

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE “NEW PEOPLE” DURING THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME
AND ITS EFFECT ON THEIR LIVES IN THE PRESENT TIME



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สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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นายลี วัฒนณา

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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“ประชาชนใหม่” หรือ ชาวเขมรที่ถูกกวาดต้อนออกจากเมืองใหญ่ไปสู่ชนบทเมื่อเขมรแดงขึ้นครองอำนาจใน ค.ศ.1975 นับเป็นทรัพยากรบุคคลกลุ่มสำคัญของสังคมกัมพูชาในปัจจุบัน คนเหล่านี้มีตำแหน่งเป็นหัวหน้าของหน่วยงานต่างๆและเป็นบิดามารดาของชาวเขมรรุ่นใหม่ ในสมัยเขมรแดง “ประชาชนใหม่” ต้องเผชิญกับความทุกข์ทรมานมากมายและประสบการณ์เหล่านี้ส่งผลผลกระทบต่อชีวิตในปัจจุบันของพวกเขาเป็นอย่างมาก

วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษาประสบการณ์อันทุกข์ทรมานของ “ประชาชนใหม่” ในช่วงสมัยเขมรแดงและพิจารณาว่าประสบการณ์เหล่านี้มีผลกระทบต่ออย่างไรต่อชีวิตในปัจจุบัน

“ประชาชนใหม่” ต้องเผชิญกับการสังหารชีวิต ภาวะขาดอาหาร การถูกใช้งานหนักเกินกำลัง การถูกทรมาน การเลือกปฏิบัติ คำขู่ว่าจะถูกสังหาร การสูญเสียญาติพี่น้องและเพื่อน และการสูญเสียทรัพย์สินสมบัติและโอกาสในชีวิต ผลการศึกษาพบว่า “ประชาชนใหม่” ผู้รอดชีวิตจากช่วงสมัยเขมรแดงยังคงจดจำ ระลึกถึง และมีฝันร้ายเกี่ยวกับประสบการณ์ทุกข์ทรมานที่เคยเผชิญ ทั้งยังรู้สึกกลัวและโกรธเมื่อได้พบเห็นสิ่งต่างๆที่เกี่ยวข้องกับประสบการณ์เหล่านั้น ภาพทั้งหมดในความทรงจำของเขาส่งผลกระทบอย่างมากต่อชีวิตส่วนตัวและชีวิตครอบครัวของคนเหล่านี้

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“New people”, or those Cambodians evacuated from the cities into the countryside when the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975, are very important persons in Cambodian society today. They are the main human resource for Cambodia, they are the leaders in the offices and they are the parents of the young generation. Unfortunately, they experienced many suffering events under the Khmer Rouge regime and that affects their lives very much today.

This thesis examines the suffering of new people under the Khmer Rouge regime and how their suffering affects their lives today.

New people experienced execution, starvation, overwork, torture, discrimination, the threat of being kill, loss of their relatives and friends, loss of their property, and loss of their opportunities. The study finds that the new people who are survivors still remember, recall, and have nightmares of the suffering events they experienced, and they feel scare and angry when they see something related to their experiences. All these pictures in their memories affect their personal lives and their family lives very much.

Field of Studies Southeast Asian Studies

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Advisor’s signature

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

“In just two years, I lost everyone I loved – seventeen members of my family and uncounted friends – and everything that was dear to me. I am left only with memories.”

--PIN Yathay, 1987¹

PIN Yathay is one of survivors who fled Cambodia in 1977 from Pursat province to Thailand. After he sheltered in France, he wrote his autobiography entitled “*Stay Alive, My Son*” to tell his life in the Khmer Rouge regime and to tell how he fled the country. From his statement we understand that the survivors still keep in their minds what happened to them under Khmer Rouge regime²; the torture and the loss of their loved ones; that means everything they experienced still stays in the memories of the survivors.

