involvement in *kar niyoubaay* (politics). Mentioning “democracy” immediately upon meeting someone may therefore alarm him or her, as it is a term associated with politics. Khmer do, however, express openly their desire for *santepheap* (peace). Therefore, in their efforts to encourage support for democracy among Khmer, such that Khmer will not only listen but discuss it openly, the NGOs need to link it to the desire for peace. Arguably, there are peaceful societies under authoritarian rule, insofar as there is no armed conflict therein. So too are there societies that possess all of the institutional manifestations of electoral democracy, yet are certainly not at peace. For those who advocate democracy in Cambodia, however, peace is central to the discussion.

The “Conditions for Peace” diagram is one framework which can be used to represent to Khmer a path toward democracy, for it relates concepts all Khmer recognize—e.g., tenets of Theravada Buddhism (to be Khmer is to be Buddhist) and guides for proper behavior (to be Khmer is to love other Khmer)—to human rights. Human rights, in turn, are linked to peace. (They are also later linked to the rule of law and justice, a point to which I shall return later in the chapter).
Respect for Human Rights
Respect for the value of people.
Do not engage in force, torture, or killing

Compassion, Tolerance, Understanding
Forgiveness, Negotiation

Buddhism
- Remember the 5 precepts
- Reject unfairness
- Uphold the basic attributes of a pure or noble nature:
  compassion, pity, sincerity, joy for others’ happiness

Justice—Respect for the Law

Conditions for Peace

Figure 28. Conditions for Peace
translated from the *Human Rights and Peace Building Training for Police*, LICADHO, 2002
I shall explain sections of the diagram as it was explained to me. One way Khmer can embark upon the journey toward peace is by rediscovering Buddhism (Figure 29). Wanting peace, the LICADHO trainers explain, Khmer can turn to Buddhism, and remind themselves to act in accordance with Buddhist teachings. This is usually an easy association for participants to make. In addition to the five precepts, the trainers teach, Buddhism advocates compassion and pity, and the sentiments of compassion and pity translate into related actions. Having compassion and pity, one will then act with forgiveness and understanding, and negotiating and compromising rather than retaliating (Figure 30).
These beliefs and actions sustain the objective of respect for others integral to human rights (Figure 31). For if one respects others, one acknowledges that each individual possess certain rights which cannot be violated; therefore one acts with compassion toward and tolerance of others. These sentiments do not allow for killing or torture, or other violations. The ICLTD agrees: in order to diffuse societal disharmony, they assert, programs directed toward reconciliation need to create an environment of tolerance, so that trust between individuals and among communities may be rebuilt. An environment of tolerance supports human rights, which in turn supports democracy. Buddhism, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, negotiation, human rights, and peace are all interrelated. While the diagram is unpretentious, LICADHO notes, it helps Khmer to understand an abstract idea.

Figure 31. Compassion and Human Rights

Kathryn Poethig, Assistant Professor of Global Learning at California State University, comments that the phrase “socially-engaged Buddhism” came into common parlance (among intellectuals) in the 1970s. Indeed, monks have been active in Khmer community life for centuries. Because of the Khmer Rouge interruption, however, only more recently has it been discussed in Cambodia as a vehicle for the promotion of
democracy. Beginning in the late 1970s, the Venerable Maha Ghosananda, a Khmer monk who had escaped the Khmer Rouge regime while studying outside of the country, felt he could help begin the post-Khmer Rouge healing process through Buddhism. Thus he began to bring Buddhist teaching into the refugee camps, handing out pamphlets encouraging compassion and forgiveness for the wrongs that had befallen them. Dith Pran, the Khmer Rouge survivor whose story was retold in The Killing Fields, recounts, “Refugees rushed to gaze at his saffron robe, the long-forbidden symbol of Buddhist devotion,” and “in that moment, great suffering and great love merged” (18).

Maha Ghosananda continued his Buddhist teaching throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and in 1992, Khmer Buddhism became more formally connected with “conditions for peace,” and with democracy. During the UNTAC transition, Maha Ghosananda led the first of many dhammayietra (peace walks) from the Thai border to Phnom Penh city. Despite continued crossfire by various factions, hundreds of Khmer joined Maha Ghosananda as he unceasingly moved toward the city. In the May heat, villagers awaited Ghosananda’s arrival, hopefully watching as he, in his own words, walked “step by step” toward peace.

Through the walks, furthermore, Maha Ghosananda drew attention to social and environmental issues, as each walk centered around a theme. In 1993, for example, the second dhammayietra traversed dangerous areas, encouraging citizens to overcome fear of political violence and vote. The third dhammayietra, held soon after the Khmer Rouge had seized Pailin, protested violence. The seventh dhammayietra had as its
theme the protection of the environment. Still others focused on the "there can be no peace with landmines" message.

Participation in the dhammayietra, writes Poethig, formed “an engaged Buddhist response to Khmer social issues[. . .] thematically organized around social themes that dominate Cambodia’s public discourse: repatriation, elections, the Khmer Rouge/government conflict, land mines ban, and illegal logging.” They are not simply walks; they are nomadic teaching mechanisms, providing training workshops and awareness seminars along the way. Poethig also notes that “this has revived a populist enthusiasm for religious relevance in this postsocialist period that had generally inspired lukewarm adherence among the younger generation” (25).

The NGO and association leaders interviewed for this dissertation, moreover, using mechanisms such as the “Conditions for Peace” model above, have maintained and strengthened the connection between Buddhism and social action. Along the journey, Khmer can reconstruct or rediscover who they were, who they are, and who they wish to become.

The Particular

In the training materials, however, the universal soon becomes the particular. Interestingly, for example, in the LICADHO training manual as referenced above, the same paragraph which defines universal human rights (set menuhs), also reads that “there is one type of right that we know . . . which citizens must know, that in the matter of society and culture, we respect each other, we are courteous to each other, and we are honest with each other” (LICADHO, 1997 1, emphasis mine). While we might
submit that courtesy and honesty are subsumed under the proscription against “inhuman or degrading treatment” inherent in human rights (Universal Declaration Article 5), they are more cultural than universal concepts. (To be Khmer is to be respectful, polite, patient, gentle, honest . . . ) For Khmer, the notion of a set (right) acquires a cultural leaning. Politeness and humility are not necessarily human rights one can expect as a legal guarantee. Yet they are salient for Khmer. Human rights are rendered intelligible by linking them with both Buddhist and cultural mores. Thus, while teaching about human rights, the manual also reinforces aspects of Khmer behavior and character.

The second chapter in the manual, entitled “Buddhism and Human Rights,” further illuminates the particularized quality of the training. After a brief historical section on the origins of Buddhism in Cambodia, the text reads:

Buddhism has as its goal teaching people good ways, particularly that people should have courtesy and manners, morality, and rejection of self-righteousness, for the purpose of making peace in the world . . . when we have these characteristics, we love each other very much, and are in compliance with the law of human rights of the United Nations (LICADHO 1997 3)

While polite behavior does not contradict human rights, in the legal sense it is not a prerequisite for human rights compliance. The Khmer Buddhist definition of human rights, however, also includes manners, rejection of self-righteousness or arrogance, and love.

In addition to preparing training materials that establish links between human rights ethos and traditional Khmer thinking, my respondents recognize that the settings in which these trainings are held are important.
First, as noted previously, nearly 85 percent of Cambodia’s population lives in rural areas. Thus, while most NGOs are based in Phnom Penh, outreach to provincial areas is absolutely essential. Despite the economic lure of life in the city, many Khmer prefer rural life. This is not to say that rural Khmer are unsophisticated or resistant to change (to be Khmer is to be flexible); however, trainers and facilitators realize that unfamiliar or ambiguous terms and concepts are best broached in familiar surroundings, utilizing locally-recognized resources.

Many NGOs organize mobile teams that conduct regular classes, free of charge, for all Khmer in rural areas, using various curriculums. In 1998, for example, LICADHO held 302 village “dissemination sessions”, reaching more than 20,000 citizens. LICADHO has published and distributed 678,000 copies of an illustrated information booklet about Human Rights and 50,000 booklets about women’s rights, basic nutrition and hygiene, which have been widely distributed throughout the provinces. Recently, another illustrated booklet was created to explain the contents of the Constitution of Cambodia.

To disseminate information to individuals of different backgrounds, NGOs use several types of printed materials and teaching styles. Materials analyzed for this dissertation include curriculums appropriate to various segments of the population, including women, children, students, civil servants, and police. As a significant number of Khmer in rural areas may be illiterate, trainers often use sealpul roop, or text with illustrations, to convey their ideas. They also draw upon traditional methods of communication, such as storytelling, to convey key points. One such scenario, excerpted here, is included for discussion in LICADHO’s training workshops:
What are Human Rights?

Three friends, Maen, Mok, and Mow, are sitting together, talking about current issues.

Mow: Our country is saturated with so many rights. This is why there are so many criminals!

Mok: That’s true. I’ve heard that as soon as the police catch a criminal, those human rights activists show up right away.

Mow: Perhaps it’s true indeed. For one thing, let’s say that near your home you were robbed or attacked for your motorcycle. The criminals are put in jail, but it’s only a few days coming around your house again.

Maen: Can you two do anything but talk? Every time you talk, it’s as if one says “North, North!” and the other “South, South!”, as if you’re arguing. But when it comes down to it, you’re both talking about the same thing!

(LICADHO, 2001 5, my translation)

In some instances, staff members act out the parts; in others, audience members are asked (sometimes after breaking into small groups) to read the parts. The text is then followed by questions and topics for discussion. Why would such a scenario be an effective vehicle for teaching human rights? Recall the brief discussion of folktales in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The setting, style, and banter of the scenes from the human rights dialogue above and the folktale are very similar, and are very much “Khmer”—a short tale in which there are three people, debating or dialoguing about an issue or concern. The first character (Mow) has a set assumption about an issue. The second character (Mok) bolsters that belief. Yet some event occurs to cause them to reconsider their convictions. The third character (Maen) is involved as an observer, and provides perspective on the situation and/or food for thought for the reader/listener. Judith
Jacobs notes Khmer’ love of tales which “reveal the Khmer character, especially their humor and philosophy of life,” and those that are “simple with plenty of colloquial speech” (1986 15). Didactic tales, such as the above, are common, and introducing human rights through them is, according to my respondents, very effective.

Those in attendance at workshop in which such a scenario is presented would be comfortable and accustomed to hearing this type of a story, and thus the trainer can segueway to questions pertaining to the issues introduced. “Why do you think it’s necessary to take the time to talk about this issue here?,” the facilitator continues (5). He or she can continue to discussion about related issues—such as the misconception here, that human rights means that no one can be held accountable for a crime, because human rights activists will not allow any persons to be put in jail. LICADHO advocates for prisoners’ rights, and when LICADHO first began its work, it was a common misperception that LICADHO and other human rights activists give those who break the law “too many” rights, that they seek to let the guilty go free. Facilitators need to carefully lead participants to differentiate between the necessity of human rights for all—regardless of one’s status as an offender or convict—and lawlessness.

As discussed in a previous chapter, Khmer traditionally go to the village temple as a place for learning as well as for prayer. While for much of Khmer history actual schooling in the temples was usually reserved for young males, today whole communities do gather at the temples to hear traditional Khmer inscriptions read and chanted by the monks, and to receive instructions for living their daily lives. Thus, one excellent setting for the dissemination of human rights materials is via the temple.
Oftentimes, before broaching “democracy,” monks must help to alleviate the mental stress and trauma many Khmer still suffer. A counseling program run by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) East and Southeast Asia in Battambang, for example, noted that the first step in human rights training involved developing participants’ self-esteem, using a combination of Buddhist mediation and modern psychological methods. Sopha Hang, a project consultant, noted that “[the temple] is a great place for healing. It provides basic human needs and also higher needs . . . the needs for acceptance, belonging, sisterhood, brotherhood, and a sense of community” (UNIFEM). The project listed the following among its results:

- enhanced understanding of Buddhist scriptures and application of Buddhist philosophy to mental trauma counseling;
- development of self-esteem and self-confidence;
- application of stories from the Teachings of Buddha to counseling methods;
- use of simple language so that lay women could understand without a deep knowledge of Buddhism;
- link physical needs to mental well being and provide basic health care;
- use interview forms and case management to document and monitor cases; understand the importance of human rights (particularly of women and children). (UNIFEM)

Local indigenous NGOs have developed even more specific training courses designed especially for monks, such as a 24-course program by the Cambodian Institute for Human Rights (CIHR) on “Human Rights and the Buddhist Tradition,” attended by 1,200 Khmer monks in 2000-2001. The information is then transmitted to the community via a trusted medium. Having gained the trust of a community in this way, NGOs can present many different programs and develop new methods of disseminating information (Figures 32 and 33).6
Figure 32.
Monks training in Phnom Penh, 2002
HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR MONK

FOR PARTICIPANTS

PREPARED BY
LICADHO'S TRAINERS

Figure 33.
Human Rights Training Manual for Monks, 2002
Other outreach efforts include media campaigns via radio and television, and also presentation of issues via traditional Khmer theatre. The Project Against Domestic Violence (PADV) and the Women’s Media Centre (WMC), for example, sponsored a play, featuring a well-known Khmer performer in a traditional medium, ayai (cf. Chapter 3 of this dissertation) dramatizing the negative effects of domestic violence. Using the back-and-forth banter of ayai, the play compared the lives of two neighboring families, one of which enjoys a very happy life, as the husband and wife have a very loving relationship. The other family is miserable and shattered by domestic violence. Through ayai, PADV discusses human rights, and how human rights precludes domestic violence. It then teaches about the different services available through PADV. The wife in the unhappy family of the drama seeks out services to end the cycle of violence.

Drawing upon Khmer’ love of both the traditional medium and concern over a growing social problem, the street theatre reaches areas with little access to other resources (PADV and WMC did not charge admission for the performances). The play reached over 300,000 people in remote provincial districts. After the performances, both PADV and WMC reported an increase in the number of women and families seeking assistance for domestic violence issues.

A less traditional approach, often used in conjunction with more traditional mediums, involves interactive presentations, in which rather than treating students “simply as receptacles to be filled with useful ideas and information, as if knowledge is an object to be received rather than a continuous process of inquiry,” facilitators encourage activities that involve critical reflection (Claude). These include roundtable
discussions, brainstorming, debate, and speaking from experience, among others. The interactive presentations, importantly, help to promote “the most important general goal of non-formal human rights education”: empowerment. Empowerment, as “a process through which people and/or communities increase their control or mastery of their own lives and the decisions that affect their lives,” is an essential precondition for democracy. By engaging in specific educational exercises and forums, participants link familiar societal and cultural values (such as fairness, tolerance) not only to develop new ideas, but also to take action (respect for the law and enacting justice (Figure 34). They begin to recognize the obstacles and even social structures that impede their rights and freedoms, and feel empowered to act. Promotion of attitudes of solidarity with others can affect behavioral change, in accordance with the mutual respect reflective of such solidarity (Claude).

Figure 34. Respect for human rights is related to justice

Another non-traditional medium, but one that has become increasingly important in Cambodia, is dissemination of information via Internet. One example of an organization using this medium is ADHOC, which by using Internet communication, can reach thousands of both Khmer and members of the international community. Established by a group of former political prisoners, ADHOC claims to be the “first
Cambodian organization established to address the human rights situation in Cambodia.” (Interestingly, when ADHOC was first founded, it operated with only a few persons out of a local temple). The opening page of their website (and many of their printed materials) notes the following *tosan vichea* (philosophy):

**Vision:** A society that respects human rights and law.

**Mission:** ADHOC continues its mission to educate and empower the people to realize and defend their rights and to advocate the government authorities to work for better governance and respect for human rights.

**Goal:** The ultimate goal is to bring about change in the behavior, morality and action through the establishment of the rule of law and strengthening of civil society. (emphasis mine)

By maintaining a website, ADHOC reaches a literate, English-speaking segment of the Khmer population, as well as an international audience. Yet even in this new medium, ADHOC realizes the importance of a culturally-appropriate approach. Chun Sath, Secretary-General of ADHOC, emphasized the importance of word choice in discussing democracy with Khmer. For example, he noted that when I asked to interview him about ADHOC, I used the term *angkar*, which literally translates as “organization,” to refer to ADHOC. As noted above, however, *angkar* was also a term the Khmer Rouge used, and may engender fearful correlations for many Khmer. “You should use *samagoom* (association),” he noted. “If you use *angkar*, people may be afraid. When we bring our information to people, we must be careful not to present ourselves in a way that may cause distress or upset...” In following this guidance,
ADHOC has gained access to communities and made itself familiar to Khmer. Sath explained,

Mr. Thun Sary, the President of ADHOC, was a political prisoner for many years. When he got out of prison, he had an idea to form a human rights organization. At first, ADHOC faced many obstacles—local authorities did not know what we were doing, and interfered. We had to explain over and over that ADHOC is not a political party . . . but [the people] did not know what “human rights” were. That has been our focus—teaching people what human rights are.” (6/4/02)

People in the provinces now know the ADHOC name and are beginning to understand about human rights.

“Cambodia is a democracy? In fact, it’s not.” So stated Dr. Kek Galabru (personal interview, 7/2/02). But, she emphasized, through trainings such as the above, Khmer make the connection between what they want for their culture (i.e., what they believe is “true” Khmerness) and peace and trust organizations such as LICADHO to lead them on that path. And further, they must be able to both make the connection between personal responsibility for improper behavior and social responsibility for unjust behavior and actions, and distinguish between them. “You have to teach about human rights,” said Dr. Galabru. “If you let people know that all people will be held accountable for their actions, then they will want to do something about these abuses.”
Transformation and Reinterpretation: Blending the Universal and the Particular

I have discussed the intersection of the universal notion of human rights and the particulars associated with Khmer culture. The analysis shows that there is overlap, that there are many elements of human rights in Khmer traditional beliefs and customs, and thus, human rights is compatible with and can easily be incorporated in the Khmer way of life.

However, my respondents realize that the understanding the concept of human rights is only one step toward democracy. Moving beyond recognition of human rights to actively defending human rights, again raises the worry that Khmer will lose their culture—that in the process of democratization their traditional customs and beliefs will disappear. While the general tenor of human rights is acceptable, they remain cautious that other elements of democracy which promote active participation in civic affairs may deliver an unspoken agenda to change Khmer culture. Recall, for example that as ADHOC relates in its mission statement: The ultimate goal is to bring about change in the behavior, morality and action through the establishment of the rule of law and strengthening of civil society (ADHOC website, emphasis mine).

Chun Sath acknowledges that Khmer society, as Khmer rebuild it, may not look the same as the pre-Khmer Rouge years. Speaking about domestic violence, for example, he stated that incidents of domestic violence, usually kept secret within the home, must be reported. According to traditional Khmer law, a husband may beat his wife. But “to keep domestic violence a secret, we explain, [allows] the perpetrator to become more emboldened and [commit the abuse] again . . . We teach [them to say] that
‘You are committing the crime. You must be tried.’ [Citizens] have to take responsibility.”

While notions of hierarchy still operate in Khmer society, this does not serve as an excuse for injurious behavior. “Before, people could say they were not responsible because they were only following orders from above, but now, you did it, you have to take responsibility,” continues Chun Sath. “Now, women who were afraid before have the courage to report . . . [because] now they know that they can report it and that someone will follow up” (Interview 6/4/02). He advocates for change, noting that while such actions (i.e., making the personal public) are not characteristic of interfamilial Khmer family relations, by making this type of change Khmer contribute to the more significant goal of creating a more peaceful Khmer society.

Of particular concern to some Khmer (particularly male), however, is the belief that in becoming empowered and wanting to become involved in democracy, women will lose their Khmerness. Of particular concern is that the conception of the ideal Khmer female will be corrupted, and also, that men will lose their inflated social status. Women’s rights groups have been campaigning for a specific domestic violence law, and the issue has caused some anxiety over just that. In an interview regarding this law, one official said, “In our society, men depend on their strength and the government authorities consider it as the matter of each family. But now the government wants to poke its nose into women’s affairs and most of the people in our society do not want somebody else to meddle in their family matter” (Sary 11). Thus the NGOs incorporate women’s rights training into human rights training, explaining that empowerment for
women will likely affect traditional male and female roles, but will strengthen Khmer society as a whole.

A LICADHO training manual for civil servants explains this via a chart, replicated below (Figure 35). The training features a comparative chart or diagram, divided into two sections. The first section is entitled “Characteristics that are the same,” and the things listed for women are the same as for men: “can cry, scream, know right from wrong, can love and hate, can be hurt, can learn.” The second section, however, moves to “Characteristics that are not the same.” Here, for women, the list includes: “less physically strong, know how to be patient, soft-hearted; realize they are different from each other; women are people who carry the children.” Men, on the other hand, are described as “very strong, stern or cold-hearted, stoic; oppose each other; men are people who initiate the pregnancy.” But, the text continues, “these characteristics are all necessary, and both women and men are like two halves of a whole. You can’t have one without the other—they complement each other. That’s why there are both women and men in the world.” (LICADHO, Civil Servant 34). The laws, moreover, must apply to both—if both are necessary in life, both must be protected.
A) Characteristics that are the same.

Both women and men can cry, scream, know right from wrong, can love and hate, can be hurt, can learn.

B) Characteristics that are not the same:

1) Women
   - are less physically strong; know how to be patient, soft-hearted;
   - realize they are different from each other;
   - women are people who carry the children.

2) Men
   - very strong, stern or cold-hearted, stoic;
   - opposed each other;
   - men are people who initiate the pregnancy.

C) These characteristics are all necessary, and both women and men are like two halves of a whole. You can't have one without the other—they complement each other. That's why there are both women and men in the world.

Figure 35. Women and Men
As the population of women in Khmer society grows, including the ratio of women to men, and in particular, as the number of female-headed households grows, women's rights are intrinsic to human rights. Certainly, Khmer society cannot remain pristine, and changes in conceptions of and actions regarding human rights will change women's societal positions. But the conviction that any culture is static is flawed, and as discussed, Khmer history evidences the flexibility and elasticity inherent in Khmer culture (to be Khmer is to be flexible). Societal changes, moreover, while perhaps not in keeping with traditional or recognized practice, should not be viewed as destructive. Indeed, my respondents assert, Khmer culture will embrace certain changes to better Khmer society. This acceptance, however, is conditional, and requires that certain indispensable elements and practices of Khmer culture not be forgotten or obliterated.

It is significant that those whom I interviewed emphasize in their narratives that they are spokespersons both for democracy and for Khmer culture, representatives of both progress and tradition, and that the two are not incompatible. The leaders of several women's rights NGOs, moreover, have honed this blending of traditional mores and human rights-cum-democratic values. The indigenous NGO Women for Prosperity, for example, asserts that women should be encouraged to get involved in politics, dominated in the 20th century by men. Ancient Khmer history tells of great female politicians and leaders, such as Indradevi, the wife of Jayavarman II, and Khmer women are certainly capable of participating in affairs of the state.

A pictograph from one of Women for Prosperity's training materials articulates some of reasons that modern Khmer women have not been involved in politics (Figure
Politics makes women klaic (afraid), the sketch illustrates, because it seems inevitably to lead to bad things: corruption, conflict, extortion, intimidation, and even assassination and murder. Societal custom maintains that women should be sheltered from such things. The explanatory text accompanying the sketch acknowledges the fear women may feel about politics, yet also explains that politics is the way to focus the power of the people.

Khmer women, as culture-bearers, are already thinking about societal issues, and because of their ability to carry out a multitude of responsibilities as part of their daily lives (Figure 37), it would seem both rational and intuitive to stretch women's responsibilities into the political realm. Why not politics? the text asks. For improving the status of women will improve the status of society as a whole. Ms. Koy Veth of the Khmer Women's Voice Center notes that women's participation in society via decision-making opportunities can reduce the mortality rate, improve children's health, and help to develop Cambodia's economy (Khmer Women's Voice, November 2000, 3, also personal interview).
Figure 36.
Women and Politics

From Women for Prosperity
Empowerment of Women in Politics
Figure 37. Why not politics? Women as leaders.

The caption on the right-hand side reads:
Challenges for Women in Becoming Leaders
• Societal custom favors men
• Many women are modest and defer to men, and do not voice their beliefs or opinions
• Women are tasked with most of the responsibility for the family
• They therefore lack political aspiration or goals
• They lack opportunities to be educated or to learn various skills
• They don’t have the right to control property or other important matters

But if Khmer women, as culture-bearers, are already thinking about societal issues, and can carry out a multitude of responsibilities as part of their daily lives, it would seem both rational and intuitive to stretch women’s responsibilities into the political realm. Why not politics?

From Women for Prosperity
Empowerment of Women in Politics
But, as Women for Prosperity (and many of my other respondents) astutely note, for women to succeed in the political realm as it exists in Khmer society, they must be both progressive and conservative. They must be transgressive. In their thoughts about civic equality and freedom, they must be progressive, thinking about current issues and possible societal changes; yet they must also take care to protect Khmer traditions both for themselves and for future generations. The authors of the Empowerment of Women in Politics booklet, have considered this seemingly contradictory combination, and propose that Khmer women are flexible enough to achieve in the arenas of both politics and culture, serving as leaders versed in both. Both involve institutions, procedures, and rituals that identify and affect the lives of Khmer people, and Khmer women can combine those of both.

The transgressiveness is both stated and unstated, but decidedly present. A section of Empowerment of Women in Politics discusses the bindings of culture, of how pet (cultural prescriptions, gender) differ for girls versus boys. These pet stipulate division of roles into male and female, with those of the male being "higher" or with more status than those for the female. Female roles and vocations, they note, are characteristically called thommacheat (natural), such as raising children, important yet affecting only a small number of persons, whereas male roles and vocations are those of sangkum (society), such as involvement in politics, affecting villages and communities, and thus women's jobs are considered of less worth. The authors note that this attitude is not empowering for women. Interestingly, however, they also express something via unspoken communication. The picture accompanying the text portrays two children, a male and a female, and two adults, their parents (Figure 38). While the text bemoans
the unfairness of the plight which will befall the female child, in terms of the societal devaluation of her work, this seemingly simple picture conveys important cultural information. The picture depicts both children showing genuine respect for the parents. The Constitution guarantees a Khmer the right to life and liberty, yet also includes, the “right” of children to “take good care of their elderly mother and father according to Khmer traditions” (Article 47). While the text suggests that the female child is given fewer opportunities, in the illustration both children use the *sompeah*, or touching of hands together, and bow slightly indicating respect for elders and for authority, a true expression of Khmerness. This theme—that people can be learn about becoming empowered while remaining Khmer—is reiterated throughout the manual.

Figure 38. *Sompeah*
Another illustration (Figure 39), for example, calls women to political action, but also emphasizes that women should not forget their families. "Very often the subject of leadership and relations with family come up," the caption begins. "It is necessary to explain to everyone what you are doing, so that they can support you. Your work is a source of happiness for you. Make sure your family members understand the requirements and responsibilities of your work." And "be firm about needing time for your work, and ask for their help with household responsibilities." Thus it espouses the importance of women's participation. However, the text continues, "It is your responsibility to make your family understand that your success does not come at the expense of caring for your family." And finally, "It is necessary to plan well, to enable yourself to have time for your family and give your family members affection and comfort."