Cambodian people, about two million of whom lived in Phnom Penh, the capital city, and some other thousands who lived in provincial towns were evacuated by Khmer Rouge soon after they captured Cambodia on April 17, 1975. “Khmer Rouge” is a French word for “*Khmer Kraham* or Red Khmers”, first used by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in the mid 1960s to refer to Khmer Communists and, members of other Khmer left-wing organizations.³

¹ PIN Yathay, *Stay Alive, My Son* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1987), p. 9.

² Khmer Rouge regime (or Pol Pot regime) is the Democratic Kampuchea Government which ruled Cambodia from April 17, 1975 to January 7, 1979.

³ Ea Meng-Try and Sim Sorya, *Victimss and Perpetrators? Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2001), p. 47.

Some of new people were killed during the evacuation period while some others were forced to leave their houses and other properties or to separate from their relatives. Those people were forced to live in the countryside to work as peasants categorized as “new people”, “the 17 April people” or “deportees” or *Neak Choumleash*. Henri Locard, the author of “*Pol Pot’s Little Red Books, the Sayings of Angkar*”, defines new people as “all the town dwellers, at the moment of the brutal power seizure on 17 April 1975, plus all refugees who had fled revolutionary controlled zones and their collectivist policies in the countryside.”⁴ The Khmer Rouge believed that all those new people were their *khmang* or enemies and that those people were capitalists and the imperialists, people who used to exploit them and the country. *Angkar* or the Khmer Rouge organization educated people to throw away the capitalism idea and to conform to peasant life. As a result, most new people were killed, tortured, subjected to forced labor, lived under investigation, starved, lost relatives, threatened with death, witnessed killing or death, suffered from diseases, and discriminated against. Under these conditions, new people lived in fear and hatred for nearly four years.

Twenty nine years after liberation from the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodian people still remember their experience of suffering which they faced for nearly four years. The people or property around them, the darkness of the night in which the Khmer Rouge used to bring people to be killed, the moonlight under which new people were forced to work without sleep, the tools that Khmer Rouge cadres used to kill or torture people, the black clothes; the uniform of the Khmer Rouge cadres, the guns, and their memories of other events are the stressors or the stimulus to remind the victims of Khmer Rouge what had happened in their lives in the past. They lost their grandfathers, grandmother, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers, and children and they themselves faced torture, forced labor, starvation, and witness of death or killing. The revision of experiences of suffering in the past brings them to live in the shadow of suffering which may disturb their daily lives at present. Those

⁴ Henri Locard, *Pol Pot’s Little Red Book: the Sayings of Angkar* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Book, 2004), pp. 183-184.

experiences still affect their lives in family, at work, in social life, thinking, decision making. It is believed that these suffering events are still in the minds of those people although they had happened years ago. It is hard for them to come back to normal lives as they ever had before, even though they have everything they used to have before.

Most new people were highly educated and they belonged to middle or high class families. Therefore, they had more opportunity to enroll in higher education institutes during the Prince Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes. Some of them used to work as teachers, politicians, medical doctors, soldiers, technicians, administrators and other professions. Unfortunately, educated people were useless for the Khmer Rouge regime and placed first on the list to be killed. Most of them were executed and the Khmer Rouge kept an eye on them and put more pressure on the rest.

On the one hand, the war and the genocidal regime caused a shortage of human resources between the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, the new people who survived become the most important human resource for the new regime, post-Khmer Rouge. On the other hand, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, as a result of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in late 1978, Cambodia faced many problems such as war, diseases, food shortage, refugee, crime as revenge, people moving around, and other social problems. Most human resources who could have helped solving those problems were killed, and all infrastructures in the country such as schools, hospitals, banks, roads, and others were destroyed or left dysfunctional.

Facing with those problems, the new regime needed those new people very much so they tried to gather educated people to help to solve the problems; that was the new era for new people to work on their chosen professions again. Some of them went to their old offices and some of them changed to other offices which related to their professions.