Figure 39. Balancing Civic Participation and Family
One section illustrates a Khmer woman speaking before a large crowd, perhaps, as indicated by the wall hanging and the podium, at the United Nations (Figure 40). Notice, however, that while she participates in contemporary affairs, she is dressed in traditional Khmer dress. The text provides a guide for behavior appropriate for a good leader: "You must 1) listen and study diligently; 2) dress as you ordinarily do; 3) be genuine and think widely [broadly]; 4) be honest, and accept criticism gracefully, in order to improve and better yourself." Political aspiration mingle with attention to comportment. The manual also devotes several pages to the importance of one's body language (Figure 41). Each illustration is accompanied by text explaining the nonverbal indication of each position—crossing one's arms may indicate that one is unsociable, or unreceptive, for example. While certain postures and gestures are preferred to others, politeness is emphasized in all stances, and the woman is always outfitted in traditional Khmer dress. Much of Khmer culture is connected to visions and expectations of the ideal Khmer woman, and in particular, her comportment. The cogency here is that an indigenous NGO, promoting democracy for Khmer women, also stresses appropriate cultural conduct.
Figure 40.
Contemporary Affairs
1) Listen and study diligently;
2) Dress as you usually do;
3) Be genuine and think broadly;
4) Be honest, and accept criticism gracefully, in order to improve and better yourself

Women for Prosperity
Empowerment of Women in Politics
Figure 41.
Body Language

Women for Prosperity
Empowerment of Women in Politics
Continuing Along the Path

In 1996, the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights began to train primary and secondary school teachers in human rights teaching methodology. A review of the training confirms that Khmer want to learn about human rights and related issues. A questionnaire found that 90 percent of the teachers rated the training “very important” or “important”, and that they desired more training. The review indicated that “some [teachers] travel long distances, spending large sums for transportation (which are not reimbursed),” braving then-Khmer Rouge controlled areas to reach the training sites. “Some tend their rice fields early in the morning,” the review continued, “and then come directly to the training sessions, still muddy from their work.” Furthermore, “trainees often extend the training sessions way beyond the scheduled closing.” They are eager for instruction in methods they believe will make Cambodia a better place (Neou, “Human Rights”)

Enabling Cambodia to become a liberal democracy involves rebuilding a sense of selfhood for its people, first as Khmer, whose culture is both universal (human beings with irrefutable rights) and particular (a people who are distinct from other, non-Khmer); second, as citizens of a nation, an imagined community of individuals, equal before the law, and entitled to have a say in the workings of that nation. The story of democracy in Cambodia is thus also the story of reawakening and reaffirming Khmer culture.

In order for democracy to take hold in Cambodia, Khmer must heal the wounds of history, which have caused them to stop trusting each other, and one of the avenues to doing so is to bring Khmer to a true understanding of human rights. National
reconciliation cannot be achieved solely by changing a nation's political structure, for it "is in large part a spiritual and psychological process that seeks to encourage moral reflection and individual and collective repentance" (ICLTD, emphasis mine). And with these conditions achieved, Khmer can engage further in the democracy debate and dialogue.

The following chapters continue discussion of this constant negotiation in Cambodia’s journey in relation to democracy, toward peace.
CHAPTER 6.
CODIFYING CUSTOM: RULE OF LAW AND THE INDEPENDENT JUDICIARY

*Control your temper through concentration and patience;
control everyday evil and crimes through rules and authority;
those who control their hearts to reject anger
deserve the greatest praise of all.*

-Khmer proverb

It is said that the *rule of law*, the principle that every person in a society is
governed by law, and that the law applies equally to all individuals therein regardless of
race, ethnicity, class, wealth, religion, and so forth, is fundamental to any democracy.
Furthermore, the law must be clear and easily-identifiable to citizens: “every state must
have the power to maintain order and punish criminal acts, but the rules and procedures
by which the state [makes, enacts, and] enforces its laws must be public and explicit,
not secret, arbitrary, or subject to political manipulation by the state” (“Rule of Law”).

Much of the international community has implied, if not out-and-out reported, that the
application of any law in Cambodia is “pro-rated” according to one’s power, social
status or wealth, or that there is no law in Cambodia at all. In 1994, British journalist
William Shawcross commented that “in Cambodia today the very culture is one of
lawlessness” (37). Recent media headlines also depict the chaos of Cambodia’s judicial
state.¹

Yet the lack of full adherence to *kol karanat chbap* (the rule of law) in
Cambodia heretofore does not unequivocally indicate citizens’ lack of appreciation for
it in the present, nor preclude observation of it in the future. On the contrary, local
NGOs maintain that the rule of law and the related implementation of a free and
independent judiciary are the most important issues facing Khmer as they strive toward
democracy today. At a forum which took place while I was in Cambodia in 2002, the NGO community issued the following statement:

The continued absence of the rule of law in Cambodia is probably the single most important obstacle to development in the country impeding both local and foreign investment, internal trade, public confidence in the government, and most important—the security and general well-being of the people. The significance of the rule of law lies in protecting the most vulnerable[,] who do not have the means to protect themselves. (56-57)

Some scholars argue that so-called “Asian values” conflict with the tenets of the rule of law, and that they are not appropriate for “Asian cultures.” Others, while steering clear of the essentialist terminology, assert that Khmer social structure, hierarchical and bevy to a patron-client system, cannot mesh with the rule of law, otherwise it would have been implemented by now. Those I interviewed, however, disagree. Local NGO leaders, intellectuals, and others see the need for the rule of law in Cambodia. Khmer historian Ros Chantrabot spoke at the conference mentioned in the introduction, suggesting that in order to exist as a state in the long-term, Cambodia must implement the rule of law:

First of all, for the time being, it is necessary to construct a state of law, with all of the institutions necessary to guarantee equality of citizens before the law, impartiality, and security. This State of law is the foundation of the country, shielding against an overabundance of power, and also is a landmark for the people. It has an immutable quality, while human beings change with the passage of time. (391)

This chapter has a dual purpose. First, I shall delineate what Khmer mean by the rule of law—in other words, how is it meaningful to them? Second, I shall discuss the means by which they explain this new model to others, again using cultural venues.
The Western Model

Cambodia's initial definition of the rule of law came from the Paris Agreements and subsequent UNTAC pandect. In 1992, the Supreme National Council, the designated authoritative body during the transition period, agreed to the UNTAC provisions for judiciary procedure and criminal law. There are 75 articles in the provisions, which I will not replicate here. The basic tenets, however, are as follows:

1. The independence of the judiciary must be guaranteed in accordance with The Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, adopted by the United Nations.
2. Judges must decide cases in complete impartiality, on the basis of facts which are presented to them, and in accordance with law, refusing any pressure, threat or intimidation, direct or indirect, from any of the parties to a proceeding or any other person.
3. The judiciary must be independent of the executive and legislative authorities and of any political party.
4. Trial courts are composed of a judge and a prosecutor. These courts have general jurisdiction over the application of these rules, as well as laws and other norms in force in their respective jurisdictions.
6. The right to assistance of an attorney or counsel is assured for any person accused of a misdemeanor or felony.
7. No one may be detained more than 48 hours without being brought before a judge, following charges filed by a prosecutor.
8. No detainee shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, nor be beaten or tortured.
9. All suspects, indicted and accused persons benefit from the most complete presumption of innocence.
10. The principle of equality of all persons under penal law requires that punishments applicable in Cambodia be the same in all provinces or zones. (Cambodian Defenders Project, "Provisions")

The Constitution of Cambodia of 1993 retained most of these provisions, and provided for a formal government structure, with an executive, legislative, and judicial branch. An independent judiciary, however, is perhaps the most unfamiliar to Khmer,
not because they do not want it, but because in their lifetimes, they have not
experienced it. As discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation, the Khmer Rouge
destroyed the existing legal system in 1975, and the one that replaced it in the People’s
Republic of Kampuchea/State of Cambodia period beginning in 1979 was a direct
extension of the executive. Several of my respondents noted that the current juggernaut
of the judiciary is a catch-22: Khmer need an effective judiciary to help them to believe
in democracy, for once they begin to see the system working—people being held
accountable for crimes, people being treated equally before the law—democracy will
become less an abstract concept and more something experience in everyday life. But
in order to have an effective judiciary, Khmer have to believe in democracy, and utilize
their individual liberties—freedom of expression, voting, etc.—to insist upon separation
of powers and the rule of law. Even after UNTAC, Khmer have only recently begun to
do so.

Neou Kassie, director of the Cambodian Institute for Human Rights (CIHR),
comments that many Khmer are still in “survival mode.” Decades of turmoil taught
Khmer to rely upon force and violence, rather than the rule of law, to solve problems.
In the 1970s, 1980s and much of the 1990s, Khmer were struggling to produce (or
purchase) enough food for their families, with most living below the poverty level.
Thus issues such as the rule of law rightly took a back seat to problems directly at hand.
As Nhek Vannara of the Khmer Youth Congress for Democracy commented, “Culture,
literature, and morality are very important—but poverty makes people think about other
things” (personal interview 6/24/02). Even post-UNTAC, most NGOs initially had to
focus on immediate concerns: alleviating starvation, poverty, and disease, and clearing
landmines, for example. These problems have not been completely alleviated, but they have been stabilized somewhat, and thus, Khmer can now work on other concerns. As with human rights, the NGOs now work to educate Khmer about the rule of law and the importance of an independent judiciary by relating the principles underlying them to principles in Khmer culture.

At the forum mentioned above, NGO representatives stated that “a credible, predictable and transparent legal framework and an independent and capable judiciary are the foundations of the rule of law and underpin the development of democracy, market economy and social justice.” These, for Khmer, are the most important characteristics for a just society: credibility—are the representatives of the justice system trustworthy, rather than swayed by money or threats?; predictability—will the judges follow legal precedents, rather than ruling randomly, and will all citizens be treated equally under the law, as per the Constitution?; transparency—will citizens know what the law is, and will these laws be open to public scrutiny?; independence—will the courts be impartial, and free from influence from the executive?; capability—do those tasked with formally upholding the law have the appropriate knowledge and training to do so? In short, Khmer need to know that they can count on the legal/judicial system to protect and uphold their rights. It is fruitless for one to understand what human rights are, without the appropriate structural framework to ensure they are upheld. Khmer are looking for accountability of their current government: clear lines of legal, financial, and political accountability to ensure effective and honest performance (IDEA Handbook 14).
In particular, this means that the laws of the nation must be held higher than political affiliations, family ties, patron-client relations, or any other associations. It means that officials cannot divert public resources for their own use. It means that officials who currently serve in other segments of the government cannot also serve as judges, or on the Supreme Council of the Magistracy. It means that citizens are to have access to draft legislation and budget policies, and should be aware of their specifics. It means that one cannot be taken into custody without knowing the crime with which he or she is being charged, and what law he or she ostensibly has broken. It means that citizens accused are presumed innocent, and if convicted, have the right to appeal a verdict. It means that judges must be free from intimidation by political parties, and they must not accept money or other bribes to influence their actions. It means that if members of the judiciary abuse their power, there is an independent body to inspect and prosecute their offenses.

The past few decades destroyed public confidence in the government. Khmer respected government because they feared it, not because they trusted and believed in it. Thus, the need for accountability and transparency has never been more necessary. There must be a framework in place, which, when coupled with Khmer' political will (desire for human rights, and related civil/political rights), supports a democratic society. As the U.S. Institute of Peace asserts, “adherence to the rule of law entails far more than the mechanical application of static legal technicalities; it requires an evolutionary search for those institutions and processes that will best bring about authentic stability through justice” (USIP, “Rule of Law”).
Traditional notions of justice

While in contemporary Cambodia corruption seems to have become a part of daily life, its existence does not mean it is desirable as a way of life by Khmer people. Rather, corruption is seen as a sign that Khmer have moved away from traditional principles.

Popular Khmer folktales, often didactic, call upon *Subha Tunsay*, or Judge Rabbit, to decide perplexing matters using his wit and wisdom. Other characters in the folktales bring their concerns to Judge Rabbit, who intelligently resolves any conflict or disagreement. While lively and often comical, with Judge Rabbit serving as a cunning trickster figure, in the *Tunsay* tales, the righteous and honorable character wins and the conflict is resolved, if by unusual means. Tunsay weighs the evidence justly, without prejudice based upon personal characteristics or social status of the characters who request his ruling.

Khmer history evidences more formal (though not necessarily ordinary) institutions distinguishing right from wrong as well. Mabbett and Chandler discuss a third-century inscription detailing a justice system of the Funan period, and point out legal practices in inscriptions of the Angkor period. While “there is no way of measuring the extent of discrimination or corruption in the administration of justice” during these times, they write, “the ideal of fairness to all was certainly recognized; one judge [during the Angkor period], for example, is declared to have been appointed on the strength of his impartiality” (71-2, 167-68). Chinese emissary Chou Ta-Kuan, visiting Cambodia in 1296 and 1297, commented about justice in Cambodia as follows:
Points of dispute between citizens, however trifling, are taken to the ruler [...] take the case of two men who are disputing over some unknown matter. Twelve little stone towers stand in front of the royal palace. Each of the contestants is forced to be seated in one of the towers, with his relatives standing guard over him. They remain imprisoned two, three, or four days. When allowed to emerge, one of them will be found to be suffering some illness—ulcers, or catarrh, or malignant fever. The other man will be in perfect health. Thus is right or wrong determined by what is called 'celestial judgement.' (33)

As related in an earlier chapter of this dissertation, Khmer social relations operated under the patron-client system, which with the King as the supreme patron and patriarch, served as the basis of Khmer life for centuries. (cf. Chandler History; Ebihara, Svay; Ledgerwood, "Understanding Cambodia"). Benevolence of the ruler was offered in exchange for the loyalty of the ruled, with varying degrees of ruling power bequeathed based upon one's social status. Ledgerwood observes that these unequal exchanges between the wealthy and the powerful and the poorer and dependent are referred to as patron-client relationships. Both sides provide goods and services to the other. The patron possesses superior power and influence and uses them to assist his clients. The clients in return provide smaller services and loyalty over an extended period of time.

Ledgerwood acknowledges, however, that ideally, "the relationship is complementary, with both sides benefiting. The client is protected and assured a minimum level of subsistence" ("Understanding Cambodia"). Moreover, Khmer were not unsophisticated about such relationships—that is, they were aware of the power relations involved, and the lower-status client was likely forever indebted to the patron, yet the higher-status patron was also bound by responsibility and accountability. A Khmer proverb reads, "Neak mean reakssa khsat dauch sampuat poat pi kraw" (The rich should take care of the poor like the cloth that surrounds you). While unusual from a Western perspective,
the relationship was in many ways symbiotic and offered both parties an amount of social, financial, and psychological protection. While perhaps unequal, the system was still equitable.

The Khmer Rouge, however, dismantled existing systems, both codified and customary, meting out seemingly random punishments in contumacious confusion. In subsequent regimes, the rule of law remained unenforced. (While Khmer were no longer under the Khmer Rouge, they certainly did not have many liberties under the socialist PRK/SOC regimes that followed.) Kao Kim Hourn, executive director of CICP, notes that as a result, in dispute resolution, Khmer, drawing upon their experiences with a patron-client system, tended to rely “on the good will of other parties rather than on the law itself for the resolution of the conflict” (Grassroots Democracy 7, footnote 8). Reliance on good will and patronage is not necessarily anathema to justice; however, given present conditions, they are no longer sufficient.

The difficulty, moreover, lies not with the social structure, but rather, with who has power, and whether individuals, regardless of their status or power, are held accountable for their behavior. I do not suggest that patrons throughout Khmer ancient history were without fault; however, the 20th century has witnessed a change from the holism Dumont suggests is inherent in a hierarchical society to a more abusive system of relationships. Khmer scholar Aun Porn Moniroth comments that Cambodia, “a society overwhelmed by a culture of cult of personality, authoritarianism, paternalism and patronage of the leading class over the citizenry,” fell prey to “egoism and militarism, [wherein] the respect of the law is not as important as the respect of the individual in power” (39).
Consequently, Moniroth suggests, extortion, corruption, and nepotism became "transformed into a tradition and an acceptable way of life" (39-40). One of the most stifling impediments to democracy is that currently, in addition to high-level government officials, the police and military possess an enormous amount of power, particularly at the local level. Police randomly levy fines for minor transgressions (or no transgressions at all), and villagers seem equally apprehensive about similar activities by soldiers. It is therefore very important that the police and the military be included in discussions about the equal treatment of all—including themselves—before the law.

While perhaps not unusual, my respondents argue that *pukrooluoy* (corruption) is not acceptable (see Figure 42). The seeming lack of a legal culture in the present day is not something inherent in Khmer social order. If Khmer are given a mechanism—which has been absent for three decades—by which all citizens can be held accountable according to the rule of law, such actions will become the exception rather than the norm. Thus my respondents work to disseminate information about the need for codification of the rule of law and subsequent development of an independent, impartial judiciary.
Figure 42.
Corruption exists, but it is not wanted.
From a Center for Social Development newsletter
Buddhism and Blending

When I asked him to describe “Khmer culture,” Professor Hor Lat, Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology at the Royal Fine Arts University in Phnom Penh, responded that “Khmer Culture is *chhap* (law) plus *toumloap* (habits) plus *propeiney* (traditions/customs).” In other words, he said, laws governing right and wrong actions grow out of traditional Khmer principles, which have always manifested themselves in *toumloap* and *propeiney*. Significantly, he continued, “our civic law was created from the implementation of religious philosophy,” and each engages the other (Personal interview, 10 July 2002). Khmer religion—Buddhism—with its guidelines for thought and action, was, along with habits and customs, the precursor to civic law. Many religious and legal precepts are technically separate in modern Cambodia—one may ignore guidelines about say, gluttony, which is proscribed in Khmer Buddhism, but an individual who commits such offense is not subject to punishment by civic law. As Hor mentioned, however, both inform each other, and sometimes overlap. Thus it is not surprising that in seeking to implement the rule of law in the nation-state, those at the forefront of so doing turn to the religious community, the *sangha* (monkhood), for aid in explaining it to members of Khmer society.

Temples historically and traditionally have been a major medium for community decision-making, spiritual counsel, and conflict resolution in Cambodia. Catherine Morris, director of the Peacemakers’ Trust, comments that “Buddhism is the only institution that cuts across all political and social divisions in Cambodia,” and further, “the Buddhist clergy evokes widespread popular deference, and has exceptional power
to sway people at the grassroots level” (3). Thus, even though individuals occupy varying social strata, the monks’ messages cut across them, and are applicable to all. Moreover, while following the Eightfold path is an individual’s responsibility, law is recognized as a mechanism formed by societies in order to guide persons in following that path. Laws reflect (codify) the importance of behaviors and actions conducive to one’s own and others’ well-being. The NGOs turn to the temples to disseminate this information.

The Venerable Yos Hut Khemacaro, a senior Khmer monk whom I had the honor to meet at Wat Langka, has spoken about the importance of active citizenship. In one of his many articles, he writes that

in the face of Cambodia's age-old traditions of deference and hierarchy, it is easy to misinterpret Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and justify inaction in the face of injustice[...]. The tendency to see it as a passive religion has often led its great potential to be overlooked by outsiders. [Yet] Khmer Buddhism's timeless message of non-violence and compassion offers an important platform for promoting constructive social and political change in Cambodia today. (1-2)

The Cambodia Foundation for Education and Development (CAMFED), for example, has as one of its goals “to introduce [Khmer] monks to the development possibilities and need of their village communities,” with the expectation that the monks will teach community members in turn. CAMFED holds law literacy classes, paralegal training sessions, and discussions of constitutional law, criminal law, civil law, and litigation procedure.
Another local NGO, Buddhism for Development (BFD), has been involved in promoting democracy and the rule of law since the early 1990s. In their statement about capacity building, BFD notes that they realize the advantages that Buddhism and monks can offer to the development and peace of their communities...[and] Buddhism for Development advocates a society that [incorporates] democracy into its way of life, respects human rights, and [treats] everyone equal[ly] under the rule of law. (“Capacity Building”)

BFD publishes books on the rule of law, which it disseminates, both in print form and through oral recitation, to the communities surrounding the temples. Currently, BFD has representatives in 31 centers in ten provinces, and produces workshops in conjunction with the Khmer Institute of Democracy on understanding and implementing the rule of law. (“Capacity Building”).

Linking activism with Buddhism allows Khmer to develop the confidence to take action. Working through the temples, NGOs have begun to rebuild societal trust: if the monks promote the rule of law, Khmer believe, the rule of law must be beneficial for Khmer, since monks are moral beings who seek only to guide them in their search for goodness and happiness. Making merit and offerings at the temple is a familiar act. By holding democracy-related activities in the temples, and including familiar rituals during the activities, Khmer learn that standing up for one’s rights, and for human rights, need not correlate with bloodshed and corruption. The people can then take these lessons into their homes and village communities.

Those who do not go directly through the temples or monks still utilize Khmer cultural principles to convey their messages. Youk Chhang, director of the
Documentation Center of Cambodia, began running a training session on responding to oppression and human rights violations in 1998. Chhang organized a role play, with four character roles: “perpetrator,” “victim,” “bystander,” and “healer.” In the role play, participants were asked to provide an example of an instance in which he or she played one of these roles: “i.e., a time when they stood by and did nothing, when they violated someone’s rights, when their own rights were being violated, and when they witnessed someone whose rights were being violated and took action” They acted out the instances, followed by debriefing. During the debriefing, Chhang discussed the means by which one might move from one role to another—in particular, from any of the first three, perpetrator, victim, or bystander—to the fourth, the healer. Chhang noted that the healer figure, who might be made familiar by comparing him or her to a monk, teacher, or other revered figure, could also be viewed as an activist figure. Both healers and activists, it is explained, promote and protect the rights of others.

The next element of the training, entitled “Going Further,” asks participants to make the link between recognition of human rights and accountability to the rule of law. They are asked what types of mechanisms need be in place for oppression and crimes against human rights to be stopped, what they believe the mandate of such mechanisms should be, and how they as citizens might become involved in the process. Democracy is not a passive ideology.

Such culturally-based programs are offered not just for laypersons, but also for candidates and incumbents. An interesting example of a “revised” program is a “good governance” training for Provincial Governors, other senior officials, and public servants offered by CIHR since 1998. The CIHR seminars focus on the necessity of
neutrality for public servants in official duties, forgoing nepotism and not accepting bribes. Importantly, CIHR strengthened its message by infusing a cultural dimension to the training. Amidst lectures and handouts on the need to change anti-democratic and authoritarian values and processes, for example, participants were asked to sing the “Khmer Children’s Ideal,” a traditional Khmer song. Notes Kassie Neou, Executive Director of CIHR, “[it is] a well known song, but with words that remind and reinforce the essential messages” of good governance. While lengthy, the song is worth repeating in its entirety.

May all Cambodians have loving kindness and compassion!
And together protect the glorious interests of our nation
Under the wise guidance of intelligent leaders
And clear sighted policies with deft flexibility,
And who can provide their beloved people
with justice and integrity,

Leaders with intelligence in speeches and clear thinking at all times
And determined bravely to overcome all hardships with constant devotion
Putting the interests of the nation above all
And able to bring our beloved nation unity and national reconciliation
And to promote the prestige of the country as high
as those of other countries in the world

Respecting our national custom and tradition by leaders
Don’t let them wane,
And sticking firmly to the role as a leader
To establish glorious and advanced communities
And all Khmer children have to serve the country
To promote liberty and prosperity in our beloved motherland.

While emphasizing responsibility, justice, integrity, and neutrality, elements integral to a society which observes the rule of law, the song also points to the important elements of Khmerness, discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation: the
greatness of Khmer culture, the love of Khmer for each other, loyalty, the flexibility of Khmer leaders, and so forth. Additionally, leaders must think of the nation, rather than individual, personal power, "to promote liberty and prosperity in our beloved motherland." These trainings, notes Neou, have been used at different points with commune level officials, those at provincial and district levels, and even those involved in the National Assembly elections ("Good Governance").

Active citizenship

Khmer scholar Lao Mong Hay, former director of the Khmer Institute for Democracy, notes that following UNTAC, Khmer became more informed about and "subsequently emboldened to seek to influence government policy." In a pamphlet created to teach Khmer about democracy, the Committee for Free and Fair Elections (COMFREL) also asserts that "Democracy is a path that leads citizens to greatness," and that each Khmer must get up and move along that path—i.e., take action. And further, a true democracy builds upon "the relationship/trust between leaders and the people they represent includes creating laws that take into account the opinions and beliefs of the people, disseminating information about those laws, and execution of those laws" (COMFREL 2001 1-2, my translation from Khmer). One of the most exciting projects in Khmer democracy today is citizens' input on the creation of laws; the most active NGO in this area is Star Kampuchea.

When I called to arrange an interview at Star Kampuchea, I assumed that I would likely meet with a single individual, probably the executive director. I arrived for the interview, and the Executive Director, Mr. Nhek Sarin, was indeed present;
however, he had also invited several of his colleagues to participate. I was happily surprised—such conduct, I learned, is characteristic of Star Kampuchea, as the organization itself is structured democratically. Star Kampuchea has three major programs: the Advocacy and Information program (AIP), Capacity Building Program (CBP), and the Legislative Development Program (LDP). All of these programs “follow an extensive participatory process that Star Kampuchea has evolved from inception. All staff members take part in strategic decision-making and are assigned responsibility for two-way consultation with Star Kampuchea’s wider membership” (2003 statement 2). And indeed, in this meeting and subsequent meetings (I was invited to attend some forums), Star Kampuchea involved many staff members in both discussions and decision-making processes. For each question from my own survey I asked, moreover, I received at least three, and sometimes four answers, as each staff member responded and provided feedback as appropriate.

Star Kampuchea openly cooperates with 37 NGOs both in Phnom Penh and in the provinces. According to Star Kampuchea, civil society “is the social sphere located between families and the state,” comprised of individuals and groups of individuals (civil associations, or CAs) acting independently from the state. “Through these CAs,” they continue, “groups of people express and promote the interest of their target beneficiaries [. . . and] try to influence the administrative and legislative authorities to adopt policy consistent with these interests” (Star Kampuchea brochure, undated).

Tellingly, Star Kampuchea staff was the organizer of a then-upcoming “Civil Society Fair,” which “will give space for all civil society actors to reinforce their relations and cooperation in their respective purposes, through formal and informal
gatherings.” They emphasize a distinction between a Civil Society Fair and an NGO Fair, as the former seeks to consolidate various NGO strategies “for a real civil society movement.” In other words, the fair is to encourage all Khmer to participate in civil society; it is a public, open fair. There is a tendency for Khmer en masse to feel disconnected from Khmer who work with and in the NGOs, for several reasons. First, as mentioned most NGOs are based in Phnom Penh, and there exists a sense of disassociation between urban and rural Khmer. Second, some local NGO leaders are repatriated Khmer, either those who fled and returned, or those born abroad who have resettled in Cambodia, and while they are still Khmer, they are perceived differently. They are not ostracized, per se, but there is a detectable variance in how they are treated by local Khmer—and notably, vice versa. Local Khmer sometimes feel that repatriated Khmer tvoe reuk (to act high and mighty) or meul ngeay (to look down on). (Given more time, we might analyze the repatriate community in terms of sunhcheat, chuncheat, and kaun-khmaer, see Chapter 3!). Third, many Khmer may know that NGOs exist, but may think of them only as relief agencies (like the NGOs which earlier came to Cambodia), and do not know what activities they sponsor, what goals they promote, or that they are involved with democracy at all. Star Kampuchea works diligently to dissolve this social wall.

Perhaps the most relevant program here is the Legislative Development Program (LDP). Most Khmer feel far removed from the legislative process. “Recognizing this need,” Star Kampuchea writes, the LDP “works to improve the quality and increase the quantity of legal information available” to other NGOs, associations and the general public. The Public Forum on Draft Laws aims to bring draft laws to all Khmer, “since
laws are vital and have effect on everyone in the society," encouraging comments and
debate on the draft legislation. A sample of the types of legislation Star Kampuchea
and participants in their workshop review appears below (Figure 41). Star Kampuchea
then (anonymously) publishes these comments in a legislative newsletter in both Khmer
and English, which they distribute to those working on the draft laws, be they
institutions or groups. As the mission statement for Star Kampuchea makes clear,

In Cambodia today, we cannot rely on someone else to do things for us.
We, the people, must empower ourselves . . . We will therefore continue
to teach people to advocate for their own issues. Through increased
skills and sophistication in advocacy, we will all be able to participate in
the establishment of a stable democracy in Cambodia. (2003 statement 5)

As seen in the chart below, excerpted from a much more comprehensive list published
by Star Kampuchea, Khmer (and other interested parties, such as INGO personnel) can
follow the development of draft legislation. For example, in number (4) below, one can
see that the draft legislation on domestic violence went through a third draft in February
2001, and since then had been reviewed and updated by the local NGOs Partners
Against Domestic Violence (PADV) and Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC).
Finally, at the time this particular newsletter was published, the draft law had been
passed on to the Ministry of Women’s and Veteran’s Affairs.

I asked Nhek Sarin if rural villagers actually followed various laws. “Yes,” he
told me. “In fact, when they involve issues like land and property and may affect them
directly, they follow quite carefully. You will see in the newsletters.” (personal
interview). Indeed, Star Kampuchea staff regularly travel to the provinces and sponsor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation in process</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Article/Chapter</th>
<th>Languages Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Statute on Magistrate on Kingdom of Cambodia</td>
<td>Draft Law being discussed at Supreme Council of Magistracy</td>
<td>105/19</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Immovable Property Bill or Land Law</td>
<td>Draft law approved by Council of Ministers</td>
<td>277/20</td>
<td>English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immovable Property Bill or Land Law</td>
<td>Draft law, 1st revision, by the 7th Commission of the National Assembly</td>
<td>277/20</td>
<td>English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Criminal (Penal) Code</td>
<td>Draft Law</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Procedure Code</td>
<td>Draft Law</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Penal Code drafted by Advisor to the Appeal Court</td>
<td>Draft law being discussed at the Ministry of Justice</td>
<td>818/Title 6</td>
<td>Khmer and French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Prevention of Domestic Violence Against Women</td>
<td>Third Draft of Feb 7, 2001</td>
<td>29/5</td>
<td>English and Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention of Domestic Violence Against Women</td>
<td>Draft Law by PADV and CWCC</td>
<td>31/8</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention of Domestic Violence Against Women</td>
<td>Final Draft Law at Ministry of Women’s and Veteran’s Affairs</td>
<td>30/5</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 43.
Sample List of Draft and Proposed Laws
Excerpted from Star Kampuchea’s Legislative Newsletter, April 20, 2001

discussions on the various draft laws. In March 2002, for example, LDP staff went successively to Sihanoukville, Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, and Pursat, where they held forms on the draft Penal Code. A recorder took anonymous minutes (i.e., the participants were not identified or linked to particular comments), and the summary from all four areas was published in the April-May 2002 LDP Newsletter. The participants in the forums were not passive listeners; they actively suggested alternate wording for specific articles of the draft law, and made suggestions for additions and deletions. For this particular forum, more than two hundred participants attended, and
there were several monks among them, Sarin pointed out. We tend to think that villagers do not know about democracy, he noted, but they love their country, and if given the opportunity, they will become active citizens.

Furthermore, Star Kampuchea is respectful of Cambodia as a nation, and of Khmer culture, and uses cultural principles to help convey its messages. For example, Star Kampuchea planned to organize a forum for "Constitution Day," on 20 September 2003, marking the 10th anniversary of the Constitution. While this "will be an ideal chance to advocate for the government to organize the National Congress stipulated in the Constitution," the program will mostly likely be respectful of the King and conducted according to Khmer social conventions—peaceful and nonviolent (2003 9).

**Keeping the Peace**

Interestingly, it is often those who are saddled with upholding the law who may violate it. The diagram below is a chart used by LICADHO in a training for police, asking police and other officials not to take the law into their own hands. Some officials may feel that since the courts are not adequately protecting Khmer, civil officials must do so, and while some certainly engage in such behaviors for personal power and financial gain, they also do so because there is neither the apparatus to prevent them from so doing, nor, they believe, is there an alternative mechanism for justice. The "triangle" diagram below is used to teach police about their appropriate roles in enforcing and upholding the law in a society which observes the rule of law (Figure 44). The opening caption reads, "The biggest problem related to various
violations by police personnel is the lack of responsibility for their operations/actions, and this leads to serious problems of corruption."

The top of the triangle begins with *bandung*—charges or accusations—the initial catalyst for action on the part of police and other officials. Moving to the bottom right, the diagram indicates the position of *prabun nie kah pradep*—the system of law, or the courts/judiciary. The bottom left cites *kah totuel koh drouv*, responsibility of the authorities for (carrying out) the operation/actions necessary to right the wrongs determined by adjudicating the charges—the appropriate actions, notably, having been determined by the courts, not decided randomly by police. The bottom caption reads, *nih kohr bal jiet nung dola ka civil aikereak*: police and independent civil authorities are separated from the courts. Finally, the caption below the diagram itself reads, “The system of law cannot cross paths with that of the police”—in other words, while their goals may be similar, the paths by which they achieve those goals must remain separate. The courts and the police follow different paths to similar social goals. Again, while this may seem obvious from a Western standpoint, the idea of police supporting the courts is relatively novel.
The biggest problem related to various violations by police personnel is the lack of responsibility for their operations, and this leads to serious problems of corruption.

The three ways of holding people accountable for right and wrong.

- Police
- Charges or accusations
- Courts/judiciary

Police and independent civil authorities are separated from the courts.

The system of law cannot cross paths with that of the police.

Figure 44.
Police responsibilities

LICADHO
Figure 45.
Human Rights and Law training for Police
LICADHO Training Manual 2002
Police responsibilities

A) Torture leads to
B) Violation of Human Rights leads to
C) Violation of National and International Law
   and those who commit A,B,C
D) Must be prosecuted/punished, just as those who clearly break the law
Responsibility, however, we have seen earlier in this dissertation, is something called upon in Buddhist trainings. Those who have chosen to become public servants must be made specifically aware of the link between individual responsibility and social responsibility. Kek Galabru believes that during training, "something"—the moral precepts, the Khmer importance of compassion and tolerance and nonviolence—will resonate with the audience participants at all levels and bring them to a better understanding of human rights, and that in turn they will become actively involved in promoting the rule of law in order to protect them (Figure 45).

Another series of figures presented in a general workshop (for a diverse audience) further illuminates (Figures 46 and 47). Here, a man who has physically harmed his wife is taken away to prison by police, who inform him, "You who beat your wife! You must be punished by law" (Figure 46, emphasis mine). Yet while awaiting judicial action, the police must act responsibly, treating the accused humanely, not taking the law into their own hands by doling out punishment (Figure 47).

Codifying Custom?

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, promulgated in 1993, commits Cambodia to liberal democracy and pluralism (Chapter I). "The Cambodian people are the masters of their own country," the Constitution continues. "All powers belong to the people" (Article 51). While most Khmer who witnessed UNTAC likely link elections with the term democracy, until more recently, they were less aware of democracy's link to social responsibility and the rule of law.
Figure 46.
Punishment in Accordance with the Law
This is an example of respect for human rights and the law.

Figure 47.
Police training on law and justice

LICADHO
Some have wondered why, ten years after the UNTAC elections, the rule of law has not yet taken firm hold in Cambodia. International donors have become frustrated, believing that democracy should have progressed much further than it has, and have withdrawn their support. In 1997, Professor Jeffrey S. Brand of the University of San Francisco School of Law, which has a partnership with the Faculty of Law in Phnom Penh, noted that

the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) 'suspended' much of its 35 million dollar aid package for Cambodia, including most aid that support rule of law education [. . .] Cambodians who have benefited from such education are clamoring for more[,] not less rule of law education and training. The anxious looks on Khmer faces during the all-too-rapid exodus of foreigners from Phnom Penh left no doubt that they wanted education and training to continue. (1-2)

Perhaps the international community fails to understand the complexity of the implementation of democracy in Cambodia. First, basic human rights must be established and accepted as integral to the law. Second, the law must become recognized as rules by which citizens will be held accountable for their actions. Third, they must recognize and insist on credible and accountable mechanisms—the executive, legislative, and judicial branches—for protecting their rights, and upholding those rules.

The national community, however, may be beginning to respond to public outcry as brought to their attention with the help of the above NGOs. During my summer in Cambodia, the Office of the Council of Ministers was working on a Draft Legal and Judicial Reform Strategy. The strategy had as its objectives: 1) improve the protection of fundamental rights of the Khmer people; 2) improve the legislative framework; 3) provide better access to legal and judicial information; 4) enhance
quality of legal services; 5) strengthen judicial services; and 6) introduce alternate
dispute resolution methods. (RCG June 2002). They are similar to those of the NGOs,
and as such, are perhaps becoming closer to those of the Khmer people.
CHAPTER 7.
FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

“If you want to have peace, you have to vote.”
Koy Veth, Khmer Women’s Voice Centre, Personal Interview, 05 July 2002.

Elections in post-war Cambodia can be divided into several distinct phases: the 1993 elections following the UNTAC occupation, the 1998 national elections, the 2002 commune elections, and the 2003 national elections. I will extend the majority of my efforts toward discussion of the 1998 and 2002-2003 elections. This is not to say that the 1993 elections are not significant; contrariwise, they mark a watershed in Khmer history, with 97 percent participation. However, as discussed earlier, the 1993 elections were executed and monitored primarily by members of the international community, with Khmer filling a secondary role. While UNTAC is generally considered an overall success, and of course had significant local support, many facets of the transition were extrinsic in origin, and defacto control fell under UNTAC mandate. For example, UNTAC’s pandect included UNTAC representatives on the Supreme National Council, Cambodia’s transitional judicial body from the Peace Accords until the election. Much of the information on the platforms and actions of political parties and figures during this period came via UNTAC, and while that does not decisively preclude local involvement (indeed, Ms. Koy Veth told me that several of the articles she wrote were read over Radio UNTAC airwaves), one could not call this period one of a free-flow of information between and amongst Khmer. Thus I focus on the post-1993 period.

“At the end of 1993,” writes William Shawcross, “the prospects for Cambodia were far better than they were at the start of any year since 1970” (37). Khmer seemed
optimistic for the first time in decades, with good reason. While there were still
difficulties, Shawcross continues, “People in Phnom Penh seemed more relaxed than
before the election. The riel had doubled its value against the dollar and was stable […]
Trade was flourishing. There was a sense of growing business confidence” (37). Many
Khmer who had left in the 1970s and 1980s returned to visit or to repatriate. I traveled
throughout the country in 1995 and 1996 relatively unhindered (though perhaps I should
have been more cautious). I actually received several pieces of untampered mail sent
from the United States—something virtually unheard of pre-UNTAC. Certainly, there
was an air of hopefulness that had been long absent.

Cambodia suffered several post-UNTAC setbacks, culminating in 1997, with the
conflict that broke out in Phnom Penh between rivaling parties (see chapter 4 of this
dissertation). During the same period, however, more local organizations formed to
work on democracy issues. Specifically, as Khmer began to prepare for the 1998
elections (as early as 1996), indigenous NGOs began to work not only on election
issues, but on culturally-based instruction on the importance of citizen participation.
Again, promoting democracy as the political pathway to peace, both new and “old”
NGOs began to indigenize training materials, in attempts to make them more interesting
and applicable. Some trainers I interviewed felt that while certainly welcomed at the
time, UNTAC- or other externally-based curricula was simply procedural, without
much consideration for cultural values. Others felt such curricula encouraged cultural
change away from Khmerness. But the 1998 elections were Khmer: while the
European Union and other groups did monitor the elections, “in 1998, the entire
management and organisation of the polling was Khmer” (Roberts 181).
Khmer NGOs took over the role of infusing democratic principles and actions into training programs and scenarios that resonated with everyday life, and as such, Khmer became familiar with not only election procedures, but the rationale behind and meaning of the elections. As a result, Khmer wanted elections, and their representatives in the NGOs helped to effect them in a Khmer way. In the epigraph to this section, Koy Veth spoke about the importance of the elections for Khmer. To put the quote in context, I had asked her how she became involved with the Khmer Women’s Voice Centre. She responded,

For many years I was a teacher—somehow I survived the Pol Pot period, even though I did not lie about who I was. I was lucky they did not kill me. After Pol Pot I began to teach again, then worked for a French NGO for a few years. At that time, some people from the Thai border camps came to see me—they knew of me—they knew my name—and asked me if I would work for women’s rights. So I did. We began to hold meetings, and even a conference on Women’s Rights in Phnom Penh. When UNTAC came, I became involved in non-violence and the elections, and women’s participation in civic associations, in addition to gender training. I wrote several articles that were broadcast on UNTAC radio! I once told a woman, “If you want to have peace, you have to vote.” I wanted to distribute information on non-violence and the elections, on peace—but there were restrictions on distributing literature at that time. So, actually, I got one of the country’s head monks to help me get permission to distribute the leaflets—he was a true minister of peace. (Personal Interview, July 5, 2002)

Koy Veth had the foresight to make the elections accessible to Khmer, both conceptually and procedurally, through Buddhism. Other NGOs did and continue to do the same.
The Khmer elections in Cambodia

The 1998 National Elections

An examination of a training booklet from the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL), one of the most active local NGOs, is informative as to the process by which NGOs blend tradition and change. The training spends considerable time discussing Buddhist notions of human rights and responsibilities as a premise for voting. COMFREL links human rights to compassion for others, which implies social responsibility, which requires responsible citizenship, including one's responsibility to vote. In addition to delineating voting procedures (how, when, and where to register, for example), the materials provide both practical and philosophic instructions about how to choose a candidate, again linking these back to Buddhist notions. A Khmer citizen is both an individual and a member of a community/society, and he or she must vote accordingly, COMFREL stresses. Individuals must go to hear candidates speak, listen to each candidate's platform, and choose carefully after evaluating the information received by so doing. Think about how this candidate will serve the community, the training stresses. This is more important than whether or not the candidate is friend, relative, or in-law, for example. Voting does have consequences, they emphasize, so one should take the choice of candidates and the process seriously (Figure 49). Additionally, as much of the rural population in Cambodia is illiterate, trainers from COMFREL and similar groups clarified which candidates and which party corresponded to each number on the ballot cards, and/or to a particular pictorial symbol (see Figure 50). "Check your ballot to see that the number above the name corresponds to the right person, as the names may be very similar, or
Figure 49.
COMFREL staff explain election procedures and issues to Khmer villagers
printed close together,” the booklet cautions. “And you must make note of each candidate’s political objective” (COMFREL, “Manual for Educating Voters”).

Aware of the pressures that participants often confront in the election process, in the COMFREL seminars Khmer citizens are presented with two diagrams, which discuss the consequences of irresponsible voting procedures (Figure 51). In the top diagram, COMFREL explains that by purchasing voting tickets, corrupt candidates can obtain power, but that such power leads to corruption. Corruption, according to Buddhist principles against greed, is an evil attribute and should be avoided. Likewise, in the bottom diagram, selling voting cards (either for oneself or on behalf of a candidate), may gain the seller some slight material return, but doing so leads one to being enslaved by power (money)—again, an attribute frowned upon by Buddhist ethics.

![Sample Ballot](Figure 50)
What is the result or outcome of buying and selling voting cards?

**Figure 51.**
Effects of buying and selling voting cards
A cartoon illustrates how trainers call upon Buddhist principle of honesty and integrity (Figure 52). Pictorial illustrations, my respondents note, are among the most well-received and understood training materials, even in explaining abstract concepts. In this illustration, the voter considers the potential consequences of his actions: 1) "If I vote according to my own conscience, secretly, justly . . ." he considers, he will live a happy, peaceful life (symbolized by the picture of a home and land); 2) "and keep telling myself to observe my conscience," during the sign-in/identification process and receipt of my voting card; 3) if someone (a candidate) gives me a gift, I may accept it, so as not to be disrespectful, but I "keep telling myself to observe my conscience;" 4) and even if they make me give my fingerprint, I will "keep telling myself to observe my conscience." A final caption concludes, "No matter what, I must exercise my freedom . . . I must vote according to my own conscience!" (my translation from Khmer).

While I offered in a previous section that Khmer are not unsophisticated about patron-client relationships, in election situations they are still viable and can summon loyalty, particularly if an individual is unsure how or for whom to vote. Thus the NGOs actually address in their election materials cultural issues which might complicate neutrality—such as issues of reciprocity and patron-client obligations. They acknowledge that these are part of the culture, and do not denigrate or ignore them, but advise that they need to be put aside during elections. For example, they address gift-giving of food, money, or supplies, which is not uncommon in Khmer culture, but stress that this should not influence one’s vote.
Figure 52.
I must vote according to my conscience. COMFREL poster.
The NGOs provide much-needed avenues to information, such that instead of voting out of simple curiosity or fear, or sense of obligation to a particular candidate, Khmer think about the effects of their votes on the community, about how their votes might help Cambodia to face a brighter future: alleviation of poverty, building schools and temples, and so forth (Figure 53). Indeed, the COMFREL website home page (like most of COMFREL’s printed materials) opens with the following caption: "Free and Fair Elections Bring about Peace and Prosperity" (COMFREL home page).

In May, June and July 1998, COMFREL commune volunteers and village observers exceeded their target goal of 11,000 voter education sessions, holding a total of 12,434 workshops to explain the electoral process and inform villagers of their rights. According to activists’ reports, approximately 870,000 persons (with nearly equal numbers of men and women, 436,000 and 434,000) attended. COMFREL also hung posters, distributed leaflets, booklets, and other materials about free and fair elections. “The posters put up by COMFREL’s activists reached an estimated 4 million people” (COMFREL home page). Villagers hang up the posters on the walls of their homes, alongside newspapers and magazine pictures. They have become part of “normal” décor.

During this time, COMFREL also published 23 articles in the *Rasmei Kampuchea* (Light of the Nation) and other Khmer newspapers., in which they further discussed intimidation, vote buying, thumbprinting, voter rights, and other election issues and procedures. Significantly, the *Rasmei Kampuchea* articles offered a small
Figure 53.
Vote for a better future.
gift as an incentive for readers to respond to questions asked in the articles. This gesture reinforces that it is okay to accept gifts, as this is in accordance with Khmer culture, but that gifts should not be part of criteria upon which citizens rely in choosing suitable candidates.

NGOs also broadcast radio programs and TV spots on election-related issues, including voter secrecy, civic rights, women's participation in civil society, and an overview of the electoral system (Figure 54). A Cambodian Institute for Human Rights (CIHR) program which proved very popular was the "Distant Learning By Radio for Rural Women" project, which served as the "means by which many learned of their equal right to vote, and their right to decide themselves who to vote for, rather than obeying husbands or fathers" (CIHR, 1998). Groups of women gathered around the radio at different points during the day to listen to the programs together. A radio-broadcast question-and-answer show, which operates in a manner similar to the quick-witted banter of ayai singing, which Khmer adore, was and is used to provided information and analysis about the elections, focusing on key messages including the right to register, the secrecy of the vote, how to vote, etc. "The formula adopted in all CIHR's mass media work aims to be lively, entertaining, " notes Neou Kassie, "and getting the message across in the best way for it to be understood and remembered" (CIHR 1998, 4).

While television is not a traditional medium, it has become a very effective means of disseminating information. NGOs produce "spots," or short segments as public service announcements. A very short piece (two and a half minutes) entitled "What does democracy mean?," for example, features an urban, middle-class
Figure 54.
Getting the message across

Clockwise, from top left: 1) Villagers gathered around a radio, listening to an election announcement; 2) a rally for the elections; 3) Khmer watching a television drama about democracy; 4) a common scenario: supporters of political parties travel around towns in large trucks, with banners and pictures representing their party’s candidate; 5) election information posted on trees to get the word out; 6) a potential candidate relaying information about her platform and issues to voters.
family: husband, wife, older son (early- to mid-twenties), older daughter (late teens or perhaps early twenties), and a young daughter (7-8 years old). The scene begins with the father reading an election brochure, and the young daughter, playing, seizes it from him. “Hey!” the father says. “This is important!” The young girl asks, “Why? What are elections?” The other family members join in the conversation and explains: this is the right of all Khmer. Democracy and elections will “help us to help each other back and forth”—something valued in Khmer culture (see Chapter 3). If you are over 18, you can choose our leaders. At the end, the young girl is very disappointed to find out she cannot vote because she is too young, and scowls, providing comic relief.

Additionally, the television broadcast of a weekly show entitled “Free and Fair Elections” included guests such as Venerable Maha Ghosananda of the Dhammayietras, and discussed the importance of (the Buddhist principle of) non-violence and responsibility (of each individual as a Buddhist) during the elections. As in the “Culture of Peace” model introduced in a previous section, the links between Buddhism and nonviolence and tolerance, human rights, the rule of law, and participatory democracy are continually reinforced and become progressively clearer to Khmer.

Roberts notes that one theme prevalent in the 1993-1998 period was the “increasing commitment of Khmer society to the principal of democracy invoked via UNTAC.” This “embracing of choice, whether culturally normal or not in the appointment of the country’s leaders, suggested a strong commitment to leadership change (or continuity) which was repeated in 1998 with a similarly high voter turn-out” (Roberts 124).
The Commune Council Elections of 2002

The commune council elections held in 2002 gave the NGOs an even greater opportunity to teach Khmer about participation in civil society. Cambodia had not held local elections of any kind since the late 1960s, when candidates from Prince Sihanouk's ruling Sangkum Reastr Niyum party ran for office (HRW, “Cambodia’s Commune Council Elections”)\(^1\) Whereas village politics has for decades differed from Phnom Penh or “national” politics (cf. Ebihara, Svay), and Khmer have been active participants in village welfare, oftentimes, village, district, and commune officials were appointed based on their relationships (blood- or otherwise) to high-ranking incumbents. With a veritable commune election, on the scale of elections of 1998, however, candidates and their supporters needed to (and did) assemble to refine and proclaim their platforms.

Thus, in the training materials for the commune elections, while continuing to provide information about voting procedures, the NGOs began to devote more time to the actual issues upon which candidates’ platforms stood, and the ways in which villagers communicate with each other. Take, for example, the following guide, produced by the Khmer Women’s Voice Centre (Figure 55). The title caption for the guide reads, *Kdey sangeum daoel yeung chang ban!* (Things that we hope to have!), and features several Khmer discussing what we learn inside the guide to be election-related matters.
The story takes place in a village, and shows Khmer engaged in their regular activities: farming and repairing their homes, for example, but while doing so, they are discussing the election. The text begins with a woman expressing fear that once the commune elections are over, perhaps there will be fighting between those who won and those who did not win, or that those who voted for the losing candidate might be targeted for fines or other complications. Her friend assures her that this would be a crime, and should not happen, that there is a commune election law prohibiting this. (Figure 56). The story continues, chronicling a series of concerns. A key issue is the disagreement of a husband and wife about attending a bon phka (a ceremony of giving
gifts to the monks) after the election. The husband does not want to go, because he was in fact a member of the losing party. He does not want to go, because he feels *khmas ke* (ashamed), and perhaps, like the woman in the opening scene, is afraid of repercussions from the winners (Figure 57). But others reassure him that they are not thinking that way, that who wins or loses is not as important as that the election is over, the candidates were chosen, and now the community will be served. This understanding, and this notion of social contract, are both "things that we want to have" (c.f. Figure 55).

While certainly idealistic, the story allows those reading or listening to it to follow the various concerns of the characters, which are likely also their concerns. It addresses the fear of violence, and the possible conflicts which have been part of Cambodia’s zero-sum political philosophy in the recent past. It also addresses cultural issues, like the desire to avoid *khmas ke*. Notice that the closing of the elections will be celebrated by a *bon*, and thus Khmerness is retained; but some other cultural elements (the all-consuming concern with *khmas ke*, the zero-sum philosophy) can be modified in order to help the community to respect both individual rights and the outcome of the vote (KMVC, *Things That We Hope*).
Figures 56 and 57.
Discussing Election Concerns
A television brief (fewer than five minutes) produced by the Women’s Media Center entitled “The Power of the Commune Committee” also relates the role such a committee can play in Khmer lives. The scene opens with a picturesque river setting, showing Khmer fishing and catching shrimp (recall that Khmer are the “children of the water”). The characters are not city-folk: they are engaged in normal, rural activities. They are dressed in traditional, informal Khmer clothing, and wearing krama. Neighbors discuss the upcoming commune elections over meals, and bring up issues such as those already mentioned—not wanting to hurt the feelings of a friend or relative running for a position, for example. The characters debate about the secrecy of the ballot, and so forth. At the end, an elder, respected community member (one whom other villagers would customarily look to for transmission of knowledge) assures them that the ballot is secret, and that elections will help to better their living situations.

The Commune elections also gave Khmer a “practice run” for the national elections of 2003. Local NGOs such as NICFEC provided a full summary report analyzing the Commune Elections, presenting findings and recommendations about the election process. Concerns included corruption, a too-short registration period, as people coming from very remote areas were not able to get to their “official place of residence” in order to vote, and too-short election hours, insufficient to allow the number of people waiting in line to actually vote. (The polling officers simply turned them away). This self-reflexivity on the part of Khmer indicates their growing understanding of democratic processes. The report states, moreover, “all these changes should be implemented in the light of long-term visions for Cambodia as a democracy.
A new attitude is required to accompany the reforms that are introduced, to ensure that they operate to promote a democratic way of life ("Commune Election" 7).

The 2003 National Elections

The 2003 elections occurred as I was nearing the completion of this manuscript. At this writing, a successful coalition government has not yet been officially inaugurated. The final makeup of the new government is at this point only speculation. Here, however, I focus on the activities of the NGOs in preparation for the 2003 elections.

As with the 1998 elections, the training materials discuss procedures and specifics—where elections will be held, how to register to vote, what time one can vote, and so forth. It should be noted that in the more secure Cambodia this post-UNTAC increasingly more Khmer have repatriated from Australia, France, and the United States (as well as other countries), and with each election, a new segment of the population has reached the voting age of eighteen, and thus the actual procedures must continue to be a part of the training. Notably, however, the materials reflect the NGOs’ knowledge that infusion of democratic principles through cultural venues is an effective approach. Voting is still confusing, but it is becoming part of Khmer culture.

The Women’s Media Centre produced several “spots,” similar to those described above, for television and radio in preparation for the election, all focusing on different aspects of the elections and other democracy issues. They range from short, commercial-like segments, to five-minute interludes, to hour-long dramas. Some spots
take place in cities, such as Phnom Penh or provincial centers, while others show Khmer wrestling with democracy issues at the village level.

One of the most exciting developments during the time prior to the 2003 elections is the NICFEC “traveling democracy” program (my terminology). While NICFEC has been in existence for a number of years, in 2001 and 2002 it became very active in using the arts to promote democracy. NICFEC’s mission statement reads:

Our mission is to uphold and promote democracy, human rights and elections in Cambodia through education and the dissemination of information and the dissemination of information based on the principles of Khmer culture and arts and international law system in order to inculcate this concept into society (NICFEC Home Page).

According to Mr. Hang Puthea, NICFEC’s executive director, there are six groups of selophak (artists) who travel throughout the country, performing democracy-related dramas, comedies, and so forth. The performances include lakhoun basaac (traditional opera theatre), ayai, lakhoun niyiey (spoken theatre), concerts, and love stories (personal communication, 6/27/03). “Sometimes,” Hang expressed, “people in the countryside have heard about democracy, but they feel it is a ‘city’ concept. We want them to know what democracy is, what elections mean, so we bring these issues to them in ways they understand—and enjoy.”

One example of a NICFEC troupe performance is “A Story of the Heart to Hold On to.” I shall describe just a few scenes from this narrative that reflect the inculcation of democratic principles into Khmer art venues.

As the story opens, it is early morning in the countryside, and a Khmer family is sitting and talking. As is common in Khmer dramas, the husband and wife banter back and forth, jokingly: in this case, the husband asks why his wife did not let him back
into the house late the night before, instead “making your husband sleep with the mosquitoes.” Inferring that he has been with a mistress, the wife responds that she knows what he was doing all night, and she did not open the door, she says, because she does not want AIDS to come into her house.

“Oh, dear mother of my children,” he says, “Don’t you remember?”

“Remember what, my dear, loving husband?” she responds, somewhat sarcastically.