Since then up until the present time, most new people became key persons in the government ranging from officials to the ministerial level. They are the persons who have major responsibility for the future of young generation and the country. Accidentally, their past memories affect national policy making and somehow may

influence the young generation's behavior. It means that what affects the former new people's lives will affect the way they lead the country and the next generation. It is interesting to understand how experiences of suffering affect the new people. It is also important to understand these effects since they are an obstacle to development, particularly as it relates to the will and ability to work, to plan for the future, and to solve problems.

Furthermore, it is an urgent issue because they are a rich source of oral history. Some of them have passed away already and some others are too old to talk about their experiences. If we do not start documenting these resources, more people will pass away and we will lose very important historical sources.

All in all, the result of this study can be used to learn more about the new people's lives in present time and to support mental health programs in Cambodia. It can also be used as a document for researchers or other academic institutes or can be used as evidence to bring Khmer Rouge to trial.

2. Significance and Usefulness of the Research

Today, most of the new people have become the key persons in the government ranging from minor officials up to the ministerial level and their lives may affect the fate of the entire nation. This study shows clearly, how these experiences affect the lives of the new people and how their lives affect modern Cambodian society.

3. Major Arguments

Nearly thirty years have passed since the Khmer Rouge regime but the experiences of the survivors of that regime have not gone from their memories. The new people in particular have faced many kinds of suffering, for example the loss of family members, relatives, friends and property, witnessing of death or killing, the threat of killing, torture, imprisonment, overwork, starvation, disease, and

discrimination. These experiences have had a great impact on every aspect of their lives in the present time, namely, their work, their family and social life, their ways of thinking and decision-making. All combine to create attitudes and feelings of distrust, hatred, violation, aggression, and selfishness in Cambodian society today.

4. Objectives

- 1) To examine the “new people”’s experience during the Khmer Rouge period.
- 2) To analyze how these experiences affect their lives in the present time.

5. Research Methodology

Most studies about the new people focus on Khmer refugees who live in foreign countries. There are very few studies about new people who live in Cambodia after 1979. There is less documentation of the lives of new people in the present time, so the best way to document their lives is to talk with the new people who survived the Khmer Rouge regime.

To meet this condition, both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used. Surveys and interviews have been used in the data collection process. Questionnaires were used to ask general questions and to provide the basis for in-depth oral interviews. Pre-Testing was done first in the data collecting process and then information from both questionnaires and in-depth interviews was analyzed.

New people who are working for government and other important agencies in present day and who live in Cambodia during and after the Khmer Rouge regime were selected as the sample for this study. The reason is that most new people who are working for the government today are from the elite families in the Lon Nol or Prince Sihanouk regimes and these elite families were the first target of the Khmer Rouge regime for cleansing or brainwashing, so they arguably faced harder lives than the others during that regime. New people whom I interviewed are mostly low ranking

officials, students, and the children of officials of the previous regime. Their parents were killed by the Khmer Rouge and left behind children who were students or low ranking officials in the Lon Nol regime.

Phnom Penh had a population of about 600,000 people before the war. This number increased to around 2 million people by the time the Khmer Rouge captured the country in 1975, as the city swelled with refugees fleeing the fighting in the countryside. Most of my informants lived in Phnom Penh originally but a few were part of this refugee group who fled the countryside for the city. Therefore, most informants were among the original urban population of 600,000.

Phnom Penh is the study area. The reason is that most new people were invited to work for the central government, which is located in Phnom Penh, after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. Age is another important category to be considered, so new people of age forty or up both female and male, form the sample of this research. Anyone who was forty at the time of the interviews was about eleven years old during Khmer Rouge regime. So with this reasoning, persons aged forty years old and up are the best sample for this research.

There is limited information on the exact number of new people and the offices in which they work, so it took time to find them. On the other hand, because of the limited time of study, the sample size was ultimately limited and not based on statistical calculation. The new people were selected to answer questions and the informants were asked to identify other new people for subsequent interviews. The sample is from various professions such as educators, artists, writers or researchers, administrators, diplomats, religion figures, army officers and policemen, politicians, medical doctors or nurses, and technicians. In total, fifty new people were chosen for interview.