“You should remember!” he scolds. “It’s almost voting day. I know because NICFEC came to talk about the election, which will be on Sunday, the 27th of July, 2003 [. . .] Yesterday I was at a meeting with other villagers, drinking tea until late, and talking about the elections. But you, old woman, you’re always jealous, thinking the worst of me . . .” The only disease he has, he continues, is the “disease of being poor”!

They proceed to banter, and in the second scene, the couple’s daughter, Rompool, enters. Again, there is comic banter, and husband and wife continue to argue for several minutes, while Rompool waits. Finally, exasperated, she interrupts.

Rompool: “Dad! I am so hungry I’ve eaten my fingers and toes already!”

Rompool’s father: (Bowing and offering her the *sompeah*): Oh, oh! My poor soul—all ten? [Making a praying gesture] May the sun and the moon give everything to my daughter…and while you’re at it—how about for me and my wife, too?”

The scene is very comic for Khmer, as it subverts the child-parent respect paradigm, with the father using the *sompeah* to his daughter, rather than vice-versa as is custom, and apologizing for not having food prepared right there for her. (Usually, one or more of the daughters prepare meals and serve the entire family). Rompool leaves to
draw water from the nearby pond, and while she is gone, we find out through more
conversation between husband and wife that Rompool has a secret crush on Vireak, of
the Son family in a nearby village. Rompool knows that Vireak, who also has a crush
on her, will be waiting near the pond to catch a glimpse of her—although he will not
admit that is why he is there. Indeed, Vireak is at the pond, and when Rompool arrives,
he tells her that he has gone there to let his cows drink. The cows are nowhere to be
found, however, and Rompool nudges,

“My goodness! How are your cows so smart? Their owner walks to the pond
first and waits for them to follow by themselves!”

Vireak then embarrassingly attempts several other transparent excuses. He is
captured in his sophistry. He admits he wants to talk with her, but Rompool tells him that
they should not be talking to each other without other people around, as in Khmer
culture, it is improper for two single young people to meet alone. “I must leave,” she
says. “I cannot go against our tradition!”

Vireak reluctantly agrees, “Rompoo, if that’s the way it is, I give up!” But
searching for a reason to make her stay, he says, “After the election, I will ask my
mother and father to ask for your hand in marriage, according to our laws and customs.
You will see. Khmer men can strive to respect our nation’s traditions, too. Goodbye ...”

As he moves to leave, Rompool stops him, and asks, “Wait, Vireak. When is
this election you’re talking about? And what are you voting for?”

“Oh, it’s great,” responds Vireak. “The election will take place on Sunday, the
27th of July of this year! It will start in the morning and continue until the afternoon.
You should not forget about it!”
More banter follows, with other characters entering and teasing both of them about their “inappropriate” meeting, and also discussing the issues of the election.

The third scene begins in the village temple, where many of the villagers are crowded together. An *achaa* (lay religious healer) begins to speak.

“In the name of the committee of this temple, I wish to thank and pay homage to the Buddha, and to the learned of this temple, and for the funds that allow us to have this celebration of our unity, of our building of a Pali school, to continue Buddhism in our community. May I also wish that you meet only good wishes from Buddha for long life, wealth, health, strength,” etc. He continues with traditional greetings, and eventually introduces a NICFEC representative, Piseth, who has come to speak to them about the election. Piseth rises, and continues to explain both what NICFEC is, and why the elections are important for these villagers:

“NICFEC is a non-governmental organization,” Piseth explains. “It is independent, and it is not related to any political party! It has as its purpose to support and raise up democracy and the elections in Cambodia. I am not here to campaign on behalf of any party. I am only here to inform you about a number of issues related to the election, and if you have any concerns or questions, please ask me! But before we do that, we from Phnom Penh honor you, and please invite you all to dance!”

Khmer music plays, and the villagers begin to dance *roamvong*, a traditional folk dance. This is a significant interlude, for it makes those watching feel at ease amidst discussion of a serious and sometimes volatile topic.

In subsequent scenes, Piseth explains the importance of the election for the people’s future. The villagers ask questions, including “How do I need to dress in order
to vote? Is there a requirement?” and “Do I have to have completed a certain grade level in order to vote?” Piseth explains each of the requirements, which do not include manner of dress or grade level, but do include Khmer citizenship, age (at least eighteen years old), an identity card, a voting ticket and so forth. He hands out brochures to each family. At the end of the drama, all stand up and begin happily dancing again.

Enactments such as the above are extremely well-received by rural communities. They cover election specifics, including the date and time of the elections, usually mentioned several times, but also cultural issues, including male-female relations, the importance of the temple in village life, Khmer’ love of traditions such as dance and song, and so forth. This venue is familiar, enjoyable, and non-threatening. Prior to the 2003 national elections, NICFEC set a goal to reach twenty-four provinces/cities, 185 districts, 1,622 communes, 13, 553 villages, and 6,749, 876 Khmer overall (NICFEC homepage).

Moreover, the 2003 materials devote much time to discussing the importance of voting to ensure a better future for Khmer. They reinforced that even if there are those who feel there have only been small changes as a result of the 1993 and 1998 elections, Khmer must be committed to democracy, and continue to exercise their democratic rights. Democracy is not a one-shot deal, and it involves more than elections. Many of the posters, brochures, and programs show Khmer thinking about secure and happy futures.
Three Freedoms

As evidenced by the high voter turnouts for the 1993, 1998, and 2003 national elections, and the 2002 commune elections, it is clear that Khmer do want to have a say in the governance of their country. They have become progressively more aware of national, regional, and local issues, and more adept at choosing candidates. Despite attempts to intimidate them to vote or not vote for a particular party or individual, they have relied on the secrecy of the ballot and continue to flock to the polls during elections.

But voting is only one facet of democracy. NGOs are also working to educate Khmer about more active participation in civil society. Joining civil associations does not offer the same protection of anonymity or secrecy as the ballot, however. Thus, Khmer need to feel secure in what have become known as the “three freedoms”: freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Neou Kassie notes that Khmer do not yet understand the notion of “volunteerism”—but the explanation as to why not is complex. Khmer do not volunteer, or join community and civic associations, not simply because they have become self-absorbed, although Neou argues that such is an unfortunate side-effect of war and the Khmer Rouge regime. Importantly, such volunteerism is predicated on individuals’ perceived freedom to express themselves through associative venues. In recent decades, however, such freedom has been censored, both directly and indirectly. Thus, Khmer must be reintroduced to civic participation, first by reintroduction to the freedoms crucial to realize such participation.
**Freedom of Expression**

How, then, to instill belief in and desire for freedom of expression in Cambodia? There are a number of media organizations in Cambodia, including journalists' associations. *Reporters Sans Frontières* stated in a press release in 2000 that “the printed press [in Cambodia] enjoys real freedom and more than 260 publications have been recorded by the information ministry - although only ten appear regularly.” *(Reporters Sans Frontières, “Press Release”). Several of my respondents concurred. Om Chandara of the League of Cambodian Journalists (LCJ) agrees that “we have democracy because there are so many newspapers—our organization represents at least 55 or 56 separate papers” *(personal interview, June 13, 2002). LCJ lists among its many objectives protecting the freedom of the press, freedom of speech, promoting good governance and transparency, and protecting journalists against violence. “We have laws,” Om noted, “we just haven't been able to enforce them yet.”

Pon Bunsong of the Khmer Journalists Association notes that Khmer are gradually coming around to the idea of freedom of expression. The KJA, for example, has more than 2,000 volunteers. In previous years, media employees were “often unwilling to give out the addresses of the newspapers offices as they fear for their safety” *(Tive Sarayeth, “Media Reforms”). Yet in 2002, the Women’s Media Centre published the first media directory, revised and reissued for 2003. It is printed in both Khmer and English, and in addition to listing the media associations, including newspaper offices, television stations, and radio station headquarters in Cambodia, it also delineates the Kingdom of Cambodia Press Law.⁴ “It is very difficult to find funding to help journalists,” Pon comments. “But look at the number of volunteers we
have! If the economy develops, Cambodia will develop.” At KJA, journalists can learn how to use computers, and note-taking and writing skills, for example. “I think that Cambodia has more freedom than all of the other countries in ASEAN,” says Pon. “We dare to write more than in other countries.” Pon admits that freedom of expression suffered a setback in 1997. Since then, however, they hean niyeay (dare to speak). The Khmer Journalists Association did lead a concerted international campaign against a new press law which would have further restricted the media. “We are close to democracy even though we just became a democracy,” he concluded. “More than countries that have been democracies for a long time.” (personal interview, June 20, 2002).

I do not suggest that the Khmer media truly have freedom of expression, as recent actions by the government suggest that certain things will not be tolerated. In 1998, for example, authorities introduced a sub-decree calling for a ban on classified details on military operations, criticisms of the multi-party system, and theories thought to undermine the national currency. In June 2002, the Ministry of Information shut down twenty-nine Khmer newspapers. (In July 2002, ten were permitted to resume publication). Interestingly, though, they were ordered to close not because they slandered officials or insulted the monarch, but because they did not publish regularly. If a paper does not publish for three months, its license may be canceled. While still undemocratic, since there is no law requiring they to publish frequently as such, it is interesting that the government was not looking to squelch reporters’ opinions (Yun, “Closed Newspapers”).
It is possible that the newspapers have more leeway than other media. The six Khmer-language television channels and fourteen FM radio stations are controlled by the government. Moreover, Khmer villagers are not likely to be as fearless or outspoken as reporters in Phnom Penh, and thus for the former, freedom of expression needs to be introduced gradually.

Again, the NGOs suggest doing so in a culturally-appropriate way. Insisting in trainings that Khmer write articles overtly accusing the monarch of unseemly activities is not acceptable, for example. Just as human rights in Cambodia does not mean the right to do anything one wishes (see Chapter 5 of this dissertation), freedom of expression does not allow one to say whatever he or she pleases (this is not specific to Cambodia—U.S. law does not allow one to yell “Fire!” in a crowded theatre, for example). Khmer culture is a very polite culture, and Khmer should dissent without being insulting. That is, while using principles of freedom of expression to communicate concerns or issues, in keeping with the culture of peace, and the desire for the ultimate goal of peace, Khmer can do so within the boundaries of acceptable cultural behavior.

The artists’ NGO Sovanna Phum (Magic Village), for example, uses traditional shadow theatre to dialogue about capricious issues. The sbaek touch, or “little” shadow theatre, which uses small leather puppets, has been used as a venue for various freedoms of expression. The sbaek touch is a variant of Khmer puppet theatre, and is also known as Aian theatre. According to Sovanna Phum, there are four basic “freedoms” in Aian theatre: first, Aian entails freedom of figures—that is, the characters in the sbaek touch can take many forms. While traditionally the Aian figures
come from the Khmer peasant world (farmers, cows, etc.), “it can happen that the needs for one scenario push the creators in giving birth to new figures (soldiers, usurpers, bourgeois...) or to twist around the original role of certain figures from the Reamker (princes and princesses, fabled beasts, royal elephants).” (home page). Through the puppets, Khmer can act out concerns about say, corruption, that they are not yet ready to confront openly.

Second, notes Sovanna Phum, is freedom “of making”—meaning that the procedures and parameters for creating the puppets can change according to the needs of the play or the resources available. After the Angkor period, for example, “the articulations [of the puppets] became more numerous, giving more and more realism to the figures.” Third is freedom of performance: “the capacity to improvise, to introduce modern anecdotes, information on social life or up to date comments on actuality is what is expected from a good ‘Aian’ puppeteer.” And finally, sbek touch encourages freedom of themes. “It is quite simple,” writes Sovanna Phum, “there is no limit to the choice of theme to be performed in the ‘Aian’ theatre.” Shadow theatre is an excellent venue for introducing restricted topics (Sovanna Phum Association).

Such mediums serve as an enjoyable and non-threatening venue (for either officials or villagers) for relaying information about community issues, and moreover, are less likely to be censored that newspapers or television programs.
Another venue which NGOs rely upon for disseminating information and teaching about freedom of expression is radio. While not a traditional medium per se, as noted Khmer culture is a story culture, and Khmer love radio programs, especially soap operas. As a fictional medium, too, soap operas might be less susceptible to government censure.

According to journalist Lor Chandara, media NGOs and groups which advocate for freedom of expression “give people a way to strengthen themselves [...] to express their ideas effectively in speech, how to do research and gather information in a democracy, and how to use that information as powerful instruments for changing opinions and influencing policy” (Personal Interview) It is upon this strength and confidence that Khmer will draw as they form and join associations, and participate in assemblies. The goal is one of an independent media engaging an informed citizenry broaching a range of topics.
Freedom of Assembly

I remember returning to Phnom Penh from western Cambodia. The day I arrived, December 21, 1991, there was a medical students' demonstration. Some of them were shot. Then there was a police state. If you had been there, you would have been followed everywhere, discretely or directly [...] Things have changed since then. Since the election of 1993, we have had a democratic government for several years. And gradually, we have had peace and freedom of movement. Khmer society has undergone dramatic change. And I would like to emphasize 'dramatic change' [...] We have taken to the streets to make ourselves heard. Demonstrations, elections, the national assembly, and voting rights have become part of our everyday vocabulary.

So stated Dr. Lao Mong Hay, as part of a seminar on “The Dynamics of Change in Cambodia” in Washington, D.C. (Summers et al 3). Compared with pre-UNTAC days, Khmer are certainly less afraid to assemble and protest. Notably, too, Khmer in 2002 expressed much less fear of assembly than during my previous research in 1995 and 1996. While the so-called coup of 1997 certainly was a setback for Cambodia, the work of local NGOs with regard to the freedom of assembly has skyrocketed since that time.

Usually, in order to stage a demonstration or protest, local authorities have required permission (and/or payment). In 2002, however, more than 80,000 candidates, representing over eight political parties, campaigned in rural or commune elections in the more than 20 provinces (“Democracy’s Stronghold”). The European Union observers, furthermore, commented that “the large number of registered candidates and elected Council Members, and the large-scale participation of civil society in all aspects of the process is a positive factor for the strengthening of grass-roots democracy in Cambodia” (“Preliminary Statement”).
Local NGOs, aware of the friction that often occurs between local authorities and protesters, hold special “neutrality” trainings for police. A LICADHO/UN pocket guide for police, for example, includes the following “cheat sheet”:

**What Constitutes a Genuine Democracy?**

Democracy is a political system which allows open debate/expression of the issues/problems of a country. Open debate/expression should be allowed to take place on television, radio, newspapers, meetings, and through peaceful demonstrations. Everyone shall be allowed to participated, including students, farmers, factory works and business people […] Democracy requires the existence of the civil rights to speak, publish, assemble, and organize which are necessary to everyday discussions on economic, social and political issues and the conduct of election campaigns. (“Pocket Guide”).

An excerpt from the training appears below (in English translation)

**3.3 May the police use force to disperse demonstrators?**

Legal and peaceful demonstrations must not be dispersed by the police, so no force may be used against such demonstrators. Measures should be taken to always avoid excessive force against unauthorized but peaceful demonstrators [examples: never use firearms or other weapons that can cause death or serious injuries and never beat demonstrators]. Use of firearms shall never be used except to protect against anyone being immediately killed or seriously injured. No shots are to fired in the air or over the heads of demonstrators when there is no imminent threat of someone being killed or seriously injured. (*REFER TO ILLUSTRATION #2*) (Figure 59).
Figure 59. Freedom of Assembly?
Freedom of Association

Since 1993, hundreds of national NGOs have been established. The activities of these NGOs range from environmental preservation to human rights to women’s participation in politics. Thanks in large part to the initial proliferation of international NGOs post-UNTAC, the RCG has allowed NGO participation in a wide range of fields, and acknowledges that NGOs play an important role in the development of Cambodia. However, their work is still in its embryonic stages, and while vibrant, needs to be further developed. Lao Mong Hay notes that “some of them just keep quiet, regardless of the lawlessness and powerlessness, and do not speak up. A few dare to risk their necks” (Summer et al 5). Chea Vannath, president of the Center for Social development, agrees: “The real NGOs that make an impact are quite few. We do make a impact, but it is still very limited because we lack a critical mass” (Summer et al 12). In order to achieve critical mass, moreover, more Khmer must get involved in associations, such that the associations will become larger, stronger, and make more of an impact. To this end, NGOs have begun to adopt trainings that explain more thoroughly what an NGO actually is, and what NGOs do. A sample training appears below (Figure 60):
Exercise 9, Building Civil Society
Materials: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Constitution of Cambodia

Step 1: Facilitator asks participants to identify some of the various ways whereby conditions are improved and things are changed in their community. If reference is made to an NGO, then ask about what people think NGOs are and what they do.

Step 2. Facilitator identifies an NGO sponsoring human rights education, and explains what it does, and why it is independent of the government. Using the “go around” procedure, ask if people think NGOs are helpful in the building of a better community.

Step 3. Ask participants what functions NGOs might perform (e.g., observing elections, reporting human rights violations, developing legal assistance for the poor, lobbying for changes in the law).

Step 4. Ask participants if they think any of these activities are against the law or will get people in trouble. Point out that the Constitution guarantees freedom to citizens for such active participation in society. Discussion.

Step 5. Ask participants to form groups and discuss and come to consensus on the one basic need in their community that is least supported (e.g., hunger, security, etc.). Each group should imagine they are forming an NGO to deal with the problem at the local level. Give the NGO a name and formulate a demand and a plan to achieve the plan.

Adapted from “Popular Education for Human Rights,” 2000
Khmer version in consultation with Sum Sok Ry and Moul Sethik

Figure 60. Getting Khmer involved in Civil Society

Among the most adroit at promoting citizen participation are women’s rights and women’s issues organizations. As noted in an earlier section, women’s organizations, by virtue of their members and/or target groups, have from their inception worked with ways of combining democratic values and Khmer culture. The programs of the Women’s Media Centre, for example, broadcasts dramas and comedies, familiar genres for transmission of moral platitudes and other information in addition to entertainment. Unlike many contemporary television programs, however, which are often violent and portray women in subordinate positions, WMC’s programs focus on women’s contributions to Khmer society. Judy Ledgerwood discussed the importance of women in the family (see Chapter 3); these NGOs broaden their roles, such that they are important not only in their nuclear families, but in the community. Exploring
women's participation in legislation and policy development, women's rights, women's leadership and environmental protection and conservation, for example, "the department aims to inspire women to pursue their personal and professional goals so as to become change agents within their communities." The staff of WMC are change agents themselves: one of their functions is to monitor television and radio programs, and also newspapers for their "gender equality perspective." Each program or article is given a score for its title, content and picture, according to the extent to which women are represented. "News is classified as having a 'gender equality perspective' when two thirds of the content talks about or shows women," for example. WMC also broadcasts public service announcements, and brief comments on gender-related issues, including women's rights with respect to alimony, divorce, and property ownership and inheritance.

In conjunction with the NGO Project Against Domestic (PADV), in 2002 WMC Women's Media Center recently produced a traveling street theater play on domestic violence. A commentary on the project notes:

The production featured ayai, a traditional form of improvisational comedy that is familiar to all [Khmer]. Performed in remote rural provinces that were not served by radio or television and in which legal service NGOs had only begun to establish a presence, the play was attended by almost 400,000 people during its 40-day tour. (Chua)

Also, with the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center (CWCC), WMC created a five-minute program (for both video and radio) discussing trafficking of women and children, including the tricks used by traffickers to abduct women and girls, relief services available to victims of trafficking; or people who know victims, and
information on the *Law on the Suppression of the Kidnapping and Trafficking/Sale of Human Persons and Exploitation of Human Persons*. This program, broadcast for three
or four days per week over a four-month period, became “a common topic of conversation” among both male and female villagers throughout Cambodia:

Random interviews with a cross-section of citizens demonstrated the success of this strategy in raising awareness and understanding of sexual trafficking. Over 9 in 10 respondents had seen the video, and the overwhelming majority could cite specific information from the program. Three quarters said they had learned about the different ways women and children could end up in a brothel, and two thirds said that women were cheated by false offers of work. Importantly, over three quarters had discussed the video with other people, and over 4 in 5 said the video had caused them to be more careful about strangers who offered jobs to villagers, and to avoid visiting brothels[...]. Of most impact, the vice mayor of Phnom Penh city was prompted by the video to convene a meeting of 50 district chiefs, police commissioners and NGO representatives. He ordered the police to act strongly against sexual trafficking. Within three months almost 400 women and children were rescued from brothels and referred to rehabilitation centres, and at least 35 brothel owners were jailed. (UNIFEM, “Using Media Campaigns”)

Khmer women’s organizations are among the more prominent civil associations, though by no means the majority. Through examination of the materials they have developed for dissemination on “new” issues, we can also see how tradition blends with change. As Tive Sarayeth told me, “We need to educate women to know their rights. And we need to be selective about what “cultural” aspects we keep—for example, one might argue that not letting girls go to study is part of traditional Khmer culture. We have to respect Khmer culture, but we have to be able to change things that are harmful. (Personal interview, 7/7/02).
Things again come full circle: Koy Veth of the KMVC works to help Khmer women to make the connection between improved quality of life and voting (Figure 61). Khmer women, while intrigued with the idea of elections in 1993, were less aware of the connections between the abstract idea of democracy and the tangible changes democracy can effect. In pre-election Khmer society, Khmer, especially women, depended upon others to improve their lots in life—they relied upon patrons or benevolent officials, rather than on laws (enacted by democratic vote). In the excerpt from the election poster pictured here, the KMVC links tangible changes with voting.
So, what do women want?

I want an improved quality of life.

I want a reliable water source so I can grow my crops.

I want peace.

I want there to be a law to protect Khmer women against domestic violence.

I want women to have the opportunity to be leaders.

So what do we all need to do? The time to choose for ourselves has come.

Khmer Women’s Voice Centre
Election Poster, 2002

Figure 61.
Election poster targeted at women voters
A Civil Society

"Civil society is the complex network of freely formed voluntary associations, apart from the formal governmental institutions of the state, acting independently or in partnership with state agencies," according to Patrick. "It is a public domain that is constituted by private individuals." (1996:6). Civil society, states Neou Kassie, can help Cambodia specifically to avoid war and conflict, "as a partner between government, opposing parties, and ordinary people," in which citizens can participate in the depoliticization and rebuilding of Khmer society. Rather than accepting that corruption and favoritism are normal, "we have to raise the consciousness of each individual to know real right from wrong" (CIHR 1998:2). Thus, it is important to get citizens involved in civil associations, first by familiarizing themselves with the concept of a civic organization, association, or NGO as such, through activities such as that described above, and then by actually participating in civil society groups. As they become progressively empowered, moreover, it is hoped that they will more openly proclaim their willingness to fight for such freedoms, emblazoning paths for future generations.
ឈុតុំបំពង់បេសាទដូចដ័យដូចជាដូចដូចក្នុងរឿង

- បេតិការណ៍ ទុក្ខក្លាស់
- បេតិការណ៍ សមាជិកក្តីកម្មប្រឈរ
- ការណ៍មួយពីរឈុតុំបំពង់បេសាទ ដូច ការណ៍អាចមាន។

(Comfrel)
CHAPTER 8.
ASSESSMENT

"The concept of democracy must be given its full meaning in Cambodia, and the effects of its existence should be seen not just in the fact of an election, but in every aspect of life.”

(NICFEC, 2002 8)

Late on a sweltering June afternoon, as I closed the interview with Ms. Tive Sarayeth of the Women’s Media Centre, after several hours of stories of Khmer women’s struggles and challenges, past and present, Sarayeth looked at me and said, “You know, though, I’ve lived through four regimes, and this one is the best. It’s not perfect. But we have made progress, and most importantly, we are educating people” (personal interview). Her comments here are representative of most of the Khmer I interviewed. While none attempted to convince me that Cambodia had wholly embraced democracy, or that what it had embraced was operating perfectly, it was clear to me that all are fervently committed to the goal of democracy, and consequently, to their work. They are so committed because they believe that in the long run, democracy will work for Cambodia. Importantly, too, they also believe that it is not only they--NGO workers, intellectuals, and students, urban dwellers or returned expatriates--who advocate democracy. Rather, they believe that the Khmer people en masse have begun to understand democracy, to want it, and moreover, to be empowered by it.

In Grassroots Democracy in Cambodia, Kao Kim Kourn, with whom I also discussed these issues, writes,
Grassroots democracy in Cambodia has spread to various segments of society, and thus, will be difficult to reverse. To some extent, democracy has reached the consciousness, hearts and minds of the Khmer people. The suffering of the Khmer people over more than two decades has made them much stronger and more willing to accept and believe in democracy because they know what life was like under non-democratic regimes. The people of Cambodia today are seeking democratic principles to play a vital part of their everyday lives. (3)

Spiritually, emotionally, and culturally, I argue, Khmer are ready for democracy. Thus, inspired by the collective aspiration of the Khmer people, those I interviewed, through the “avenue” of civil society, have fought and continue to fight to put into place the mechanisms by which Khmer, however gradually, can pursue democracy. By drawing upon and reanimating shared cultural narratives, furthermore, particularly that of Buddhism and its promotion of connection to and love for others, they increasingly empower more Khmer to want to participate in actions which will facilitate both cohesive community, and individual liberties for persons within that community. As Khmer begin to see the effects of their actions, moreover, they will progressively become involved in other aspects of the democratic process, as active citizens.

Relearning democracy

Kar brachethibtey (democracy) itself is a new term for Khmer today, for although most perceive that they are kaun khmaer neak kosang angkor—children of the Khmer who created Angkor—in their own lives they have experienced great barbarity and anguish. They are aware that only fifty years ago, Cambodia declared independence from France and became a sovereign nation, yet for most of their own lives they have been dependent both on their government, to make decisions for them,
and on foreign powers, to supply aid and direction to an impoverished nation. Largely stripped of their sense of self, and self-reliance, Khmer must be reminded—or in many cases, informed—that they have rights, and they must relearn how to exercise the power inherent in those rights. Based upon their experiences of others throughout the country (as well as their own experiences), my respondents assert that the Khmer want peace, and lives free from fear and injustice. The individuals in this study are working to educate Khmer about how to pursue those goals. This dissertation chronicles the beginnings of their journey.

The 1993 Constitution of Cambodia and subsequent amendments to said Constitution assert that Cambodia intends to follow the western model of liberal democracy. In chapter 4, I discussed several elements of the western model, as delineated by American scholars and policymakers, for example. As reiterated throughout this dissertation, however, my respondents emphasize in their narratives that they are spokespersons both for democracy and for Khmer culture, and that the two are not incompatible. Indeed, democracy in Cambodia will be (must be) a Khmer democracy. While rooted in two thousand years of history, however, Khmer culture, we have witnessed, is flexible and dynamic. Khmer can therefore indigenize democracy, cognizant that both “democracy” and “Khmerness” will likely change in the process, but confident that neither will lose its quintessential, defining qualities.

The post-UNTAC world undoubtedly seemed overwhelming for Khmer. As mentioned in the introduction, UNTAC brought with it unfamiliar and jarring elements, which some saw as inevitable aftereffects of democracy, as yet another attempt to define Khmer, rather than allowing them to define themselves. It is not surprising, then,
that a generation of Khmer wished to retreat into "tradition" as a shield against globalization. Pre-Khmer Rouge history maintains, however, that retaining Khmerness need not mean cultural stasis.

A study of Khmer arts in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, notes that after independence, "certain forms of art and culture considered as new or modern began to develop in Cambodia" (Reyum vii). These new forms were not considered un-Khmer, but rather, the definition of Khmer embraced these new forms. In fact, "the period following independence in Cambodia seems to have been marked by a willingness to expand and incorporate new elements, looking both outside and inside the newly independent nation for available methods and materials with which to build a modern culture" (vii). Independence contributed to a strong sense of Khmerness, and as such, Khmer did not fear outside influences. "Whether consciously or not," the authors of the above study continue, "most of their work took up questions of how to create forms that would be recognised as both [Khmer] and modern" (vii).

The study mentions a Japanese painter, a Mr. Suzuki, who was invited to teach at the School of Cambodia Arts in the late 1940s. While the authors mention that "Suzuki was not particularly interested in Khmer culture or how his students might go about creating modern [Khmer] visual forms," his classes of students learned several of Suzuki's techniques, graduated, and made careers for themselves as artists—and importantly, as Khmer artists (Reyum 248). Simply because the style(s) taught included some from abroad, the students did not lose their identity and cease being Khmer. In fact, by the mid-1950s, "their skill in representational rendering [taught by Suzuki] found many uses in the newly independent society, particularly in an age when
advertising and forms of visual presentation were taking on increasing importance” (251).

Nor had earlier Khmer become French. While the French had become increasingly controlling during the early 20th century, imposing French systems, many Khmer adopted and incorporated French ways as part of their lifestyles. They adapted French theatre forms, for example, and French architectural styles. These were incorporated into Khmer culture, however—just as Indian and Brahman and other elements had been incorporated centuries before—and doing so did not make them feel un-Khmer. Khmer identity has over time demonstrated its flexibility and adaptability.

The Khmer Rouge, however, deliberately destroyed Khmer culture. The Khmer Rouge devastation was so thorough that recovery has taken much longer. Khmer today need reassurance that in the 21st century, in accepting new methods and structures, they will not lose their unique identity. They need to be reminded that they can, as they have throughout their history, incorporate democracy into Khmer identity. In this assessment, I shall discuss how successful the Khmer feel they have been thus far, and what goals remain for them to achieve.

Roadblocks

There are those who do not believe democracy will work in Cambodia. Human rights activists are quick to point out the exclusionary practices and violence directed toward the ethnic Vietnamese, for example, and rightfully state that such actions are undemocratic. Some argue that no society can concern itself with democracy while most of its people live in poverty. The journalist Henry Kamm, for example, asserted in
2000 that “today’s Cambodia is a basket case. It is a country that hardly nourishes and barely teaches its ever-increasing people, nor does it bind its multiple wounds or cure its many ills” (248). At this point, says Kamm, Cambodia is not ready for democracy: “No equitable rule of law or impartial justice shelters [Khmer] against a mean-spirited establishment of political and economic power, a cabal that is blind and deaf to the crying needs of an abused people” (248).

Some suggest that the hierarchical system of social relations in Cambodia is too resistant to democratic thinking. David Roberts’ excellent analysis of Khmer politics in the 1990s asserts that Cambodia’s tradition of what he terms the “legitimacy of absolutism”—the concern of Cambodia’s elites with amassing power, and consequently regulating political mechanisms such that there can only be one victor—does not lend itself to the power-sharing amenable to democracy (29, 44). I tend to agree. Sorpong Peou presents a similar argument. He posits that given the recurrent political milieu (the lack of what he terms a “hurting balance of power”) in which Cambodia continually finds itself, democracy will not work in Cambodia. “Cognitive change is difficult, if not impossible,” he writes, “especially when power relations among various socio-political forces remain asymmetrical” (Intervention and Change xiv).

I admit that at the present time, using certain western criteria as our barometer, Cambodia in general has not been able to fully implement liberal democracy. The eighty-five questions in the IDEA assessment, for example, cover many areas, and I cannot speculate as to how many of the eighty-five Cambodia would “pass.” The statistics offered in chapter 4 may be disheartening.
Yet mine is not an assessment of the success or failure of Cambodia's political leaders or regimes. Others have already provided such analysis. There is a plethora of literature declaring that Cambodia is undemocratic and probably will never be democratic; indeed, philosophically, it would have been much easier to write a dissertation which had that as a foregone conclusion. Roberts makes an excellent point, however, when he asserts that "in reality, the peace process was aimed at foreign powers, not at [Khmer]" (30). Thus, any checklist of democratic criteria remained insufficient; Cambodia has not fulfilled foreign expectations. (30). But the Khmer (in this study) themselves state that they do want to see democracy work in Cambodia—on their own terms. They simply do not want to completely overhaul Cambodia, to turn it into England or the United States, or France, or Japan—but that does not mean that Cambodia cannot exist as a liberal democracy.

My respondents agree that there are many problems that need to be addressed. They also assert, however, that to continue on a democratic path, Khmer need to have a sense of agency, a sense that they can do something to change the situations and conditions in which they find themselves, and the best means of accomplishing that is to provide firm roots in Khmer identity. Grant Curtis comments that UNTAC should have "devoted much more effort to helping the [Khmer] develop a new and distinctly 'Khmer' form of consensual politics through efforts directed toward the art of compromise, including improved negotiation techniques for 'national reconciliation'" (17, qtd. in Roberts 46). Thus the first task for those Khmer involved in promoting democracy is to do just that. Continued social transformation requires contribution
from the people of that society, such that the transformation blends tradition and change, old and new.

Figure 63.
Khmer artists study ancient sculpting and chiseling techniques
Siem Reap Province, 2002
Elements of Khmer democracy

As asked what democracy means to them, my respondents provided the following comments:

“Democracy means freedom, not force; that people have civil rights and the right to give comments” (20-year-old male, from Prey Veng province).

“Democracy comes from the words prajie (people) and atupdey (power),” (20-year-old male, Phnom Penh).

“It means provision of power and rights to the population. People have rights to select the country’s leaders, those who have good will to serve the national interests and to pay attention to people’s living conditions.” (21-year-old male, Phnom Penh).

“Power and people.” (19-year-old female, from Battambang province).

The regime that considers that the people are the most important. If the government wants to conduct anything [a plan or action?], it must get the ideas of the people together. (20-year-old female from Kampot province).

“Respect for the people’s will; people defining the country’s future” (22-year-old male from Kampong Cham province).

“The term ‘democracy’ means adherence to decisions and opinions of the people. Thinking more about advantages and freedom of people. (21-year-old male from Kompong Thom province).

“People have rights to live, to work, to do business, share ideas, show their opinions in public, choose the leaders they want,” (20-year-old male, from Kampot province).

“Democracy means a process in which people vote to choose their representatives to lead the country. Everything is reached by a majority;” (18-year-old female).

“The word democracy is the freedom that an individual obtains in accordance with the constitution. If an individual commits any crime, that person will be condemned by the law;” (22-year-old male, Phnom Penh).


“People enjoy freedom to choose who is in power; and no pressure to choose other powers, but to satisfy oneself [vote a/t conscience]” (22-year-old male, Phnom Penh).

Democracy in Cambodia, they assert, ultimately requires that the people guide the direction in which the nation will move. However, they also must be provided with the structural mechanisms to be involved in the process: civil and political rights, free
and fair elections, the rule of law, the separation of powers (including an effective independent judiciary). These are part of the "western" definition. Yet for Khmer, democracy also acquires a cultural leaning. I provide several examples below.

First, although Khmer democracy does involve representative leaders selected by free and fair elections, it also continues the monarchy, whose members are appointed, not elected. No one has called for the dismantling of the monarchy. It is a reflection of hierarchical Khmer society and seemingly undemocratic, yet unlike earlier days, the Constitution provides that the King shall reign but not govern. Thus the power remains with the people (through their elected representatives). In retaining the monarchy, Khmer remain connected to their heritage; by embedding it in a constitutional monarchy, they move toward democracy.

Second, Cambodia involves the sangha (monkhood) and Buddhism as part of its administrative system. Article 4 of the constitution declares that "The motto of the Kingdom of Cambodia is: 'Nation, Religion, King.'" As I was preparing this manuscript, Americans were engaged in heated debate over whether a monument of the Ten Commandments could remain in the Alabama State Judicial Building ("Ten Commandments Controversy"). In July 2001, Justice Roy Moore had the monument moved into the building's rotunda, claiming that "the Ten Commandments represent the moral foundation of American law" ("Defiant Chief Justice"). The courts had ruled that displaying the monument violates the U.S. constitution by promoting one religion over another, and violates the separation of church and state. Americans are divided on the issue of including so-called religious
language or figures in political arenas. Cambodia's constitution, on the other hand, directly declares that Buddhism is the state religion (Article 43).

Third, citizens' civil and political rights follow Khmer cultural codes. The constitution guarantees certain personal liberties, such as the freedom to travel (Article 40), freedom of expression, press, and assembly (Article 41). Interestingly, however, the constitution which protects individual freedoms also enshrines for citizens "the right to take good care of their elderly mother and father according to Khmer traditions" (Art 47). Relatedly, the right to education includes Buddhist education (Article 68), and cultural and moral teachings.

I do not wish to suggest that these particularizations are undemocratic. I simply point out that they reflect different values and priorities specific to Khmer culture, and thus, their democracy is a Khmer democracy.

Again, some elements of Khmer democracy correspond more closely to the western model, such as the supremacy of the rule of law, and the separation of powers, including an independent judiciary. The phrases "rule of law" and "separation of powers" come from western NGOs or associations, and these need to be explained before they are indigenized (cf. Hean). While these elements have been noticeably absent from Cambodia's recent past—during the Khmer Rouge regime and the subsequent socialist regime, for example—they are not anathema to Khmer democracy. In fact, as discussed in earlier chapters, the NGO workers and others explain their relevance for Khmer using cultural means, linking the fundamental principles underlying the rule of law and separation of powers to Khmer culture. They use the Jataka tales of the Buddha's life to clarify the notion of accountability: those who
break the law are held accountable to it. The idea of an independent body in charge of
deciding disputes resonates with popular Khmer folktales. They use ayai dramas and
shadow puppet theatre performances to convey messages about domestic violence.
They use yike comedic plays to explain the voting process, and to encourage Khmer to
vote. Linking Khmer culture with activism, necessary for a functioning democracy,
gives Khmer a necessary familiar foundation, and thus helps to develop Khmer’
confidence in taking less familiar actions.

Success or Failure?: Khmer perspectives

Human Rights

Now, in 2003, set menuhs (human rights) is a phrase with which most Khmer
are familiar, even if they are not one-hundred percent sure of its definition. While
human rights abuses continue and are among the greatest of Cambodia’s problems,
compared with a decade ago, dialogue about human rights has become much more open
and abundant.

My personal experience supports this last statement. While I was in Phnom
Penh in 2002, I became friendly with one of the female caretakers of the guest house
where I stayed. Every day, she would greet me with, Bong srey tov na vinh?, a polite
Khmer greeting which literally translates as “Where are you going?” Usually, when I
would answer with the name of the particular organization I had scheduled, she would
answer with chas (yes), and go about her work. On one occasion, however, I happened
to mention that I was going to LICADHO, and she responded with, Oh! Kenhom skoal
LICADHO (I am familiar with LICADHO), and ran to retrieve a card she had in another
room. Apparently, sometime in the previous couple of months, her aunt, who lives in a remote provincial area, had been badly beaten by her husband. On her aunt’s behalf, she had gone to the LICADHO office, and filed a complaint. LICADHO gave her the card confirming that she had filed a complaint. *Kenhom tov ahaoy koat meul daoem bey kom ahaoy koat twee medong tiet!* she said. “I’m going to show this to him so that he won’t do it again!” She was unsure, at that point, whether investigators had actually gone to the province to investigate. However, acting with the assumption, likely correct, that even in a remote area villagers would be familiar with name LICADHO and the human rights work with which they are involved, she felt that by simply showing her aunt’s husband the card, he would be alarmed enough not to commit a similar offense. Ordinarily quite shy, she was so proud, she told me, because she helped her aunt. She had learned, perhaps through billboards, perhaps through newspapers or radio, perhaps through friends, that in a situation in which there is abuse, there is an organization to which one can turn, which will help to hold an offender accountable for his or her actions.

My experience with ADHOC also supports this contention. First, the very existence of written reports in various languages, including Khmer, distributed throughout the country, signals to Khmer that *someone* is aware of specific incidents of human rights abuse. That is, human rights abuses are not an unequivocal part of Khmer existence. Second, ADHOC places staff members in every province, and the staff take the time to meet members of different villages, distributing information and informing them about services ADHOC provides. Most of the ADHOC staff are unpaid volunteers who truly want Khmer to know their rights and to be willing to stand up for
them. Third, if there is a report of abuse, says Chun Sath, and it is investigated and determined to be true by ADHOC, staff alert the proper authorities (e.g., provincial police). If, within a reasonable amount of time, no action is taken to remedy the situation, he says, ADHOC will issue a press release. At that point, not only is someone aware of the incident(s), but whoever reads the press release will know that the responsible party did not follow through. This last point, incidentally, is more effective than one would think, for Khmer detest being made khmas ke, or embarassed/ashamed in front of others.

Finally, the integration of human rights into both formal school curriculums and introduced via nonformal education, particularly in primary schools, is heralded as a great success. In 1995 and 1996, CIHR teamed up with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport to make human rights a permanent part of the Khmer primary and secondary school curricula. And because human rights is believed to be so fundamental to democracy in Cambodia, most organizations, be they NGOs or women’s associations or student groups, usually include protection of human rights and prosecution of abuses in their statements of purpose and goals. Radio programs and television quiz shows on democracy-related issues became quite popular after their introduction by CIHR, reaching tens of thousands at a time. Moreover, the Khmer, who as discussed truly honor and enjoy their festivals, such as Pchum Ben (Festival of Souls) and Bon Om Tuk (Water Festival), have incorporated International Human Rights day, December 10th, into their calendar. As with other holidays, International Human Rights day is usually commemorated with offerings at the local temples, articles in local newspapers, and often, by speeches by Khmer officials. It is evident that human rights are being
promoted in Cambodia, and that once introduced, they resonate with Khmer culture. As CIHR comments,

finally, at the level of culture, a process of education, broadly construed, can turn the norms in a society toward greater respect for human rights. Here, the ideals of democracy and human rights through formal and informal education, television, radio, and print media can infuse the wider society with the ideals of human rights and democracy. ("Project Description, Human Rights")

Women’s rights

Strongly related to human rights are women’s rights, and like human rights, “women’s rights” as an element of democracy have been indigenized into Khmer culture. While in general, women traditionally have had lower social status than men (c.f. Ledgerwood, “Khmer Conceptions of Gender”), women have been ardently involved in civil society. The Women’s Media Centre, for example, is run entirely by women. Says Tive Sarayeth, “The media still stereotypes women and portrays them in sexist ways. They are always housewives, mothers, bar girls or singers” (personal interview). “Gender,” she maintained in a article, “is a new and little understood term [in Cambodia]. The need for advocacy to gender sensitise the media is therefore of paramount importance” (Tive). Are they succeeding? One success, notes Sarayeth, is that after campaigning for four years, the Centre was able to convince Khmer to ban pornography from Khmer newspapers.

Chun Sath made a point of informing me about special trainings ADHOC conducts on women’s rights, and that at the time I interviewed him, ADHOC staff was 52 percent women (personal interview). “This is in our Constitution,” he said, “and our Constitution came from basic human rights. Human rights says that we should
encourage both daughters and sons to further their study, for example. But because of poverty in families, who gets to go to school? Sons. The daughters are asked to stay at home. But we trying to let people know that this doesn’t have to be the case.” As the general Khmer population is also 52 percent women, and moreover, since there are so many widows in Khmer society, it is important that Khmer women receive an education (1998 Census).

Koy Veth of the Khmer Women’s Voice Centre made a similar point, and added that women are not only nurturers, but also leaders: “Once people start to believe that women and men can be different but equal—and I know that goes against what some think is Khmer culture, but culture should not hinder us!—they can become leaders” (Personal interview, 7/2/02). Without overstating what is still very much a work in progress, perhaps the message is beginning to get through. The Project Against Domestic Violence estimates that a traveling theater troupe they sponsored to enact dramas about domestic violence, and to portray models of new behavior, reached crowds of 5,000 to 30,000 people at each of 35 performances. In a survey conducted by the Center for Advanced study, when asked if they believed women would make good commune leaders, 90 percent of the men responded positively, as well as 84 percent of the women! “The openness to accept women as leaders is good news for civic education efforts,” the study concludes (Center for Advanced Study 79).

Elections

For Khmer, while free and fair elections are not the sole indicator of democracy, they are important. Accordingly, the fact that the 1998 and 2003 national elections were Khmer-managed is an indicator of success. Most voters in these elections felt

My respondents feel relatively confident (and this is evidenced by the high percentage of actual voters) that the importance of voting and the procedures for voting have been received and understood by Khmer (see chapter 7 of this dissertation). They are very happy with the range of materials they have been able to produce, and the numbers of people they have been able to reach. This became especially important for the 1998 elections, because most of the 1993 election materials were UNTAC-generated, and did not reflect familiarity with Khmer culture. Newer materials used familiar characters and colloquial (yet still respectful) language, and moreover, themes were presented through much-loved cultural venues—theatre, music, dance, and art.

The respondents are less confident, yet still optimistic, that Khmer vote freely and fairly. Without the UNTAC presence, there was no formal security mechanism to protect Khmer from undue influence or threats to sell their voting tickets, or to vote a certain way. Thus, for the 1998 elections, COMFREL, NICFEC, and other election-related NGOs increased the amount of election material dealing with corruption, vote-buying and selling, and the importance of “voting according to one’s conscience.” Previous efforts had focused more on getting people to vote; more recent efforts encourage them to vote mindfully. Prior to the 1998 elections, between January and May 1998, the Center for Social Development conducted a survey about Khmer attitudes toward corruption. “Unsurprisingly,” states the report, “the results [of the
survey] showed that 84% [sic] of Cambodians felt bribery is the normal way of doing things.”

Figure 64. Corruption is still a problem

It should be noted, however, that 90 percent of those surveyed feel that corruption hinders national development, and “a massive 98% believe that ending corruption is important.” Even if corruption is defended as “cultural” (see discussion of the patron-client system in chapter 3 of this dissertation), Khmer seem willing to change Khmer culture to permit more democracy. Moreover, the Center concludes, “These findings clearly indicate that the people of Cambodia are not resigned to the inevitability of a corrupt system, and that with positive action there exists a real chance to put a stop to it” (CSD, National Survey).

Another indicator is the first-ever 2002 Commune Council elections. While imperfect, these elections were important in empowering Khmer, because Khmer political thinking “is very locally focused.” According to the CAS survey also quoted
above, more than three times the number of the respondents they surveyed felt commune governments influence their lives more than the national government than vice-versa (CAS 4). The survey also found that although villagers were not sure what the official duties of the commune government are, most asserted that they would vote in a commune election if they knew about it (27). My respondents noted that having commune elections, thereby familiarizing community members about the responsibilities of the commune government, as well as the voting process and related “free and fair” issues, would assist them in making connections between their individual actions (voting, protesting) and changes in their community based upon those actions (new leaders who accomplish tangible goals, such as building roads, for example).

Thun Sary, President of ADHOC, comments that “the commune council elections are a process that will enable decentralization and democratization at the grassroots level, a very important factor for strengthening democracy in Cambodia” (Human Rights Report, 2001 3).

The elected Commune Councils, whose mandate runs until 2007, held their first meetings in March and April 2002. The decision to hold Commune elections, moreover, has been taken by the Government of Cambodia because of a “growing understanding through Cambodia that people must take a greater part in decisions affecting their affairs and there is also a growing understanding that government and administration must be more sensitive and more responsive to its citizens.” (Prum Sokha, qtd. in Werde).
Civil and political rights

As with the above sections, it would be quite easy for me to list a plethora of civil and political rights abuses, and to cite instances in which efforts to stop such abuses have been thwarted within the government. Such reports abound, and one need only execute a quick search on the Internet for thousands of sites detailing them. It was very interesting to me, however, that even within the short time I was in Phnom Penh in 2002, I both personally witnessed and read or heard about various instances of Khmer asserting their civil and political rights.

Just before my arrival in Cambodia at the end of May 2002, protesters organized a rally in Battambang province to speak out against discrimination against HIV and AIDS victims. I was quite surprised by this, first, because during my previous time in Cambodia (1995-1996), most Khmer did not know much about HIV/AIDS (many believed a blessing from a monk could cure it), and second, if they did, they were hesitant to talk about, as one of its means of transmission is through sexual contact. Any mention of such, except with very close friends or relatives, made Khmer khmaas ke. Yet by 2002, protesters in Battambang, with 600 additional marchers in front of the National Assembly building in Phnom Penh, asked for anti-discrimination laws (Lor and Myers 15).

In mid-June, garment workers at two Phnom Penh factories organized and went on strike. A Cambodia Daily article reports that “more than 500 garment workers at the Sino Nature factory walked off the job at noon Monday[,] claiming that neither the factory nor the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs was responding to a week of complaints.” These workers knew that they had rights as employees of the factory, and
that if those rights were not adequately met, they could voice complaints to appropriate authorities. As these authorities did not respond, however, the workers sought to make the public aware of their plight, and hopefully, to hold those authorities accountable for their wrongdoing. “About 500 workers from the Supreme Choice factory demonstrated outside the Ministry of Commerce,” the article continues, “demanding mediation” (Yun, “Garment Factories Strike” 17). This last comment is also telling, for rather than seeking violent retribution for perceived wrongs, the workers at the Supreme factory asked for mediation.

On June 27, I awoke one morning to the sound of protesters walking along Norodom Boulevard. Bystanders told me that they had walked in from the provinces to protest against the Prime Minister over a land dispute. I later learned from a newspaper report that the protesters wanted the Prime Minister to intervene in a dispute with soldiers who had threatened villagers, “telling them that if they didn’t hand over the land, the military would allow Pol Pot to kill the people if he returned” (Yun, “Land Dispute” 12). One demonstrator noted (to the reporter) that he had taken legal action following the initial dispute, but that nothing came of it, and so, they decided to take the case to the government.

Throughout the summer, Khmer wrote letters to the editors of various newspapers, citing dissatisfaction with government action or inaction, human rights abuses, and other instances of injustice. One brave soul, who from the information provided in the article was ethnic Khmer, even wrote that Khmer should stop allowing the border dispute to hinder the relationship between Khmer and Vietnamese. He called upon some familiar values, writing that “people on all sides should use their minds,
hearts and bodies to solve this issue,” for “we should take advantage of the opportunities that this peaceful era offers and work together to bring our region out of poverty” (Kimsan 15).

In citing these examples, I do not wish to extrapolate and make a sweeping statement about all Khmer. However, in my experience, Khmer from different provinces, employ, and gender have begun to recreate a society in which various opinions may be heard. Perhaps the Buddhist influence of tolerance has been reawakened.

All of these democratic elements are in their embryonic stages, yet those in Khmer civil society continue to advocate on behalf of the Khmer people, and to empower Khmer to advocate for themselves. If the practices I witnessed during the short period I was in Cambodia are even slightly representative, this reiterates their willingness to adopt new democratic ideas and institutions, and to explore the notion of power to the people. Additionally, many within these organizations and associations are unpaid volunteers, and participate because they believe in what they are doing, and not because they are becoming rich in doing so. In fact, while I was in Cambodia, I saw several news reports in which members of the NGO community spoke out against allegations that they mismanaged their funds and made large profits from donations (see Appendix D, “In defense of local NGOs”).

Separation of powers and the rule of law

Of the democratic elements discussed in this dissertation, the rule of law and the separation of powers have proven the most difficult for Khmer to enact. While the Constitution calls for a functioning independent judiciary, the system as it stands is
inefficient, corrupt, understaffed, and disorganized. The Constitution delineates four integral components of the Judiciary: (1) the Constitutional Council, (2) the Supreme Council of the Magistry, (3) the courts, and (4) the prosecutors. The Constitution specifies that rules governing judges, prosecutors, and the functioning of the Judiciary shall be thereafter defined in specific laws. Unfortunately, however, none of the four components seems to be working effectively. The Supreme Council of the Magistry has yet to meet. No laws governing the functioning of the Judiciary have been enacted since establishment of the Constitution. The small number of judges and prosecutors Cambodia does have lack sufficient procedural knowledge, and many have strained relations with local authorities. A 2001 report commented that "the absence of a permanent president in the SCM hampers its functioning." and "as a result, until the SCM achieve[s] independence and is adequately functioning independently from the political parties, the judicial reform will not be successful" (Human Rights Report, 2001 32) A recent Human Rights Watch report declares, "Impunity in Cambodia is prevalent in all phases of the law enforcement and judicial processes" (1999).

Yet there have been some successes. The Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) lists among its successes the first acquittal in modern Khmer judicial history, achieved "by filing a motion to suppress the forced confession of a pregnant woman who suffered a miscarriage at the hands of police" ("Activities/Successes"). CDP also filed the first-ever restraining order, which prevented a battering husband from selling his wife's property, and made the first bail motion in the new judicial system, securing the pre-trial release of a Khmer editor jailed for publishing articles unflattering to a particular political party.
The major obstacle to the rule of law in Cambodia is not that social structure or values preclude its acceptance, as the link between Buddhist values and rights and law is continually articulated by the NGO leaders and volunteers. Yet because of the ineffectiveness of the judiciary, Khmer’ faith in the legal system hangs in the balance.

Toward Justice: The Khmer Rouge Tribunal

In an extreme paradox, it is the Khmer Rouge that may solidify belief in democracy. There is no dearth of evidence—physical or emotional—condemning “the contemptible Pol Pot,” the leader of the Khmer Rouge regime. Nearly every Khmer I have ever met over the age of 19 or 20 has a terrifying story about life (and death) under the Khmer Rouge. The international community recognizes it as one of the worst tragedies of the 20th century, and supports efforts both to prevent such tragedy from reoccurring and to bring those responsible to justice. So too Khmer.

For the past several years, Cambodia’s leaders have been involved in a controversial dialogue with the international community over how the leaders of the Khmer Rouge should be brought to justice. As the Khmer Rouge regime undermined the ability of the Khmer to function, to a large extent, most agree that a Khmer Rouge Tribunal will demonstrate to Khmer that no offenders—even those who were powerful enough to take over the entire country—evade justice. As a signatory to the Genocide Convention of the United Nations, Cambodia has a duty to prosecute those who committed war crimes (Marks 237). The issue calls into question the supremacy of the rule of law, which is vital to the success of democracy anywhere, and particularly in Cambodia. If the rule of law is upheld in the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, it may be the
most important event to consolidate scattered thoughts and beliefs about democracy.

The Center for Social Development held a public forum about the issue of the tribunal, and in its report notes,

Some participants said that the destruction during the Democratic Kampuchea regime remains as a chronic disease called The Khmer Rouge disease and it is still in the minds of most [Khmer]. So we have to find the best method to cure it. If we do not cure it, the Khmer people might not be able to achieve reconciliation and it may impact negatively on the process of the country's development. (CSD Forum)

Chea Vannath, president of the Center for Social Development, comments that trials holding the Khmer Rouge accountable for their actions are necessary if Cambodia is to truly move toward democracy. The trials “will help us heal ourselves,” Vannath states. “We need them to move on.” (qtd. in Berry 1).

The discussions thus far have been prolonged and unproductive. During the initial series of meetings, the Khmer representatives and the United Nations representatives could not agree on the terms of the trial. A major point of contention was whether the tribunal should be held in an international criminal court or national genocide court. The United Nations, citing that Cambodia’s judicial system was not yet developed enough to handle such a tribunal and would not meet international standards of justice, wanted an international trial in which foreign jurists formed a majority. Khmer leaders felt a foreign majority would be a violation of national sovereignty. The controversy has continued to the present day, and as such, Khmer faith in democracy remains precarious. Youk Chhang, Director of the Documentation Center, describes the gravity of the situation:
[I hope t]hat the truth will prevail and provide answers to the questions that have been posed by the victims over the past 20 years. I also hope we have equal participation, so that it does not just involve the UN and the government. The people themselves should take an equal role. Even though they don't have a legal right, they should have a civil right to see, to hear, to watch and to know the whole process.

What we want to know is why they killed our family members? Why my sister was killed? Why they tortured me as a young boy just for taking grass from the rice field? Who gave the order to do that? That is as important as knowing what happened and I think knowing this will set us free. (Carmichael, interview with Phnom Penh Post)

Significantly, Chhang hopes not only for a tribunal, but for Khmer participation (beyond that of the lawyers and jury members) in the tribunal.