Around one month, from 5 November 2004 to 8 December 2004 was spent on collecting this data in Cambodia. Tape recording permission was required from the respondents in advance. The interview contained questions about suffering in the lives of new people under the Khmer Rouge regime. They were asked about their work, their security, their relatives, their food, and about how their past experiences affect

their current lives. Recalling their past experiences, nightmares, feeling scared when they see things related to the regime and their emotion. The respondents were also asked about the effect of all these things on the family, personal life, work, and thinking and decision making.

This topic is a very sensitive issue because most of questions remind the respondents of the experience of suffering. Therefore, the very act of interviewing affects their emotions. Some of them cried during the interview process, so counseling was used when necessary.



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CHAPTER II

THE KHMER ROUGE

The political situation in Cambodia played a very important part to the development of the Cambodian communist movement. This chapter will describe the history of the Cambodian Communist Movement from the early phase to the end as it was influenced by each political regime.

1. The Emergence of the Khmer Rouge

The Communist Movement in Cambodia can be divided into four phases:

- Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) founded in Hong Kong in 1930. This party was composed of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese communists.

- Kampuchean People Revolution Party (KPRP) established in 1951. This party was created by the United Issarak Front, which was established in 1950 when the ICP was dissolved. Most of its members were Khmer Krom (ethnic Khmers from South Vietnam), Vietnamese minority living in Cambodia, and Cambodian hill tribe people.

- The Paris student communists which started their communist ideology in the beginning of the 1950s. They created the Khmer Student's Association in France. This was to be another important faction in the history of Cambodian Communist. Most of its members went home to join the KPRP in the mid 1950s.

- Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK) established in 1960. Tou Samouth was its secretary, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary were named to the Political Bureau. Pol Pot became its acting secretary in 1962 after the disappearance of Tou Samouth. Later in 1966, the WPK was renamed to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). The CPK joined the FUNK (Front Uni National du Kampuchea) of Prince Sihanouk in

1970 to establish the Gouvernement Royal d' Union Nationale du Kampuchea (GRUNK) to fight against Lon Nol regime.

1.1 The Early Phases

1.1.1 The Khmer Communist Groups

There is a lack of information about Khmer communist groups in Cambodia. What we can do now is to discuss them together. There were a few different groups of Cambodian communists. The Vietnamese communist patronage groups seemed pro-Vietnam but the other groups seemed anti-Vietnam. However, the two factions worked together in some cases and fought each other in other cases.

The successful Cambodian communists were based, on the one hand, on a handful of ethnic Khmer, who joined the ICP since 1930 and hundred more Cambodian communists who had been trained in Communist political schools in Vietnam as a part of Vietminh policy to support the liberation struggle in Laos and Cambodia from 1945 to 1947; on the other hand, at the same time, the Thai government had a policy of aiding all anti-French guerrillas in Indochina. This included aiding the Khmer Issarak¹ who later divided into right wing and left wing factions.

Left wingers in the Issarak movement included Son Ngoc Minh, Achar Mean, Sieu Heng, and Tou Samouth. In 1950, a congress led by Son Ngoc Minh established the Unified Issarak Front, dominated by ethnic Cambodian members of ICP and other communists trained in Vietnam. They then became only one unified communist Front. With support from outside and inside the country, the number of Cambodian communist increased rapidly. By 1952, Cambodian communist-controlled guerrilla bands, operating in cooperation with the Vietminh, the Vietnamese communists, were able to control perhaps a sixth of Cambodia's territory and to tie down several

¹ David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Colorado: Westview Press, Inc, 1993), p. 174.

thousand French troops. Two years later it was estimated that they controlled more than half of the kingdom. In 1952, French intelligence estimated Communist-controlled Issarak force as numbering about five thousand.²

1.1.2 The Paris Student Communists

Another important source of the Cambodian communist movement was started by Cambodian students in France, such as Ieng Sary, Mey Mann, Thiounn Mumm, Son Sen, Rath Samoen, Saloth Sar, Hou Nim, and Hou Youn. These students picked up communist ideology from French Communist Party and other European communists.