Stephen Marks, the former head of human rights education during UNTAC, suggests that one of the reasons that the Khmer Rouge offenders have not heretofore been held accountable is that it is not part of Khmer culture “to feel that justice must be done before moving forward, therefore the people’s ardent hope for peace combined with respect for Buddhism allowed them to accept, for the time being at least, their spiritual leaders’ saying that peace must prevail over justice” (qtd. in Downie 1). This is perhaps a valid explanation. Many Khmer also refer to the Putth tumneay, a series of familiar Pali scriptures that in retrospect seemed to predict the Khmer Rouge regime: “The roads will be emptied of travellers, the houses will be emptied of people,” and “the blood will flow in the streets as high as an elephant’s stomach” (cf. Mortland, “Khmer Buddhists in the United States: Ultimate Questions”). Perhaps the Khmer Rouge fulfilled a prophecy, and thus Khmer should not seek vengeance.

But the Buddhist spiritual quest is also one that continually seeks revelation and understanding. I believe that while they can respect it, the Khmer cannot
simply accept the *Puth tumneay* or other explanations if they are to truly move forward with democracy. Maha Ghosananda talks at length about the need for balance between compassion and wisdom, for one cannot have peace without such balance. He tells the following story:

Once an old farmer found a dying cobra in his ricefield. Seeing the cobra’s suffering, the farmer was filled with compassion. He picked up the snake and carried him home. Then he fed the cobra warm milk, wrapped him in a soft blanket, and lovingly placed the snake beside him in his bed as he went to sleep. In the morning, the farmer was dead.

Why was he killed? Because he used only compassion and not wisdom. If you pick up a cobra, it will bite you. When you find a way to save the dying cobra without lifting it, you have balanced wisdom with compassion. (excerpted from *Step by Step* 34)

In their quest for peace, Khmer must balance wisdom and compassion. Maha Ghosananda states, “Wisdom and compassion must walk together. Having one without the other is like walking with one foot. You may hop a few times, but eventually you will fall. Balancing wisdom with compassion, you will walk very well—slowly and elegantly, step by step” (*Step by Step* 35). Khmer have just begun their journey, and, balancing Buddhism with elections, tradition and change, perhaps what has been called alternately the culture of war and the culture of impunity may indeed shift toward a culture of democracy.
Figures 65 and 66.
Rural scene;
Members of a Khmer family head to work in the rice fields
FACING THE FUTURE

During my memorable stay, I accompanied a group from the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) on a trip to Kampot province. Sorn Samnang, the President of the RAC, and his graduate students were conducting research on Kampot’s history. Kampot is also my father’s home province, and knowing this, Sorn invited me to come along. About an hour or so after we (maybe 15 or 16 of us, all in one small van) left Phnom Penh, we turned down a narrow dirt road, and stopped at the bottom of a hill.

“Do you know where we are?” Sorn asked me. I did not. “This was the University of Takeo-Kampot,” he told me. I was stunned. In all the time that I had been learning about Cambodia, I had never realized that there was a national university outside of Phnom Penh. Oh yes, the students added. Not only was there a (Royal) University of Takeo-Kampot, but a Royal University of Kompong Cham, and a Royal University of Battambang, as well as several other tertiary institutions built before the Khmer Rouge era (c.f. Ayres ch. 2).

We climbed the steep hill, and at the top, came upon the remains of several buildings, and one open-air structure where several monks were sitting. We joined them, and the students began to ask questions about this peculiar place. As I sat and listened, I looked out at the grounds beyond and began to imagine former students attending classes here, or perhaps engaging in conversation with the monks, as we were. In one way, doing so was difficult, as there were no classrooms, no teachers, no novices—just partial walls overgrown with grasses. In another way, however, it was easy, for as I looked out, I could hear the RAC students inquiring both enthusiastically...
and politely, and the monks answering when they could, almost as if recreating an episode from the past. There were few among us old enough to remember the university as an active institution; all knew, however, that this had been, and would continue to be, a place of learning.

I do not know how many students attended Takeo-Kampot, nor how many teachers instructed there, nor what subjects formed the curriculum. What I saw, both literally and figuratively, however, was a generation of Khmer hungry for knowledge about the past, understanding about the present, and wisdom to guide them in the future.

In January 2000, Prime Minister Hun Sen planted a Bodhi tree on the RAe grounds, commemorating the Academy’s inauguration (Kimsong and Doyle 8). For me, this act epitomizes the blending of tradition and change around which this dissertation has focused. For the bodhi tree represents the tree where the Buddha, sitting alone in meditation, received enlightenment. There, he came to the realization that only individually could he find happiness for himself, that nirvana could only be attained by turning inward, not outward. At the same time, planting the tree on the grounds of a school, a place where different minds meet and varied opinions are shared, suggests that it is in working with and learning from others that one gains insight into resolutions for the problems of a people, a community, of a nation. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim contended that society itself is a creative power, and that only the intensity of collective life can awaken individuals to new achievements. “Moreover,” he wrote, “it does not change with each generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with one another. It is thus an
entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them” (80).

Cambodia needs both change and tradition. It needs to recognize individual freedoms and liberties, and to encourage Khmer to find new ways of achieving present goals. Yet it also needs cohesion, solidarity—that is, Khmerness—that cultural “glue” that holds Khmer together. Frantz Fanon writes:

> A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature […] A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which the people has created itself and keeps itself in existence. A national culture in underdeveloped countries should therefore take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom which these countries are carrying on” (The Wretched of the Earth 233).

Khmer need structural democracy— institutions such as an independent judiciary and the rule of law, and individual liberties as outlined in the Constitution—to provide a framework upon which they can rebuild the nation. It is, however, a rebuilding, not a primordial birth. For Khmer have a history which they want to inspire their future. Those at the forefront of the democracy debate—here, those in the local NGO community—realize that Khmer must maintain a balance between the two. In order for democracy to work in Cambodia, they must be able to apply democratic principles inherent in their past, to practices and experiences that are entirely new. Those whom I met in Cambodia are helping fellow citizens to do just that.

Perhaps fittingly, my final interview during the summer of 2002 took place with a young man who had recently formed a new NGO, named The Forum for the Future. “I have no idea whether or not it’s going to work,” said Sok Makara, the
Forum’s founder. “But I know that I have to try” (personal interview, July 28, 2002). Like most of the Khmer who work in local-national NGOs in Cambodia, Sok does not know whether his organization will have funding for upcoming projects. He cannot say with certainty that the government will not shut down his organization if its actions offend or seem to contradict those of high-ranking officials. He knows that Khmer convictions can be used to exclude as well as to include, to stifle as well as to encourage growth.

He also affirms, however, that from his standpoint, Khmer want democracy, and therefore, he will work to help them to pursue it. “Let me explain the meaning of our symbol,” said Sok (Figure 67). “You see in the center? That is Jayavarman II, our protector, representing our glorious past. He is flanked by two nagas, facing outward, two different directions, representing our past. Khmer were divided, disconnected from each other. The banner underneath, which says ‘Forum for the Future,’ connects the naga together, representing the desire to reconnect these two, Khmer and Khmer. Then there’s a border, shaped like the head of a fish, representing the earth, our strength and resilience, all of which serve as the foundation for our development” (ibid.). For Sok, as for all of those included in this study, democracy has profound meaning, and represents the possibility of healing, renewal, and restoration of all that is Khmer.
The reality of a tribunal to hold leaders of the Khmer Rouge accountable for their crimes draws closer, as Cambodia’s leaders continue to negotiate premises and provisions with the international community. Perhaps, through this acknowledgment of a nation’s collective pain, Khmer will leave the killing fields behind—never forgotten, but woven more smoothly into their larger historical narrative, as but part of what informs their identity. The foundation for a new Khmer future is now in place,
and as exemplified by those in this study, Khmer are working to indigenize democracy, to make it an easily-recognizable part of Khmer culture. In telling their stories, it is my hope that I have done justice to the work in progress.

A Khmer proverb reads, “Whatever your name may be, work hard to live up to your name.” The name khmaer, with its various meanings—Khmer country, Khmer culture, and Khmer community—provides much to live up to, past, present, and future. Armed with both resilience and flexibility, however, Khmer are up to the challenge.

The road to peace is called the middle path. It is beyond all duality and opposites [...]. Peace comes only when we stop struggling with opposites. Maha Ghosananda

Figure 68.
The Middle Path
Figure 69.
Children of Cambodia
## APPENDIX A: Organizations and Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organization</th>
<th>Year formed or inaugurated</th>
<th>Directors</th>
<th>Hqtrtrs/ Rural branches</th>
<th>Number of staff; major programs</th>
<th>Mission statement or Statement of goals</th>
<th>Persons interviewed &amp; Date of original interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADHOC: Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Mr. Thun Sary, President Mr. Chun Sath, Secretary General</td>
<td>Headquarters in Phnom Penh; 17 provincial offices; 1 district branch</td>
<td>78 staff members; approximately 50,000 members, including volunteers. Major programs: 1) Education, 2) Monitoring, 3) Women’s Section, 4) Lobby and Advocacy publication of Neak Chea bulletin (Khmer)</td>
<td>Vision: A society that respects human rights and law. Mission: to educate and empower the people to realize and defend their rights and to advocate the government authorities to work for better governance and respect for human rights. Goal: to bring about change in the behavior, morality and action through the establishment of the rule of law and strengthening of civil society.</td>
<td>June 4, 2002: Chun Sath,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist Institute</td>
<td>Formed in 1930 from the Royal Library. Formally reinstated 1992; renovated and newly reopened 2002</td>
<td>Mr. Nguon Van Chanti; Director; Mr. Srey Yar Puth Saody, Adviser, Mores and Customs Commission</td>
<td>Phnom Penh Varies; Two commissions: 1) Mores &amp; Customs (orig. founded in 1934) and 2) the Tripitaka (orig. begun in 1929 and incorporated into the Institute in 1930); both were formally reinstated in 1992.</td>
<td>Research and publications in Khmer culture and Buddhism Aims: -collecting all the oral texts and writings of Cambodia and to ensure their conservation. -the transmission of the theories of Buddha, educates the monks and the faithful ones in the respect of the precepts of the religion</td>
<td></td>
<td>June 14, 2002: Srey Yar Puth Saody, June 14, 2002: Yi Thon (ret.) Cultural Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Institute Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Mission</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>Cambodian Institute for Human Rights (CIHR)</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Mr. Neou Kassie, Director; Ms. Mean Ho Leang, Deputy Director</td>
<td>76 staff members. Four major programs: 1) Human Rights training of public school teachers; 2) training of civil servants in good governance; 3) campaigning for 'culture of peace'; and 4) info. dissemination through TV, radio, and video productions. Mission: to help Cambodia succeed in its democratic transition by promoting human rights, free and fair elections, democratic institutions, good governance with public sector reform, a culture of peace, rule of law and gender equality; -constructive engagement with the government in a non-confrontational manner. -to provide knowledge to Khmer people.</td>
<td>June 21, 2002: Neou Kassie (exld. Due to exterminating circumstance; correspondence via email and printed materials</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP)</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Mr. Kao Kim Hourn, Executive Director</td>
<td>Varies; Two groups of researchers: Senior Fellows and Fellows. Major projects include: 1) Program on Civil Society; 2) Program on Civil-Military Relations; 3) Program on Economic Development; 4) Program on Foreign Policy and International Relations; 5) Program on Greater Mekong Subregion. Mission statement -to enhance the ability of government officials and the public to make informed decisions about public policy; -to participate in and to promote regional and international cooperation; -to advocate human rights and advance democracy within civil society in Cambodia; -to promote peace and cooperation among Khmer, as well as between Khmer and others on a regional and international basis; -to conduct research on development issues that concern Cambodia, as well as disseminate the resulting research findings.</td>
<td>July 24, 2002: Kao Kim Hourn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Position/Role</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Staff/Activities</td>
<td>Mission</td>
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<td>Cambodian League 1992</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Ms. Kek Galabru, Executive Director; Ms. Naly Pilorge, General Manager</td>
<td>Phnom Penh; 17 provincial offices</td>
<td>121 permanent staff members; 183 active volunteers, more than 195,000 members 6 major programs 1) Human Rights Education; 2) Monitoring of human rights violations 3) Children’s Rights 4) Medical Assistance 5) Women’s Rights 6) Project Against Torture - Advocacy (this is an integral part of all program areas)</td>
<td>to promote human rights and monitor human rights violations in Cambodia. Compile and produce curricula, pamphlets, illustrated booklets, posters and videos for teachers/facilitators to conduct classes on human rights, basic legal procedures, and democratic principles.</td>
<td>July 2, 2002: Kek Galabru,</td>
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<td>Center for Advanced Study 1996</td>
<td>1996; became Khmer-managed in 2000</td>
<td>Mr. Hean Sokhom, Executive Director</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Varies; staff consists primarily of core researchers and associate researchers, plus administrative staff. -Conducts small and large-scale surveys and qualitative studies throughout the country on various topics: democracy, health, and Khmer culture</td>
<td>Mission: to engage in research, education and public debate on issues affecting the development of the Khmer society. The Centre uses an integrative, problem-oriented approach, and seeks to work with Khmer and international scholars. CAS conducts research programs designed to help clarify public policy options and develop priorities from a humane, people-centred perspective.</td>
<td>June 3, 2002: Hean Sokhom; June 27, 2002: Heng Kim Vann, Researcher; June 4, 2002: Hun Thirth, Researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Center for Social Development (CSD)** | 1995 | **Ms. Chea Vannath, President; Heav Veasna, Managing Director; Dr. Lao Mong Hay, Head of Legal Unit** | **Phnom Penh** | **22 permanent staff; numerous volunteers**
Major programs:
1) Publishing a monthly research bulletin that focuses on democracy, accountability and transparency issues
2) Televised public forums on issues of national importance
3) Compiling objective reports on National Assembly and Senate activity
4) Working with MOEYS to introduce anti-corruption education into the National Curriculum
5) Advising legislators and government officials on the drafting of new laws
6) Providing free library facilities for students and researchers
 | **Mission:** to promote democratic values and improve the quality of life of the Khmer people through practical research, advocacy, awareness-raising and public debate.
**Vision:** a prosperous, peaceful and harmonious Cambodia - the kind of society that will support moral values and technological and social modernization.
**Goals:**
· To promote public accountability and transparency
· To advocate for good governance through the institutionalization of democratic values and principles
· To monitor the development and implementation of free and fair electoral processes, and to build citizens' participation in these processes
· To strengthen respect for Human rights as an essential aspect of development
· To act as a neutral forum for open and candid debates and discussions on issues of concern to society.
<p>| <strong>June 2, 2002:</strong> Ms. Sieng Huy, National Issues Forum Coordinator; July 8, 2002. Chea Vannath (excl. Due to illness; subsequent correspondence by phone and email); |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)</strong></th>
<th>1995, established as permanent election monitoring organization; 1997, registered with Ministry of Interior as NGO</th>
<th>Mr. Koul Panha, Executive Director; Mr. Thun Sary, First Representative; Mr. Phoung Sith, Second Representative</th>
<th>Board of Directors comprised of representatives from 12 Khmer NGOs; 11,000 volunteer election observers</th>
<th>Mission: to create an informed and favorable climate for free and fair elections through lobbying and advocating for a suitable legal framework; educating, to inform voters of their rights; and monitoring activities that both discourage irregularities and provide comprehensive monitoring data to enable an objective, non-partisan assessment of the election process</th>
<th>July 22, 2002: Koul Panha, June 2003: Mar Sophal, Monitoring Coordinator</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Forum for the Future</strong></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Mr. Sok Makara, President</td>
<td>Board of directors (6); membership information not yet available</td>
<td>Objectives: to promote democracy and citizen participation to Khmer society To honor the nation of Kampuchea To educate Khmer in order to improve the nation To appreciate all of the diverse cultures of Cambodia</td>
<td>June 27, 2002: Sok Makara</td>
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<td><strong>Khmer Journalists' Association (KJA)</strong></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Mr. Pon Bunsong, Director; Mr. That Ly Hok, President</td>
<td>21 staff members; More than 2,000 volunteers;</td>
<td>Mission: train journalists in writing and computer skills; raise funds to send journalists for trainings; collect information and share that information with other newspapers for reporting</td>
<td>June 20, 2002: Pon Bunsong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Khmer Women for Cooperation and Development (KWCD)

1997

Ms. Sum Saturn, Director; Mr. Chan Sokha, Administrator

Phnom Penh; Sihanoukville

45 staff persons; 12 permanent staff in Phnom Penh; 10 in Sihanoukville; plus volunteers.

5 major programs:
1) Sex workers’ empowerment;
2) HIV/AIDS/STD prevention
3) Agriculture (home gardening and nutrition);
4) Vocational training;
5) Women’s Empowerment

Objectives: 1) reducing the epidemic of AIDS/STD among sex workers and to empower these workers; 2) increasing family income, reducing use of toxic chemicals, reducing malnutrition; 3) teaching skills to poor families, and reducing the numbers of persons entering cities to find work; reducing the roaming activities of students abandoned by schools, orphans, homeless; 4) provide opportunities for women to participate in politics, and encourage women to become leaders; reduce bias against and violence against women.

June 25, 2002: Sum Saturn

Khmer Women’s Voice Centre (KWVC)

1993

Ms. Koy Veth, Executive Director

Phnom Penh

15, plus 16 on-call provincial trainers; Advocacy, Decentralization and Gender Equity; Training: Gender, Leadership, Democracy, and Good governance; Media Program.

Vision: a democratic and peaceful Khmer society in which women have equal rights and responsibilities with men; Promotes participation and decision making by women in social, economic, and political spheres while influencing the society to recognize the role and contribution of women; through the KMVC magazine, to educate Khmer society by eliminating harmful and incorrect preconceptions about and reducing discrimination against women.

July 5, 2002: Koy Veth
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>President/Executive Director</th>
<th>Phnom Penh</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khmer Writers' Association</td>
<td>1954; 1993</td>
<td>Mr. You Bo, President</td>
<td>186 members; 355</td>
<td>Mission: to promote Khmer</td>
<td>July 1, 2002 You Bo, Ms. Pal Vannarirak,</td>
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<td>students; Major</td>
<td>culture and Khmer literature and writing; To teach various writing</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>programs: festivals</td>
<td>techniques, in poetry, novel</td>
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<td>celebrating national</td>
<td>writing, and other Khmer writing</td>
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<td>culture; publication of</td>
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<td>books of poetry,</td>
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<td>novels, magazines;</td>
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<td>seminars on various</td>
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<td>topics; support Khmer</td>
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<td>writers; sponsor</td>
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<td>writing contests;</td>
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<td>study tours for students to</td>
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<td>learn about Khmer</td>
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<td>culture</td>
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<td>League of Cambodian</td>
<td>1993; statement of objectives presented in July 1995</td>
<td>Mr. Om Chandara, President</td>
<td>55 newspapers</td>
<td>Objectives: protect freedom of expression, especially freedom of the press; promote good</td>
<td>June 13, 2002 Om Chandara</td>
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<td>[Khmer] Journalists</td>
<td></td>
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<td>represented by LCJ</td>
<td>governance; develop human resources</td>
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<td>NICFEC</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Mr. Hang Puthea, Executive Director</td>
<td>Coalition of local</td>
<td>Mission: to educate Khmer</td>
<td>June 21, 2003 Hang Puthea</td>
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<td>NGOs, incl. Camb.</td>
<td>people to exercise their right to vote, and to learn about the principles of democracy. The</td>
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<td>Dev. Assoc., Fine Arts</td>
<td>main goal is to strengthen democracy, build peace, eliminate</td>
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<td>Assoc., Khmer</td>
<td>violence, and improve all areas that affect people's living</td>
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<td>Literature Students</td>
<td>conditions</td>
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<td>Assoc., etc.; NICFEC</td>
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<td>to explain to Khmer</td>
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<td>in simple ways the</td>
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<td>importance of voting</td>
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<td>and the secrecy of</td>
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<td>the voting process,</td>
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<td>and democratic activities.</td>
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<td>Institute</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>President/Name</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>Important Dates</td>
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<td>Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Mr. Sorn Samnang,</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 Institutes: Culture and Fine Arts; Humanities and Social Science; Biology, Medicine and Agriculture; Science and Technology; National Language</td>
<td>June 5, 2002, Sorn Samnang; June 11, 2002: Mr. Som Somuny, Deputy Director and Chairman of Literature; July 23, 2002: Ms. Khlot Thida, Deputy Dir. &amp; Chair, Philosophy and Morality; July 23, 2002: Mr. Chhay Yiheang;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA)</td>
<td>1965; 1988</td>
<td>Mr. Tuk Keoun, Rector</td>
<td></td>
<td>RUFA is tasked to train artists, musicians, architects, archeologists and other cultural relevant experts. RUFA is administered through Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, which has among its stated missions: --to Implement policies for protection, preservation and heightening the values of national cultural heritages and other cultural properties of the Kingdom; to re-gather and promote the values of national culture and tradition by encouraging communication and development of cultural activities.</td>
<td>July 10, 2002: Hor Lot, Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology; July 9, 2002: Kun Samnaing, Director National Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)</td>
<td>1960 (as Khmer Royal University); 1996 as RUPP</td>
<td>Mr. Pit Chamnan, Rector Lav Chhiv Eav, Vice Rector, Neth Baron, Vice Rector</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>3 Faculties: Foreign Languages: 49 teaching staff, 21 administrative; Science: 80 teaching staff, 32 administrative; Social Science and Humanities, 66 teaching staff, 21 administrative</td>
<td>The RUPP offers Bachelor's degrees as follows: Bachelor of Arts (B.A) in Sociology, Philosophy, History, Geography, Literature, Psychology; Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science; Bachelor of Education (BEd) in English and French language teacher training. The RCG Five-Year Socioeconomic Plan notes among MOEY's objectives: 1) to promote a growing public/private partnership in higher education 2) to prepare an action plan for regulator and legislative reform 3) to strengthen institutional arrangements for teacher supply/demand and planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAR Kampuchea</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Mr. Nhek Sarin, Executive Dir. Ms. Chet Charya, Deputy Executive Director</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>19 full-time staff; Advocacy and Information; Capacity Building; Legislative Development</td>
<td>To promote and strengthen Khmer civil society actors, by developing their capacity, initiating collective action, cooperating with and supporting them, and-through sound and advocacy-providing them with a common voice so that they can advocate for their own causes and thereby build true democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Founder/Leader</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Staff/Leadership</td>
<td>Mission</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Neutral Khmer Students (UNKS)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Mr. Neak Serey Rotanak, President</td>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>23 staff; 10 paid; 13 volunteers (membership 400+ students)</td>
<td>Mission: to make students aware of their democratic rights; to foster communication about democracy; to remain neutral while providing a forum for important local and national issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Youth Congress for Democracy</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Ms. Kong Leakhena, Executive Dir.; Mr. Nhek Vannara, President of Congress</td>
<td>Phnom Penh, with extensive provincial travel</td>
<td>Varies; hundreds of volunteers throughout provinces</td>
<td>Vocational training and non-formal education; literacy training; Reintegration of former Khmer Rouge soldiers and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Media Centre of Cambodia (WMC)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Tive Sarayeth, Director, Networking; Chea Sundaneth, Director, Radio FM 102; Nuth Tasy, Director, Services Centre; Poan Phoung Bopha, Director, Media Campaign Department; Som Khemra, Director, Television Dept.</td>
<td>Phnom Penh; 7 provincial contacts</td>
<td>47 Staff; 5 Co-directors. Five departments: RADIO WMC (FM 102, Services Centre, Media Campaign Department, Networking Department, Television Department</td>
<td>Firstly we aim to raise the awareness of social issues from the unique perspective of Khmer women. Secondly we strive to improve women’s status by means of promoting socially conscious television, video and radio programs. Thirdly we endeavor to increase women’s participation in the mainstream media through workshops, form discussions and public lobbying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Unless otherwise indicated, any/all of these organizations that had been founded prior to 1975 were subsequently closed down or destroyed by the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979. Thus, at times there is more than one “inaugural” year.

b As stated in interviews and printed materials (e.g., brochures, annual reports, etc.), and organizational web pages.
The date indicated is the date of the original interview. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many of these first interviews were followed by numerous other meetings, phone calls and/or emails, in which we continued our conversations. Also as mentioned, I oftentimes interviewed more than one individual from a given organization; interviewees were primarily, yet not necessarily, in managerial or executive positions within the organizations.
Appendix B.
Questions to Guide the Study:

1. What is/are the most important issue(s) for you as a Khmer today? What challenges do you face? What kind of concerns do you have?

2. What is good about life in Cambodia now? What are Khmer happy about? What is not-so-good, or challenging?

3. In what direction would you like to see Cambodia move? Do you have a vision about Cambodia’s future? How do you see the role of Cambodia in the world today?

4. How will Cambodia get there? How are you involved (or do you see yourself involved) in this process (if at all)?

5. What does it mean to be “Khmer”? How do you know you are a Khmer? How can you tell whether someone is Khmer or not?

6. What types of “things” make one a Khmer? How were you taught/did you learn you were a Khmer? How do you teach your children or other youth to “be” Khmer?

7. Are there situations in which you feel “very” Khmer, or more Khmer than others? What is a typical “Khmer” day like?

8. What are the true strengths and weaknesses of being Khmer? How will these strengths and weaknesses affect Cambodia as it faces the future?

9. What is the difference between “chuncheat Khmaer”, “sunhcheat Khmaer,” and “kaun Khmaer”?*

10. What things/characteristics do you feel are important for Cambodia to maintain as it moves into the future in order to remain Khmer?

11. What does the term “democracy” mean to you? Do you think it will work?

*These are different ways of saying “Cambodian,” or “Khmer”—literally translated, they mean “ethnic Khmer,” “Khmer in nationality,” and “son/daughter of Cambodia”—used in casual conversation. I wished to find out how the Khmer sort-out the use of these terms.
### ជំនួយលេខតិចលើករឿងរបស់អ្នកបំផុត

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<tr>
<th>បញ្ហាដែរ</th>
<th>បើអ្នកមានការបញ្ហារបស់អ្នកទេ? មានសំណួរអ្វី? មិនមានសំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី?</th>
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**បញ្ហាដែរ** ជាមួយនឹងអាយុប្រមាណ និង អាយុរបស់អ្នក: មានបញ្ហារបស់អ្នកទេ? មានសំណួរអ្វី? មិនមានសំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី?

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**បញ្ហាដែរ** ជាមួយនឹងអាយុប្រមាណ និង អាយុរបស់អ្នក: មានបញ្ហារបស់អ្នកទេ? មានសំណួរអ្វី? មិនមានសំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី?

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**បញ្ហាដែរ** ជាមួយនឹងអាយុប្រមាណ និង អាយុរបស់អ្នក: មានបញ្ហារបស់អ្នកទេ? មានសំណួរអ្វី? មិនមានសំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី? សំណួរអ្វី?
តើអ្នកប្រឈមការប្រការីការប្រឈមជាធម្មតាវិញទេ?

តើអ្នកស្រៀនពេលប្រការីការប្រឈមជាធម្មតាវិញទេ?

បញ្ហាជំនួយ : គឺឬអ្នកប្រឈមការប្រការីការប្រឈមជាធម្មតាវិញទេ? ឬ ឬ?

បញ្ហាជំនួយ : គឺឬអ្នកប្រឈមការប្រការីការប្រឈមជាធម្មតាវិញទេ? 

បញ្ហាជំនួយ : គឺឬអ្នកប្រឈមការប្រការីការប្រឈមជាធម្មតាវិញទេ?
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<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
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<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
<td>ទំនោរប្រយោគប្រមូលដូចជាទូទៅទៀត?</td>
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លេខ៦១០ ប្រការីប្រការីអនុសីត្រសុំមង់ រាប់ 'សាប៊ុន់' 'ស្តៃ្លឹម' 'នុះ' 'នោះ' ?

លេខ៦១១ ប្រការីប្រការីអនុសីត្រសុំមង់ រាប់ 'សាប៊ុន់' 'ស្តៃ្លឹម' 'នុះ' 'នោះ' នៅលើរូបភាពប្រការីវិទា មិនអាចស្វែងរកបាន ?

លេខ៦១២ ប្រការីប្រការីអនុសីត្រសុំមង់ រាប់ 'សាប៊ុន់' 'ស្តៃ្លឹម' 'នុះ' 'នោះ' ?

បង្កើតការពិពណ៌នារបស់រូបភាពប្រការីវិទា ដែលមានបង្កើតឡើងពីរូបភាពប្រការីវិទា ?
APPENDIX D.
Letter to the Editor from local NGO leaders

In defense of local NGOs

Dear Editor,

Recent investigations into allegations of mismanagement within a few local non-government organisations (NGOs) have brought to the fore the issue of corruption in NGOs in Cambodia. We welcome these criticisms as an opportunity to reflect upon NGO activities.

Not all NGOs mismanage. Not all NGOs not even most NGOs, are "deceitful in their practices" ("Dubious practices", PPP, April 26-May 9, 2002). It is a pity that the allegations leveled by the two foreigners were asserted as "the RULE rather than the exception" (NGO cheats, PPP, May 10-23, 2002).

It is true that a number of NGOs mismanage and we do not condone these NGOs. It is also true that many NGOs have put in place mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency such as functional boards of directors, regular financial and programme audits and evaluation by internationally recognised companies.

NGOs have only recently emerged in Cambodia, and are currently and constantly working to improve their operations, at both the administrative and programme levels. Efforts include the promotion of an NGO code of ethics, a strong focus on training in financial management, and discussion on the role of boards of directors and how to make them more effective.

We would like to remind readers that NGOs only receive 10% of all funds allocated to non-government organisations' activities in Cambodia. (See General information of NGO statement to the 2001 Consultative Group meeting.) NGOs operate in the remotest areas of Cambodia, where the government cannot reach, thus providing crucial counterpart contribution to the government's priority objectives of poverty alleviation.

In short, most NGOs contribute significantly and positively to rebuilding the country and strengthening democracy. It seems this contribution is not understood, or has been ignored, by the two critics of Cambodia's NGOs.

It is not productive to accuse all NGOs or all women's NGOs of corruption. Targeted allegations provide the impetus for improvement. Broad generalisations will do nothing but destroy our legitimate attempts to build civil society in Cambodia.

Mr. Thon Saray
President, ADHOC
Ms. Chea Vannath
President, CSD
Ms. Oum Chanthol
Executive Director, IPCC
Mr. Ros Sophanap
Executive Director, GAD
Ms. Koy Veth
Executive Director, KWVC
Mr. Yong Kim Eng
President, KAY
Mr. Hang Phathena
Executive Director, NICTAC
Mr. Russell Peterson
Representative, NGO Forum
Ms. Boua Chanthou
Director, PADEK
Ms. Ihor Phally
Director, PADV
Mr. Nheb Sarin
Executive Director, Star Kampuchea
Mr. Phoung Sith
Executive Director, Vigilance
Ms. Tiv Sarayet
Executive Director, WMC

Slow time

Dear Editor,

May I use your pages to highlight what appears to be a little known fact about Mobitel. That is the network clock is three minutes slow.}

07-20 June 2002 Phnom Penh Post 13
### APPENDIX E. Important events and figures in Khmer History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period Name</th>
<th>Approximate dates</th>
<th>Systematic view</th>
<th>Major figures or characters</th>
<th>Major changes</th>
<th>Resulting influences</th>
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<td><strong>Pre-Funan</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Animism</td>
<td>Neak-ta, pantheon of local spirits</td>
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<td>Ceremonies and rituals to appease nature-spirits, tree cults</td>
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<td>Funan Period</td>
<td>1st-6th centuries; Hinduism, Brahmanism; Shivaism; Vishnuism, and other Hindu cults, plus local animistic beliefs</td>
<td>Kaundinya, Soma (Alternately, Kambu and Mera), and the Naga King</td>
<td>First Kingdom of Cambodia created</td>
<td>Start of the royal lineage; future kings would trace ancestry back to Kaundinya and Soma; “Children of the Water”; water economy; <em>Bon Om Tuk</em> (Water Festival)</td>
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<td>Chenla Period</td>
<td>7th-8th centuries</td>
<td>Hinduism, Brahmanism; Shivaism; Vishnuism, and other Hindu cults, plus local animistic beliefs</td>
<td>Trinity of Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver/sustainer), and Shiva (destroyer); and their consorts: Saraswati (goddess of knowledge), Lakshmi (goddess of love and beauty, prosperity); Kali or Parvati (goddess of power, transformation)</td>
<td>Indian influence; Cambodia located along trade route between India and China. Stimulated rise of highly-organized, hierarchical, centralized states: King, Brahmins (priests and often tutors to kings), Officials, commoners, slaves Cult of devaraia</td>
<td>Conception of the Khmer as a mixed race; writing system; Sanskrit inscriptions, infusion into indigenous language; Vedic texts; concept of <em>dhamma</em> and <em>karma</em></td>
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<td>-Land Chenla</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kingdom split into to rivaling parts: Land (Upper) Chenla and Water (Lower) Chenla. Water Chenla subjected to continued raids by Javanese pirates</td>
<td>Brahmanic rituals and Hindu cults; hierarchical (though not caste) social system; village as characteristic unit. Dry rice cultivation, supplemented by hunting and gathering</td>
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<td>-Water Chenla</td>
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<td>established capital near Tonle Sap</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angkorean Period</td>
<td>9th-15th centuries</td>
<td>(28 kings)</td>
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<td>802-834</td>
<td>802-834</td>
<td>Jayavarman II</td>
<td>Founded Angkor Empire; Unification of Land Chenla and Water Chenla; magnified cult of Devaraja; Introduction of court system; shift to continental economy</td>
<td>Agricultural economy (based on control of water); King as all-powerful (god-king); Artistic Greatness; first capital at Indrapura (south-central Cambodia), then moved to Amarendrapura</td>
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<td>877-899</td>
<td>877-899</td>
<td>Indravarman I</td>
<td>Began to build canal system; build Preah Ko (sacred cow) temple and Bakong</td>
<td>Triadic pattern of royal behavior: which began with Indravarman I: 1) sponsoring of irrigation works; 2) honoring ancestors by installing statues of them within temples; 3) erection of temple-mountain structures to serve as sarcophagus for king</td>
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<td>986-1001</td>
<td>986-1001</td>
<td>Jayavarman V</td>
<td>Banteay Srey, the temple of the women</td>
<td>Buddhist scholarship flourishes</td>
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<td>1002-1050</td>
<td>1002-1050</td>
<td>Suryavarman I</td>
<td>Angkor enriched with many temples, including TaKeo, Phimeanakas; increase in territory, esp. Theravada Buddhist Kingdom of Louvo</td>
<td>Capital moves to Yasodharapura. Beginning with Suryavarman I, kings required that an oath of loyalty to the monarch be taken publicly</td>
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<td>1100-1150</td>
<td>1100-1150</td>
<td>Suryavarman II</td>
<td>Constructs Angkor Wat, devoted to Vishnu; Reaffirmation of dimensions of Hindu mythological universe: Mount Meru</td>
<td>Churning of the Sea of Milk on Angkor bas-reliefs; Dance (apsara) as mediation between earth and heaven</td>
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<td>Jayavarman VII</td>
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<td>Diminished importance of Brahmanical advisors</td>
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<td>1181-1219</td>
<td>Mahayana Buddhism— diffusion of more egalitarian thinking— anyone can attain salvation</td>
<td>Jayavarman VII immerses himself in study of Mahayana Buddhism, and his temples reflect this: Bayon—Buddha heads and bodhisattvas. King as earthly manifestation of bodhisattvas; huge infrastructure of hydraulic works, roads, bridges, schools, “hospitals”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Temple as central part of community life; Buddhist stupas/architecture; Sangha (monkhood) becomes an important part of public life. Number of merchants and traders increase with improved infrastructure. Increasing syncretism of Khmer religion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1296-1297</td>
<td>Chou Ta-Kuan, Chinese envoy, visits Cambodia and records account of everyday life therein.</td>
<td>Angkor sacked by Thais</td>
<td>Movement of capital to Phnom Penh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1309-1431</td>
<td></td>
<td>Angkor sacked by Thais</td>
<td>Movement of capital to Phnom Penh</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Angkorean period</td>
<td>1432- (few inscriptions or other recorded history of this period exist)</td>
<td>Theravada Buddhism The Five Precepts;</td>
<td>Chinese missionaries, French missionaries come to Cambodia</td>
<td>“power politics”: Cambodia often caught between the aspirations of Vietnam and Thailand, plus foreign powers</td>
<td>Influence of Theravada Buddhism, which is more hierarchical than Mahayana; Monk-related festivals: Chol Vossa, Bon Ka Then; Khmer literature flourishes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1820-40s</td>
<td></td>
<td>King Chan, King Ang Duang</td>
<td>Rebellion against Vietnam and “Vietnamization”</td>
<td>Importance of ceremony, particularly those related to agricultural cycles; gift-giving becomes important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial Period</td>
<td>1863-1941</td>
<td></td>
<td>King Ang Duang, King Norodom, King Sisovath, King Sisowath Monivong</td>
<td>Cambodia becomes French protectorate</td>
<td>French influence intensifies; first western-style school created (Lycee Sisowath); also Institut Bouddhique created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period Name</td>
<td>Approximate dates</td>
<td>Systematic view</td>
<td>Major figures or characters</td>
<td>Major changes</td>
<td>Resulting influences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1941-53</td>
<td></td>
<td>King Norodom Sihanouk</td>
<td>Romanization crisis; fight for Cambodia's independence; political parties develop; nationalist movement begins.</td>
<td>Cambodia gains independence under Sihanouk; French attempt to &quot;modernize&quot; Cambodia; 1947: First Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-colonial period</td>
<td>1954-1970</td>
<td>Buddhist socialism; Constitutional Monarchy</td>
<td>King Norodom Sihanouk; and Sangkum Reastr Niyum; (Sihanouk abdicated in 1955 to his father (King Suramarit) to become prime minister; resumed the throne upon his father's death)</td>
<td>Sihanouk attempts to keep Cambodia out of the Vietnam conflicts and other power politics</td>
<td>Economic difficulties, growth of communist insurgency, Cambodia becoming increasingly unstable by end of 1960s</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1970-75</td>
<td>&quot;Khmer Republic&quot;, informally known as Lon Nol regime</td>
<td>Lon Nol</td>
<td>Lon Nol and forces (backed by the US) overthrow King Sihanouk (while out of the country) and install new regime</td>
<td>Sihanouk takes refuge in Beijing. Communist insurgency grows; much fighting between government troops and these (Khmer Rouge); bombings by US and invasions by Vietnam. Many Khmer flee to Phnom Penh. Khmer Rouge enter Phnom Penh in April 1975 and overtake Cambodia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1975-79</td>
<td>Communism, &quot;Democratic Kampuchea&quot;</td>
<td>Khmer Rouge</td>
<td>Phnom Penh emptied; all Khmer taken to the countryside to cultivate rice and devote themselves to angkar</td>
<td>Destruction of social structure; deaths of millions of Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period Name</td>
<td>Approximate dates</td>
<td>Systematic view</td>
<td>Major figures or characters</td>
<td>Major changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-revolutionary</td>
<td>1979-1989</td>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>PRK: Heng Samrin, Hun Sen; eventually Hun Sen becomes the most powerful figure</td>
<td>Khmer Rouge overthrow; Socialist government installed; Cambodia signs treaty of friendship with Vietnam</td>
<td>Return of relative stability; but still severe poverty; massive outflow of refugees to Thai border and to other countries, esp. U.S., Australia, France.</td>
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<td>period</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989-1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>SOC. Hun Sen</td>
<td>Vietnamese forces withdraw; international community becomes more involved with Cambodia</td>
<td>begining of meetings for peace and plans for demobilization and reconstruction of Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-1993</td>
<td>[transition to</td>
<td>UNTAC/Supreme National Council</td>
<td>Paris Peace Agreements; Elections</td>
<td></td>
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<td>democracy]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-1993</td>
<td></td>
<td>Democracy, Theravada Buddhism resuscitated:</td>
<td>Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), Constitutional Monarchy; King Norodom Sihanouk; Prince Norodom Ranariddh (becomes first Prime Minister and head of National Assembly after 1993 election); Hun Sen (becomes second Prime Minister after 1993 election; first Prime Minister after 1998 election)</td>
<td>Cambodia becomes &quot;Kingdom of Cambodia,&quot; and Norodom Sihanouk restored as King</td>
<td>Movement towards democracy: Nation, Religion, King</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: This chart is intended only as a guide, an abbreviated summary of Khmer history, aspects of which are covered in greater detail within the chapters of this dissertation. As such, the information in the chart draws upon various sources, and provides a general chronology. Some dates are approximate, and not all periods are covered, nor is every significant figure within each period mentioned. Also, each "systematic view" indicated here, though perhaps the most prominent in the period referenced, does not necessarily obliterate the one which came before it. Rather, Khmer society blended new systems with the old. This chart serves as a reference for the reader; it does not purport to be a complete chronology or summary.*
NOTES

Chapter 1

1 See David Chandler’s A History of Cambodia, or Ian Mabbett and David Chandler’s The Khmers, for example.

2 Estimates of the number of casualties vary greatly. Dr. Craig Etcheson, head of Yale University’s Cambodia Genocide Program (YCGP), reported that YCGP teams examined mass graves throughout Cambodia from 1995 to 1999, and found that the death toll was at least 1.5 million, higher than previously believed (Etcheson, “The Number”). Michael Vickery estimated approximately 700,000, for example.

3 Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper report that the United States, ironically, “has deployed its military to impose democratic rule in foreign lands on 18 occasions” (“Morning After Regime Change”).

4 I do not wish to make the argument that George W. Bush is a true Wilsonian. I simply note the similarity in the rhetoric used to describe current U.S. foreign relations and actions.

5 One might also point to the controversy related to the election of President George W. Bush. Generally speaking, only about half of Americans vote. However, the dilemma over the vote-counting in Florida raised for Americans questions about democracy and the democratic process. Following the 2000 election, an ABC news informal poll found that 66 percent of respondents stated that they are more likely to vote in 2004 (“Will You Vote in 2004?”). After the final results were announced, President Bush stated, “We were reminded of the strength of our democracy - that while our system is not always perfect, it is fundamentally strong and far better than any other alternative” (Speech, “Florida’s Election Results”). While he claimed he disagreed with the Florida Supreme Court’s decision, challenger and then-Vice President Al Gore stated, “Tonight, for the sake of our unity as a people and the strength of our democracy, I offer my concession” (Lonely, “Gore Concedes”).

6 Two recent works, Nancy Smith-Hefner’s Khmer American, and Julie Canniff’s Cambodian Refugees’ Pathways to Success, offer a glimpse into the experiences of diasporic Khmer. Both Smith-Hefner and Canniff provide fascinating discussions of the bi-cultural identity of Khmer refugees and immigrants in the United States, as well as that of their American-born descendants. Both discuss in detail the connections between Khmer in Cambodia and elsewhere, including the transmission of values, both from Cambodia to Khmer in diaspora and vice versa. There is insufficient space here to address how Khmer-Americans specifically and uniquely fit into the democratic dialogue currently transpiring in Cambodia, although their views are represented in my sample. Again, an examination of the explicit Khmer-American relationship to Cambodia and democracy warrants further research.
I place this term in quotation marks, because although the UNTAC elections are often phrased as the introduction of democracy, Cambodia held elections as early as 1946, and as shall be discussed, democratic elements have long been a part of Khmer culture (Peou, Intervention and Change 40).

As Steven Ratner points out, “The only precedent for direct UN administration of any territory was the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) which governed the western half of New Guinea (Irian Jaya) during its transition from Dutch to Indonesian rule” in 1962-63 (15).

The UNTAC mission was often referenced as a “democratic experiment.” See, for example, Julio Jeldres, “Cambodia’s Fading Hopes,” Steven Marks, “The New Cambodian Constitution,” Joakim Ojendal, “Democracy Lost?,” to name a few.

In her critique of globalization, for example, Emily Rosenberg suggests that the United States promotes itself through its commercial culture--automobiles, electronics, soft drinks, and other goods marketed overseas on a grand scale. Coca-Cola, Marlboro cigarettes, Levi’s denim jeans, and American movies, she writes, all comprise “the cultural outreach of a rising American empire and,” therefore, “its ideological justifications.” These products are “the shock troops of a cultural offensive that [assists] national economic and political objectives” (44). Indeed, Richard Horwitz quips that given the viability of U.S. institutions, citizens, products, and ideas around the globe, “one might imagine that just above the clouds stand St. Peter’s golden arches, with blue-jeaned, English-speaking angels drinking coke and watching MTV. Afterlife, no doubt, will have a driving backbeat and be modeled on the constitution, complete with universal suffrage and the separation of powers” (ix).

E.g., John Buenker and Lorman Ratner, Multiculturalism in the United States; Michael D’Innocenzo and Josef P. Sirefman, Immigration and Ethnicity; J. Milton Yinger, Ethnicity: Source of Strength?, to name but a few.

E.g., David Chandler, A History of Cambodia; May Ebihara, Svay, A Village in Cambodia; May Ebihara, Carol Mortland, and Judy Ledgerwood, Cambodian Culture Since 1975; Toni Shapiro, Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia; Nancy Smith-Hefner, Khmer American, among others.

Chapter 2

These can be grouped into several areas, including ethnographic studies, anthropological surveys, linguistic explicatins, histories, and political analyses. The wealth of literature on Cambodia cannot be replicated here; I mention the works that most influenced my study. Others are referenced both in the text and in the endnotes to each chapter.
David Chandler is the preeminent historian of Cambodia, and I defer to his *A History of Cambodia* as an extensive chronological study, spanning the conjectural beginnings of Cambodia and the Khmer some two thousand years ago, to the last decade of the twentieth century. I rely heavily on his work in attempting to summarize Cambodia’s history here. Chandler’s collaborative effort with fellow historian Ian Mabbett, *The Khmers*, is an excellent discussion of Cambodia as a whole, from images of the Khmer as seen by visitors, such as Chou Ta-Kuan, a thirteenth-century Chinese envoy, to Khmer images of themselves as carved on temple walls. They interweave geography, history, art and mythology, discussing the wars and temple construction of the kings of the Angkor period, for example, while also elucidating the relationship between the kings and the Khmer people, and the typical life of an individual Khmer farmer. Mabbett and Chandler incorporate the findings of earlier studies of Cambodia, such as those of George Coedes and Adhemard Leclere, and many others, into a comprehensive look at the Khmer as a community.

One of the seminal and most comprehensive studies of Cambodia in the modern era is May Ebihara’s dissertation, *Svay, A Village in Cambodia*, written in 1968. While as Ebihara notes, the works of earlier scholars such as Coedes and Leclere provide some excellent descriptions of Khmer life and culture, most of those studies were completed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those works can be used to compare the new with the old. Ebihara’s contribution cannot be overstated, for she provides a full anthropological study of a Khmer village, examining its history, social structure, economic organization, political organization, religion, and customs. While my research was conducted primarily in Phnom Penh, nearly eight-five percent of the Khmer population lives in rural areas, and thus much of Ebihara’s study depicts Khmer life in the twenty-first century as well as that of the 1960s. The themes she explored continue to resonate for new scholars of Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge era, or Democratic Kampuchea, has been the subject of many books, including the following key works: Francois Ponchaud’s *Cambodia Year Zero*, Ben Kiernan’s *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, David Chandler’s *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, and Michael Vickery’s *Cambodia 1975-1982*.

Peou writes that “on the level of state-society relations, a hurting balance exists when the state cannot effectively suppress social challengers and when the latter cannot undermine the former” (Counterintervention and Change 20).

William Shaffir et al. have divided field research into two large phases, which they call simply the “getting in” phase and the analysis phase (qtd. in Berg 14). The former is often the more difficult of the two, and in Cambodia, arranging to meet governmental officials proves especially difficult. One (esp. a foreigner) does not walk into a government office and ask bluntly to see a Prime Minister or cabinet member. Thus my selection of interviewees was admittedly informed by the level of accessibility I ascertained.

During the Khmer Rouge period, no aid was permitted.
7 As of August 2003, the CCC website currently states that there are nearly 800 local NGOs in Cambodia (http://www.bigpond.com.kh/users/ccc/ngo.htm). I chose my sources from the CCC Directory of Networking Membership and Sectoral Group in Cambodia 2002, which lists NGOs specifically interested in democracy development.

8 This is not always the case, but persons within NGOs and civil associations who are in positions to dialogue about and effect democratic changes tend to have finished university education, and/or tend to be slightly older. Furthermore, current university students tend to have been born during or after the Khmer Rouge period (1975-79), and thus, are less likely to base “Khmeress” solely on “the way things were” before 1975, but rather, on what they have been taught to believe in their lifetimes.

9 It should be noted that the original number of respondents in the student sample was higher than the sample I eventually used. However, upon analysis it was determined that some needed to be excluded for the following reasons: 1) two respondents were under the age of 18, and therefore excluded completely; 2) other respondents were not university students but curious passers-by who wanted to know what I was doing, what kind of work I was engaged in, and when they found out, they wanted to answer the survey questions. This further affirms that many Khmer are interested in research about their country and their society, and relatedly, about democracy and identity. Because they fall into different groups (teachers, civil servants, homemakers, etc.), I do not consider these in the present chapter. However, most of their responses, it should be noted, closely echo those of the university student sample, and could be used for further analysis.

10 According to the Ministry of Planning, only 19.7 percent of women over age 25 have more than a primary school level of education, and only 0.4 percent of women continue beyond the secondary level (General Population Census 1998).

Chapter 3

1 The past decade has witnessed a resurgence of archaeological excursions in Cambodia, particularly those with indigenous or Khmer input, and I do not mean to disparage or discount those. Such research is vital in preservation of Khmer culture and in development of new knowledge. My point, however, is that one need not “scientifically” validate one’s identity in order for it to be “authentic” or “true.” It is within this context that I begin my discussion of Khmer identity as related to me by the persons I interviewed.

2 Anthropologist Clifford Geertz notes that a people’s worldview “is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, or society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order.” (The Interpretation of Cultures 127).
3 See, for example, Chandler, A History of Cambodia; Mabbett and Chandler, The Khmers.

4 Niels Mulder's definition of culture: "Culture concerns understanding and attributing meaning to life and experience. It involves 'knowing who you are,' and 'having identity,' which socially means 'knowing who we are,' because culture is the on-going intersubjective negotiation of meaning, or the endless communicative discourse that serves to help master life and one’s participation in it by interpretation." (153). He notes that the term "syncretism" is controversial, and "sometimes smacks of derogation." He writes, "it often seems to imply that Southeast Asians do not know principle, that their religious practices and thinking are hopelessly heterodox" (17). Obviously, I disagree. Here I use the term to refer to symbiotic blending.

5 It might also be argued that certain cultures are not flexible, particularly when it comes to issues of race, ethnicity, national identity, etc. (e.g., the “one drop rule” of the United States).

6 To begin, when asked, “What is a Khmer?,” some respondents did cite physical characteristics, most commonly: black, wavy hair, large eyes, and “distinctive” body shape (usually further described only as “big”). Sherri Prasso asserts that the Khmer view lighter-complexioned individuals as more attractive, and anecdotally, I have also found this to be the case; however, in these surveys, “true” Khmer were described as dark- as well as fair-complexioned, yellow-complexioned, and “bean-color”-complexioned. This is indicative of Khmer awareness of a mixed and varied heritage, and that in order to be a “real” Khmer, one need not be of a particular complexion. Several mentioned the origin myth of the Brahmin and the naga princess. Some suggested that the Khmer came from what is now China; others, India. Others commented that Khmer look different from each other because of intermarriage with different groups. But what resonated with me is that physical characteristics, if mentioned at all, were certainly less important than other attributes.

7 And to water. Khmer scholar Lao Kim Leang of Sophia University (Japan) states, “Lake Tonle Sap has been deeply connected with Cambodian society, economy and culture. The lake has affected historical and cultural activities, and has characterized [the] Cambodian nation as if it were a mirror which reflects national identity” (852).

8 In one version of the legend, for example, the progenitors of modern-day Khmer were not Kaundinya and Soma, but rather, Kambu and Mera. This legend appears in stone inscriptions of the 10th century, and "Kambuja" is believed to be an early name for Kampuchea, derived from Kambu. (see, for example, www.cambodiatravel.com/khmer/angkor-era1000.htm) Alternately, in another version the prince is Preah Thong, the exiled son of a king of Indraprastha, and the naga princess, Lieuie, who helped Preah Thong to conquer the Cham (Knappert 162). The notion of two opposite/divergent creatures combining to form a unique Khmer entity, however, is the same.
"Trees," write Mabbett and Chandler, "are a feature of the environment in a way that they are not, for example, in the intensively farmed areas of China[...]. Trees and bushes are tolerated and deliberately planted. Quite often they are revered as the abodes of watching spirits" (25-26).

The actual functionality of the baray at Angkor is the focus of some debate. Some assert that the construction of the baray would not have been sufficient to fully irrigate the rice paddies in the area, and recent aerial imaging and radar mapping suggests that the locations of the canals and embankments does not correspond to residential settlement patterns. The idea of an enormous, efficient "hydraulic city" may have been overstated (see, for example, Fletcher and Evans, "Remote Sensing at Angkor"). It is clear, however, that the baray served (and continues to serve) political, ceremonial, religious, and symbolic functions.

Interestingly, Shiva is often depicted with a serpent coiled around his neck.

See, for example, Chandler A History of Cambodia, chs. 5, 6, and 7; Mabbett and Chandler, chs. 16 and 17.

Gerard Diffloth, an expert on Khmer inscriptions, noted that regarding the history of the word Khmer, no one really knows, as there is only one instance of it appearing in the inscriptions: "In the Old-Khmer inscriptions of the Angkorian and pre-Angkorian periods, the word “Khmer” is quite rare. There is only one occurrence where it clearly has the meaning which we know today. It is found in an inscription of the 12th century [...] In summary, the very rich corpus of Old Khmer inscriptions is rather silent about this very important word, giving us only one, not very ancient attestation. This is surprising" (645-646).

In his first sermon, the Buddha discussed two extreme practices; 1) self-mortification, believing that by tormenting the body, fasting, lying on thorns or nails, depriving and wearing out the physical form, one will realize Nirvana; and 2) self-indulgence and hedonism, believing that happiness is the primary goal of life. (Dhirvamsa, The middle path).

King Jayavarman VII introduced Mahayana Buddhism in the 12th century. The exact reasons for the conversion from Mahayana to Theravada Buddhism is unclear; however, what is clear is that while Theravada Buddhism became preeminent, remnants of both sects can still be found in Khmer culture. See David Chandler, A History of Cambodia, Chapter 4.

I am grateful to Mr. Manop of the Thai Buddhist temple in Pearl City, HI, for his insights on the nature of Buddhism.
Mabbett and Chandler write of the *neak-ta*: “They are village familiars, associated with hills or mounds or various types of tree, where they take up residence. Their icons, rough images of wood or stone, are always simple, even crude, for the spirits they embody belong to untamed nature. Typically, the energy of one of these *nak ta* [sic] is concentrated in a rough stone taken from near the foot of the tree where the spirit dwells and enshrined within the *khtom*, a miniature house on piles beside the tree-trunk, with its opening facing the tree” (108). More recently, too, Khmer scholar Ang Choulean created an excellent book, entitled *People and Earth*, which discusses the many forms the *neak-ta* can take in Cambodia today (Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture, 2000). Some animistic beings: *khmoc*—ghosts; *pret & besach*—spirits of those who have died violently; *arak*—evil (usually female) spirits; *mneang peah*—guardians of the house; *meba*—ancestral spirits; *mrenh konveal*—elf-like guardians of animals (Mabbett and Chandler).