Saloth Sar, known later as Pol Pot, who was born in 1925 (1928?) in Kampong Thom province, north of Phnom Penh, went to France to study electronics in 1949. He failed to get the degree. People believed that his failure was due to the fact that he spent most of his time learning communist theory. Other students were Ieng Sary, born in 1930 in South Vietnam, who studied commerce and politics, Khieu Samphan, born in 1931, who studied economics and politics, Hou Yuon, born in 1930, who studied economics and law, Son Sen, born in 1930, who studied education and literature, and Hou Nim, born in 1932, who studied law.

Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, who were the most powerful persons among his colleagues, joined the French Communist Party some time between 1949 and 1951. In 1951, in Paris, Saloth Sar (Pol Pot) began attending Marxist discussions convened by Keng Vansak. Others in the group including most Khmer Marxists in France attended a Communist-sponsored youth festival in Berlin and learned about the Khmer

² Ibid., p. 180.

People's Revolutionary Party.³ Then they transformed the Khmer Student's Association (KSA) into a nationalist and leftist idea group.

1.2 The Prince Sihanouk Era

1.2.1 End of French Colonialism

After it was established for a year, the Unified Issarak Front, in 1951, named their party "the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP)", with Son Ngoc Minh and Tou Samouth as its leaders.

The KPRP guerillas continued to fight against the French for independence and to critique its puppet government. For instance, in 1951, when the French commissioner, Jean de Raymond, was murdered, the Cambodian communists announced: "For the French, the death of Raymond means the loss of a precious collaborator. For the puppets, it means the loss of a generous master. For the Cambodian people, Raymond's death means the end of a great enemy. For Buddhism, his death means that a devil, who can no longer harm religion, has been killed."⁴

In the early 1950s, communists in Indochina fought the French vigorously, internally. Many countries started talking about the Indochina issue, internationally.

After French lost its war with Vietminh at Dien Bien Phu and other battlefields and with Pathet Lao Troops near Xeno in Laos, the KPRP guerillas continued fighting strongly against the French in Cambodia combined with the mission of Prince Sihanouk to draw international attention to Cambodia. Finally, Cambodian communists, Lao communists, and Vietnamese communists ousted France from their countries and they gained independence in 1953-54.

³ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), pp. 189-190.

⁴ David Chandler, A History of Cambodia, p. 179.

The Khmer Rouge stated in its magazine, *Yuvechon nung Yuvanearei padevat* (Revolutionary Youth): “From the moment of its creation on September 30, 1951, the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)⁵ led everyone, including revolutionary Cambodian youths, in the struggle against French imperialism. In 1954, imperialism was driven from Cambodian soil.”⁶

1.2.2 Gaining Independence

After independence, King Sihanouk became the leader of Cambodia and he brought Cambodia into peace by choosing a neutral way. Internationally, King Sihanouk got aid from both democratic and communist blocs. He got financial support from the United States, China and the Soviet bloc, and he used this aid to develop the country. Historians say that King Sihanouk’s regime reached its peak in 1962.

Some guerillas who fought for independence were not involved in communist movement very much. It seemed rather to be a nationalist movement, so after the country gained independence they went back to their villages. Some others, however, were interested more in communist ideology. These people continued their communist movement. The government of Prince Sihanouk did not support the communist movement; they wanted to crack down on this movement so there was very little space for communists to live in the country. Steinberg writes: “when the war was over, the party was in disarray; thousands of Cambodian guerillas stopped fighting; many of them saw no point in fighting, the French had gone. Others, fearing reprisal, went off to northern Vietnam. Still others found themselves swept up in Sangkum⁷ politics.”⁸

⁵ CPK is new name of KPRP in 1966

⁶ David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1996), p. 216.