Chandler notes that King Jayavarman VIII (1243-1295), in turn, attempted to shift the devotion of the kingdom back to the Hindu dieties, ordering defacement of some Buddha images and alteration of others into Hindu ones (Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* 69). However, both Buddhism and Hinduism have persisted to the present day.

Catherine Morris notes that “some believe Christians have strategically targeted traumatized people, criticizing their Buddhist beliefs as ineffective, and offering Christianity as a better alternative” (5).


I refer here to the “major” languages spoken in Thailand and Vietnam. Huffman points out that there are many languages spoken throughout Thailand and Vietnam. (1970 3).

Chou Ta-Kuan, an oft-quoted Chinese envoy who traveled to Cambodia in 1296-1297, wrote: “Cambodia has a language of its own. Though the languages of the people of Champa and Siam seem to us to have similarities of sounds, they cannot understand each other” (23). He continues, “The nature of the characters makes it possible to recognize the writer . . . In drawing up petitions, people often have recourse to professional scribes.” (27).

In explaining, Dumont says: “This view of an ordered whole, in which each is assigned his place, is fundamentally religious. Within this overall view are located the various functions and specializations which seem to us to be very unequally religious in themselves...One employs a Brahman, a genealogist, a barber, one employs similarly a carpenter, one employs an untouchable unfree labourer: each case is always, so to speak, on the same model. In other words, the ‘religious’ is here the universal
mode of expression, and this is perfectly coherent if one knows that the overall orientation is religious, that the language of religion is the language of hierarchy, and that the hierarchy is necessarily, as we have seen, a matter or pure and impure." (107-108).

24 Personal names are far less important than terms of address. Gerald Diffloth comments that aside from giving official names which tend to be words of Indic origin, Khmer parents and immediate relatives also have imaginative ways of creating familiar proper names for their children. Some of these names may be words which already exist in the language. But very often, these familiar names are newly created Khmer words which have no definite meaning. These names may contain puns or assonances alluding to one or more existing Khmer words and their meanings. Parents will often create whole sets of words like these, so that siblings and relatives will have similar-sounding names regardless of any possible meaning. (646).

25 Importantly, the Khmer Rouge regime attempted to abolish the Khmer system kinship terminology, forcing persons to call each other mit, meaning friend or comrade (of equal status) regardless of previous criterion. This, too, was seen as an affront to Khmerness itself.

26 Here I borrow both from the title of Toni Shapiro’s dissertation, Dance and the Spirit of Cambodia, and various other arenas in which the term “spirit” is used in conjunction with Khmer arts, e.g. “Dance, the Spirit of Cambodia,” chronicled at http://www.asiasource.org/cambodialarts.htm.

27 I do discuss Khmer literature briefly, but have not paid adequate tribute to Khmer architecture (see, for example, William Chapman, Conservation of Monuments and Archaeological Sites in Southeast Asia), painting, sculpture, poetry, and other art forms. Undoubtedly, these art forms may indeed currently or come to reflect a democratic society in numerous ways.

28 Vittorio Roveda notes in the preface to Khmer Mythology: “Another element that fascinates me is the autonomy and uniqueness of the iconography in a country, which, although influenced by Indian culture, has created its own art language. The reliefs have a ‘Khmerness’ that makes them distinguishable from any reliefs from any other civilisations. The humour of the narratives from Bapuon, the abstract clearness of the Angkor Wat ‘Churning of the Ocean of Milk’ and the ‘Historic Procession,” the ornate dynamism of the ‘Battle of Lanka’—to mention a few—have no parallels in contemporaneous Indian, Middle Eastern or European reliefs” (5).

29 I borrow this phrase from Noam Chomsky.
30 Academic and political opinions on Sihanouk vary. Neher comments that “any assessment of Sihanouk is controversial, because he is both a great patriot and a self-absorbed naif whom extremists, namely the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Communists), duped to do their bidding” (149). Some, such as Lao Mong Hay, suggest that if he were to exercise it, the King could wield considerable power under the current Constitution. Here I do not attempt an analysis of the King’s political skill, but rather, his symbolic prowess.

31 Again, my purpose here is not to critique the Sihanouk regimes in terms of their political successes and failures. Such analyses have been undertaken by Milton Osbourne and Roger Kershaw, and to some extent, by Sorpong Peou. Rather, I comment on the importance of the idea of a monarch for Khmer today. Jeldres notes that “this idealistic picture of a monarchy with a king who really cares for his people has recently been clouded by the belief of many in Cambodia that the monarchy will not survive after King Sihanouk, who was born in 1922, passes away” (“Cambodia’s Monarchy”).

32 “We hope to preserve the living traditions while reinvigorating them to allow for growth and change. We do not want ‘development’ while destroying ‘traditional culture.’ We do not want just traditional culture without development, either.” (Sam, “Role of Khmer Culture” 90). And furthermore, “We must find a balance for this relationship [development and cultural preservation] that will permit a high level of economic growth and the achievement of social progress and equity, as well as the preservation and revitalization of the national culture. We want to pave the way for Cambodia for development and prosperity, while continuing to preserve the culture” (97).

Chapter 4


2 Carothers notes that President Bill Clinton, in a State of the Union address, stated that “Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere” (1999 5). Many U.S. Presidents who preceded and succeeded Clinton have claimed the same conviction.

3 Not until centuries later, Dahl comments, did James Madison differentiate the terms in one of the Federalist papers: democracy is “a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person,” he wrote, whereas a republic is “a government in which the scheme of representation takes place” (qtd. in Dahl 16).
Dahl also suggests two conditions that are not necessarily essential, but "favorable" to democracy: 1) a modern market economy and society, and 2) weak subcultural pluralism. As they are not make-or-break requirements, these are not considered in this chapter, but this does not mean that they are unimportant (1998:147).

I am indebted to Dr. James McCutcheon for discovering and introducing the IDEA Handbook to me.

I add one annotation before I begin to apply this framework to Cambodia: IDEA is decidedly and unabashedly pro-democracy. In the Foreword to the IDEA Handbook, IDEA Secretary-General Bengt Save-Soderbergh states, "We are therefore publishing this Handbook in the hope that people in nations everywhere will be inspired to begin the process of democratisation [sic] . . .by carrying out a realistic and principled assessment of what needs doing" (Beetham et al. 8). The IDEA Handbook authors suggest that when mobilizing an assessment team, the team members should ideally come from within the country to be studied, and they should determine which sections they wish to investigate, and subsequently which areas they would recommend be improved by implementing democratic elements, and which they would not, although it apparent that IDEA deems democracy the superior form of government. Yet we can sideline IDEA's ideological intent for the time being, utilizing their framework as a mechanism here to outline just what the current situation is in Cambodia. This dissertation argues that Khmer are choosing and will continue to decide what "democracy" means in the Cambodian context. The chapters successively will weave together a narrative relating answers to both the overriding themes and the more specific individual section questions that are applicable to or within Cambodia.

Indeed, the IDEA handbook outline is complex and fascinating, and deserves much more attention that I can give it here. I would like to fully pursue the IDEA's method with a team of Khmer nationals in the future.

See, for example, Roberts; Heder and Ledgerwood; among others.

The horrors of DK are far too numerous and complex to detail here. Several scholars have written extensively on the machinations of the Khmer Rouge leaders including Chanda; Chandler 1991; Chandler 1992; Kiernan; Vickery; among others.

See Roberts for a thorough discussion of this; see also Curtis, Heder and Ledgerwood, Shawcross, Vickery. The Cambodian Defenders' Project notes, for example, The Vietnamese backed Socialist government that followed set about re-modeling Cambodia's legal system along socialist lines, but was preoccupied by on-going fighting and civil unrest. At a time when control of the country depended on military force, the one-party regime saw little use for legal training and viewed "justice" as the enforcement of state policy. The concepts of fair trial, due process and individual "rights" were unknown.
The parties to the Peace Agreements were: 1) State of Cambodia (SOC, previously the People’s Republic of Kampuchea), socialist, led by Hun Sen; 2) Khmer Rouge (Party of Democratic Kampuchea), led by Pol Pot; 3) United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), royalist, loyal to King Norodom Sihanouk; 4) Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF); pro-Western (bitterly divided into two camps, one of which was led by Son Sann) (Ledgerwood, “UN Peacekeeping”). The Khmer Rouge later seceded from the electoral race, claiming that UNTAC did not fulfill its promise to neutralize the political environment to make possible “free and fair” elections (see Roberts 2001 Ch. V).

It was during the UNTAC period, for the first time in Cambodia’s history, that several local human rights groups were engendered, including ADHOC, LICADO, CHRA, Ponleu Khmer, and Khemara. Prior to 1993, the last written constitution was in 1989. The first was in 1947 (amended in 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1964, and 1970), followed by one in 1981, and the last in 1989.

For in-depth discussions of the UNTAC period, see Brown; Brown and Timberman; Carney; Heder and Ledgerwood; Ledgerwood, “UN Peacekeeping;” Mei; among others.

Zakaria engages in a type of chicken-and-egg argument, in which he notes that many nations would be better off starting with liberty and then moving to democracy rather than vice-versa. Whereas Zakaria’s theory may indeed have merit (and indeed, I shall discuss the importance of citizen participation in civil society in this chapter), Cambodia of course had already effected elections at the time I began this project. While I may discuss whether liberty or democracy should come first as an ideal, I cannot discuss it as an actuality.

Per the Constitution of Cambodia, promulgated in September 1993, the right to vote is guaranteed under Article 34 for all citizens of either sex of at least eighteen years of age. Citizens of either sex of at least twenty-five years of age have a right to stand as a candidate for election. In the exercise of those rights, there cannot be any discrimination between men and women (Article 35).

While difficult for the United States and most of the Western international community to absorb, Roberts rightly comments, “while Hun Sen may not be popular with many westerners as a political personality, his continued presence in politics offers stability” (192). Indeed, after Hun Sen became first Prime Minister, violent outbreaks and intimidation became much less frequent.

In the months following the July incident, Hun Sen named Ung Huot, former FUNCINPEC Minister of Foreign Affairs member as the new “co-Prime Minister;” however, clearly, Hun Sen emerged victorious with expectations that he would act as the sole leader of Cambodia.
Although the elections themselves were managed by Cambodia, they were observed by the Joint International Observation Group (JIOG), a U.N.-coordinated body of thirty-seven countries.

The King does not have the power to appoint his successor; a "Council of the Throne" will choose from among the male descendants of Kings Ang Duong, Norodom, and Sisowath. His formal title is His Majesty the King, Preah Bath Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk Varman.

However, the king does have the authority to appoint the Prime Minister (after a vote of confidence by the National Assembly), the Council of Ministers, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Khmer Armed Forces, and to declare war and a state of emergency.

Suresh comments that if the amending provisions for a given constitution are strict, the constitution is said to be rigid; if the amending provisions are not very strict, the constitution is considered flexible. The restrictions to amend the Cambodian Constitution are specified in Articles 152 and 153. Article 152 prohibits any amendment when the country is in a state of emergency, as outlined in Article 86. Article 153 relates to two basic features of the Constitution, namely the system of liberal and pluralistic democracy and the regime of Constitutional Monarchy. These two features can never be amended. In other words, the objective of the Constitution as set out in the Preamble, to the effect that Cambodia will remain "a multi-party liberal democratic regime guaranteeing human rights" will never be amended. (Legal Reforms in Cambodia Series, Monograph No. 1).

In December 1999, for example, Prime Minister Hun Sen issued a directive to rearrest suspect armed robbers, kidnappers, and drug-traffickers who had been released by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. Many of those rearrested had been acquitted, and thus their rearrest violated the final judgment of the court (double jeopardy). The directive clearly violated the independence of the judiciary. "Already struggling with severe shortages of human and financial resources," comments Amnesty International, "the judicial system is now also subject to arbitrary and unconstitutional direct interference by the executive branch of government" (AI 2). 1

See the Constitution of Cambodia, 1993, as one example.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights;" "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law." (Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948).

A notable measure of human development is the Human Development Index (HDI), which is formulated by the United Nations Development Program. The HDI is a composite of several indicators, which measure a country's achievements in three main
arenas of human development: longevity, knowledge and education, as well as economic standard of living. The HDI places Cambodia in the medium human development category, at 121st place, with an overall HDI value of 0.541. Cambodia has a life expectancy value of 0.52, an education value of 0.66, and a gross domestic product (GDP) value of 0.44. Although the concept of human development is complicated and cannot be properly captured by values and indices, the HDI, which is calculated and updated annually, offers a wide-ranging assessment of human development in certain countries, not based solely upon traditional economic and financial indicators.

26 The Survey attempts to judge all countries and territories by a single standard and to emphasize the importance of democracy and freedom. The Survey assigns each country and territory the status of "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free" by averaging their political rights and civil liberties ratings. Those whose ratings average 1-2.5 are generally considered "Free," 3-5.5 "Partly Free," and 5.5-7 "Not Free." The dividing line between "Partly Free" and "Not Free" usually falls within the group whose ratings numbers average 5.5. For example, countries that receive a rating of 6 for political rights and 5 for civil liberties, or a 5 for political rights and a 6 for civil liberties, could be either "Partly Free" or "Not Free." The total number of raw points is the definitive factor which determines the final status. Countries and territories with combined raw scores of 0-30 points are "Not Free," 31-59 points are "Partly Free," and 60-88 are "Free." For further explanation, see http://freedomhouse.org/survey99/method/

27 Ironically, too, the rule of law in Cambodia propagates indignities against those it purports to protect. In Cambodia, there is no separate juvenile law, juvenile courts, or juvenile rehabilitation centers, and thus children are treated as adults in the eyes of legal system. The courts try juvenile offenders in adult courts and sentence them to adult prisons. Legal Aid of Cambodia reports cases like that of seventeen-year-old Nhut Savontang, who stole a bicycle in Prey Veng province in the hopes of riding to Phnom Penh to see his mother. Savontang was incarcerated in a cell with 55 adult males, collectively convicted of murder, rape, robbery and manslaughter. "Neither the police nor the court have made any attempt to contact his family," LAC reported. "He knows if he were to disappear tomorrow, there would be no record [...] We asked him if he had a lawyer or legal defender. He said he did not know what these words meant (LAC, 11 October 2002, http://www.laoc.org/lambs.html).

28 Per the Constitution, ownership of land is restricted to Khmer citizens and Khmer legal entities (i.e., 51% or more of the entity’s shares are owned by Khmer citizen(s) or legal entities (DFDL 53). Land in Cambodia may be privately owned by Khmer citizens without limitation by time or interest. foreigners cannot own land, although they can control property via long-term leases. Many individuals who have been living on Cambodia’s soil for decades, however, lack the legal credentials to own land outright, and/or the knowledge and assets to obtain such leases.

It should be noted that foreign investors can procure certain exemptions from the Nationality Law. A publication prepared for the investment community specifies that
“a foreigner investing 1.25 billion riels (about $330,000) can become a Cambodian citizen without satisfying the seven year Cambodian residency requirement,” although he or she must still satisfy the language and other requirements. Relatedly, “a foreigner who donates one billion riels (about $265,000) to the state budget can obtain Cambodian citizenship without satisfying either the seven year residency requirement or the requirement that the applicant be resident at the time of applying for citizenship” (DFDL 64).

29 As but one example, Hun, a woman who identifies herself as kaun-kat chen (half-Khmer, half-Chinese) and born in Cambodia, claims that on several occasions police have entered her village and rescinded her identity card (stating that she is ethnically Khmer), and reissued her a series of papers stamped with the word “antapraves” (immigrant), based on her physical appearance. She was so upset and terrified as a result that she went to district and provincial officials to have herself recategorized. Hun related the following: My mother is blood-Chinese and my father is Khmer, so I am Khmer. If I was Vietnamese maybe I would live in Vietnam, but I am Khmer and so I have always lived in Cambodia. I can speak French—I learned my lessons in French because during the Sihanouk regime Khmer teachers taught everything in French. That should tell you how long I’ve been here! I had an identity card before the war that states my Khmer nationality . . . but now the police have put me in the category of “immigrant”! They looked at my face and decided that I was Vietnamese, but you can ask anyone who lives in this village—they know my mother and father . . . ” (Personal interview, Takeo Province, June 1995)

30 While the Cham Muslims follow different religious beliefs, they are generally nonconfrontational and have been well-accepted by Khmer, and thus have reported little or no religious persecution in the past two decades. In light of the recent worldwide concern with terrorist acts possibly associated with extremists of the Muslim religion, it is possible that the Cham will once again become scapegoats for societal uncertainty. Indeed, freedom of expression came under threat in September, when the Ministry of Cults and Religion forbid political discussions in the country’s mosques following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. In October, Prime Minister Hun Sen reversed the ministry’s decision; however, religious equipoise once again hangs delicately in the balance (Human Rights Watch Cambodia World Report 2002)

31 Ironically, lack of restriction is also problematic in some cases. “Another concern is the use of the press to incite violence against members of other parties or members of ethnic minority groups,” according to a UN report (Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia on Access to the Media, 25 June 1998).

32 In a report on small arms reduction and management, the Council for the Development of Cambodia stated, “The creation of the National Commission for Weapons Reform and Management (NC) on 21 June 2001 by Prime Minister Hun Sen. was a major step forward, but it is not yet fully operational and lacks the capacity,
resources, and support it needs to become effective. The NC has not developed a national strategy, plan, or an active working group, thus limiting action on the issue.”

33 In a conference on civil-military relations, H.E. Chiem Channy spoke of the problems of reintegration due to the gap between civil and military society, noting that civilians continue to be frightened of former military members, for they “had always viewed that soldiers were the cause of their death” (35).

34 Cambodia also has military police (called the *gendarmerie*, after the French) The military police is mandated to investigate military crimes and discipline breaches, and like the judicial police, has powers of arrest, search, and seizure. Moreover, military police (due to a broadly-interpreted mandate) have jurisdiction over civilians as well as military personnel.

35 More accurately, Moore spoke of the *bourgeoisie*, but as K. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson point out, for Moore this included what is more commonly known as the middle class.

Chapter 5

1 A recent resolution of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights reiterated that the status of human rights has been the barometer of a healthy democracy. In Resolution 2003/36, the Commission “reaffirms its conviction that democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.”

2 Attention has been paid in recent years to post-traumatic stress syndrome and problems of adjustment in Khmer refugees and survivors. (see Mollica and Jalbert; Mortland, “Transforming Refugees”). David Chandler writes that “the psychic damage of these wars and of the Khmer Rouge era on survivors, certainly of mammoth proportions, can never be assessed” (“The Burden of Cambodia’s Past,” 34)

3 These are the words of the Buddha from the *Dhammapada*, detailing the five precepts:

   Whoever destroys living beings,
   speaks false words, who in the world
   takes that which is not given to him,
   or goes too with another's wife,
   or takes distilled, fermented drinks --
   whatever man indulges thus
   extirpates the roots of himself
   even here in this very world. (Dhp. 246-7)
Poethig notes that the phrase was coined by Thich Naht Hanh, now a well-known author. Hanh, a Vietnamese monk, used the phrase during the Vietnam War “to refer to his order’s commitment to a Buddhist basis for social action” (19).

This tale is very similar to a folktale recorded by David Chandler, entitled, “How Old Man Mei was Tricked.” This tale uses the characters Mei, Mok, and Maen to describe the tale of an elderly man named Mei, who liked to trick all the young men in the village who wanted to marry his daughter, Maen. At the beginning of the folktale, Mei believes he is the most quick-witted, a perception supported by the character of Mok. By the end, however, he learns that he is perhaps not the most perceptive character, for he ends up in a situation wherein he is taught a lesson by another who is even cleverer than is he (Favourite Stories 32-39).

Consider, for example, a program run by the Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA) of Cambodia, excerpted here:

6017.0: Thursday, October 25, 2001 - 8:54 AM
Abstract #21786
Engaging Buddhist religious leaders as health educators and promoters in rural Cambodia

While progress is being made to develop the public health system in Cambodia, health center services are rudimentary and coverage remains uneven. Many rural communities are seriously under-served or lack services entirely. Limited government capabilities impedes communicating basic health messages to rural people, especially those in isolated communities. To open an additional channel of health education that reaches rural women (the majority of whom are illiterate), the Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA) and the Ministry of Health turned to the Buddhist religious system. Buddhism remains the cornerstone of rural social organization and constitutes an important resource for health promotion activities. With training and support, monks, nuns, achars, and doun yeay are trained to communicate basic messages about correct breastfeeding, proper home care for children with diarrhea and ORS use, and use of home birth kits. Birth spacing motivation will be added. Through repeated house-to-house visits in their home villages, these religious leaders effectively disseminate health messages to rural women. In less than one year, nearly every household in health center catchments where some 50,000 people reside has been visited one or more times to deliver these messages. All of this has been done on a purely voluntary basis. Survey data show that the women remember the messages correctly and qualitative information suggests some are changing behaviors. While this program was initially conceived as a way to augment the government system, results suggest that these religious leaders are often more convincing sources of health information to rural women than trained health staff.
Learning Objectives: At the completion of the session, the participant will be able to: 1. recognize that even in the poorest countries, social networks exist that can be employed to create new channels for health communication and promotion at very low cost; 2. have a clear example of how communication by trusted local religious leaders greatly increases the credibility of health messages to villagers. (Kong et al.).

7 Galabru, fluent in Khmer, English, and French, returned to Cambodia from France in 1992. She has helped LICADHO to grow to a network of offices in 16 of Cambodia’s 22 provinces, in addition to the central office in Phnom Penh. LICADHO currently has 132 staff members, and focuses on six programs: 1) teaching about human rights; 2) investigation of human rights abuses; 3) children’s welfare; 4) women’s rights; 5) public health, especially for those in prisons; and 6) P.A.T.—the Project Against Torture (Interview 7/2/02).

8 Ebihara et al. point out that “both western scholars and indigenous Khmer . . . may take Cambodia of the 1950-60s as representing ‘traditional’ Khmer society and culture” (5).

Chapter 6.


2 The phrase “Asian Values” is most commonly attributed to Singapore’s former prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew. It was subsequently adopted by Dr. Mohamed Mahathir of Malaysia, Tung Chee Wah of Hong Kong, Eisuke Sakakibara of Japan, and other leaders in Asia. “Asian values,” they declared, underlie the dramatic economic growth achieved in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, in Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore (the four "tigers") in the 1980s and 1990s, and in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia (the three “aspiring tigers” in the 1990s (until the financial crisis of 1997).

Alice Tay comments that for these representatives,

The term ["Asian values"] embodies a system of values which places economic development first and above all else [ . . . ] it follows that civil and political rights could be properly postponed until economic development has been achieved, and indeed that the denial of civil and
political rights [is] a necessary measure to ensure economic progress and the benefits that flow from it (JURA GENTIUM, Centre for Philosophy of International Law and Global Politics)

The system is said to encompass the Confucian precepts of hard work, frugality, and deference to government authority, and while these are laudable concepts in and of themselves, the assertion of "Asian values" can and has been used by some leaders as justification for maintaining the social and legal status quo. Li comments: Human rights and the rule of law, according to the 'Asian view,' are individualistic by nature and hence destructive of Asia's social mechanism. (Li 2)

3 My translation from the original in French: "Tout d'abord, dans l'immediat, il faut construire un Etat de droit, avec toutes les institutions necessaires pour garantir l'égalite de chance des citoyens dans la cite, davant la loi, l'Impartialite et la securite. Cet Etat de droit sera le fondement du pays, servant de rempart contre tout debordement du pouvoir, et aussi de repere pour le peuple. Il a la qualite d'être immuable, alors que la personne humaine change au fil du temps (391).

4 In Judge Rabbit and the Tree Spirit, for example, Tunsay tricks the dishonorable character, here a tree spirit who has pretended to be a woman's husband (who is away in battle), into jumping into a glass bottle, which Tunsay quickly seals and takes far into the forest. "And from then on," thanks to Tunsay's sensible actions, "the tree spirit never again bothered the wife and her loving husband" (Spagnoli 1991 30).

5 In and of itself, hierarchy is not anathema to democracy for the Khmer, for while the rule of law stipulates that all persons are equal under the law, it does not insist that all persons, in all ways, are equal. Following the rule of law does not necessitate changing the social structure completely, and nor dismantling hierarchy. For example, the Khmer language, truly reflective of hierarchical social relations and deemed vital to Khmerness, need not change because all citizens (regardless of honorific or lack thereof) are subject to the same laws. One can still use the respectful bong for an older person (male to female and female to female), boo or om (uncle) for an older man (male to male and female to male), and other pronouns reflective of status according to age, sex, and other variables. Additionally, the pronoun used to refer to a person can and does change according to the situation: while a younger student may refer to me as bong (older sister), an older teacher may refer to me as kmooey (niece) or aun (younger sister). One's rank shifts; "while this hierarchical ranking is all encompassing—everyone is ranked somewhere in the pattern—it is not fixed," writes Ledgerwood. "People may rise or fall in social status over the course of their current life as well as over multiple rebirths" (Ledgerwood, "Understanding Cambodia").

In addition to attaching oneself to a particular person, one can gain power and/or status via education, making merit via offerings, through religious ceremonies, meditation, and other Buddhist practices; and, in the present context, through participation in the democratic process. Individuals are well aware of their "places" in Khmer society, but these places are not absolute, but rather changing and impermanent,
and individuals themselves can effect such changes. Thus hierarchy and independence weave together to form the Khmer social fabric, and the Khmer can make the system work. Moreover, as Alice Tay concludes, hierarchy does not necessarily lead to authoritarianism (Tay 9).

In 1993, the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) were formed from the various factional armies. They have an army, navy, and air force. According to the UN commission on Human Rights, there is no conscription in Cambodia. There is a National Police force, under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Interior, which is primarily responsible for internal security. However, the RCAF troops, including the military police, currently also have domestic security responsibilities. The separation of roles is very difficult to delineate, as Kao Kim Hourn notes ("Civil-Military Relations" vii). While Cambodia withstands much international pressure to demobilize, those pressuring offer few plans for reintegration of troops into Khmer society. Two members of the family with whom I lived in 1995 and 1996 were in the military; their salaries were the sole source of income for a household of 7 adults and 10 children. Both expressed concern about what would become of them and their relatives if they were asked to leave the RCAF. Kao poses some critical questions: Should we take better care of our veterans so that they are not reduced to begging in the streets? Do we think that the army is not a threat to civilian rule and the culture of peace, taking into consideration the military coup to overthrow our monarchy in 1970, and the clashes between the FUNCINPEC army and the CPP army on 5-6 July 1997? Would it not be better to promote a culture of peace in the region? (20-22).

Chapter 7

1 The commune elections, originally scheduled to be held after 1993 national parliamentary elections overseen by the UNTAC, were repeatedly delayed. Delays notwithstanding, however, Khmer looked forward to the opportunity to participate in their local communities on a new level.

2 The new session of the National Assembly was scheduled to be convened by King Norodom Sihanouk on September 27, 2003.

3 ADHOC runs a “Three Freedoms” project, which focuses on “the democratic space available to NGOs in various Asian countries in the context of these Three Freedoms”: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. ("Three Freedoms Project").

4 Article 12 of the Press Law states that a newspaper may be suspended for a maximum of 30 days for "damaging national security and political stability". (Reporters Sans Frontieres, “Press Release”).
However, in 2000, Khmer radio journalists took part in a training offered by the Institute for Media, Policy, and Civil Society (IMPACS). Notes Wayne Sharpe of IMPACS: “The outcome of the training has been immediate and gratifying. The difference in programming can already be heard on the air: more voices are heard, different viewpoints are shared and the dialogue, between the government of Cambodia and its citizens, is begun” (5).

The Reproductive Health Alliance (RHI) and its local counterparts (such as KHANA), for example, have used shadow puppetry to discuss HIV/AIDS issues for several years.
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