⁷ the name of prince Sihanouk’s party

In 1954, over 1,000 Communist-affiliated Khmer guerillas were evacuated to the newly established Communist state in North Vietnam.⁹ In 1956, communists in Cambodia operated as members of an unnamed party which was run by Tou Samouth, Saloth Sar, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, and a handful of others.¹⁰

The first goal of some Cambodian communists was to fight against the French for independence, so after Cambodia gained independence, they did not want to fight against the government anymore. Therefore, the KPRP decided to join the general election. Unfortunately, because of lack of supporters and the fact that some of its supporters were in Vietnam, and because of Prince Sihanouk running unfair elections, KPRP lost the election in 1955 and again in 1958.

In the election of October 1955, Prince Sihanouk captured 80 percent of the vote and pro-communist group got 4 percent. The communist group believed that they should get more vote than this, particularly in areas where Communist guerillas had recently been active; but Prince Sihanouk' popularity with the electorate was genuine enough. The Democrats were out-maneuvered by Prince Sihanouk, and pro-Communist candidates and voters were roughed up by the police.¹¹

To react to this failure, in September 28-30, 1960, twenty-one Khmer radicals met secretly for three days in Phnom Penh to form a new party, the Workers' Party of Kampuchea (WPK). Its Central Committee included Tou Samouth (Secretary), Nuon Chea, Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary and others.¹² WPK worked closely with North Vietnam and China.

⁸ D.J Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press,1987), p. 376.

⁹ David Chandler, Voices from S-2: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison, p. 190.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 191.

¹¹ D.J Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia , p. 376.

¹² David Chandler, Voices from S-2: Terror and History in Pol Pot's secret Prison, p.191.

The WPK had no hope of winning power through election so they changed their policy to fight to take power in Cambodia. The party spokesman stated in 1976: “In 1955, we knew that people’s opinions throughout the country supported us 99 percent, but state power was in the hands of our enemies, the army and the police. The ballot boxes belong to them. The events of 1955 taught us that we had no way of winning an election. We could only defeat the enemy by fighting a revolution.”¹³

Fear of communist ideology was widespread in Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk tried to destroy communism in the country. However, with support from North Vietnam and China, the communist movement in Cambodia developed well. With the Prince’s policy, many left wingers (communists) were arrested, killed, and tortured. For instance, in 1959, an editor of a communist newspaper, *Pracheachon* was killed. Three years later, Tou Samouth was killed by Sihanouk’s police (some said Tou Samouth was killed by Saloth Sar) and Saloth Sar became acting secretary of the Central Committee.¹⁴ This policy also kept thousands Cambodian of communists from staying in the country and they chose to exile for a short period in Hanoi until the early of 1970s.¹⁵

One year after the death of Tou Samouth, Saloth Sar, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen who were schoolteachers, were placed on a “red list” of Prince Sihanouk government, so they fled to the eastern region of Cambodia. Saloth Sar spent a year in “Office 100”, a Vietnamese-controlled base located sometimes inside Cambodia, sometime over the border in Vietnam. A year later, Saloth Sar and a WPK delegation visited Hanoi, where Sar presented WPK’s political program to his Vietnamese counterparts.

Turning to 1963, Prince Sihanouk’s regime faced many problems such as people uprising in Siem Reap. He also cut off United States military aid because of their bombing of the Vietcong on Cambodian soil. The decrease of tax on rice export

¹³ David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, p.220.

¹⁴ David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s secret Prison*, p.191.

¹⁵ David Chandler, *Facing the Cambodian Past*, p.220.

led to most rice being smuggled to Vietnamese communists because they could pay a higher price than Prince Sihanouk's government. Thus, people were not happy with his regime and the communist movement, which was supported by global communists, was very strong in spreading their ideology. As a result, many people joined this movement. The Sihanouk government, which announced a neutral policy, which did not recognize pro-Communist or pro-Democracy movements, tried to crack down on such movements.

Prince Sihanouk continued repression of local Communists although in 1965 the Prince made a secret agreement with Vietnamese communists to station troops in eastern Cambodia.¹⁶ "Sihanouk's political style often over-reacted to real or imagined threats and at the same time seeking, on the surface at least, to preempt ideological positions to both right and left. Thus he was consistently anti communist at home, while increasingly pro-communist abroad."¹⁷

In 1966 Saloth Sar embarked from Hanoi on a visit to China and in the same year, he returned from China and change the name of WPK to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).¹⁸ Through this historical event, communist movement was very active. Saloth Sar himself tried very hard to draw supporters from inside the country and from abroad to help the communist movement survive because Prince Sihanouk tried to eliminate communists day after day. At last, in 1967, after the communists got enough supporters the CPK decided to inaugurate a policy mixing armed and political struggle.

Besides, failing to crack down on communist movement successfully, Prince Sihanouk's government faced the uprising of people, who were believed to support the communist movement. In 1967 in Samlot, Battambang province, about 10,000

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁷ D.J Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia, p. 376.

¹⁸ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison, pp. 191-192.

peasants were killed by the government soldiers after they protested against the government's policy that forced them to sell rice to the government at low government price. From that point on, Saloth Sar's supporters started fighting against Prince Sihanouk's government around the kingdom.¹⁹ The fighting continued and in 1968, a CPK unit overran a government post in Battambang and captured several weapons.²⁰ Fearing further Communist inroads, Prince Sihanouk renewed diplomatic relations with the United States in 1968. However, the fighting between government soldier and CPK continued in the northeast.²¹

1.3 The 18 March Coup d'Etat

Along with unsuccessful suppression of the communists, in March 18, 1970, Prince Sihanouk was voted out of office by the National Assembly while he was visiting the USSR. Then Lon Nol, Prince Sihanouk's Prime Minister, changed Cambodia from a feudal monarchy to the Khmer Republic backed by the United States and he became President of Cambodia. The regime worked hand in hand with the United States, fighting against North Vietnamese soldiers, who based in Cambodia, and the Khmer Rouge fighters.

1.3.1 Joining the *Maquis*

From Beijing, Prince Sihanouk proclaimed a National United Front of Kampuchea. He hoped to entice all Khmers from inside and outside the country to join him. In addition, Prince Sihanouk pledged to fight back by joining with the CPK. With this good opportunity, Saloth Sar and Vietnamese Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, rushed to offer support to Prince Sihanouk's idea. Then Sihanouk called his supporters to jungle "*maquis*" to liberate the country. As Bun Rany, wife of Prime

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 378.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

²¹ Ibid., p. 192.

Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia recollected: “....., for the sake of liberating Cambodia, I join the *maquis*. I was answering Prince Sihanouk’s call to join the movement to liberate Cambodia from the Lon Nol regime.”²² By claiming that they were loyal to Prince Sihanouk, CPK guerillas gained thousands of supporters. Saloth Sar then returned from Vietnam and set up his headquarters in rural Kompong Thom.²³

1.3.2 The Lon Nol Government and U.S. Bombardment

The coup d’etat was welcomed by middle class city dwellers, but not by the peasants. On March 29, 1970, 40,000 peasants marched to Phnom Penh capital to demand Prince Sihanouk’s reinstatement, finally, they were cracked down by the Lon Nol government with many casualties. The Lon Nol regime’s action encouraged many people hesitant to support Lon Nol and turned to support the Khmer Rouge movement instead.

In addition, the Lon Nol regime was famous for its corruption, especially in the military. They brought rice which was donated from the United States to sell to the Khmer Rouge so that they could earn a lot of money while people were starving. In contrast, some officials who were still loyal to the Prince and felt unhappy with the government joined the Khmer Rouge secretly.

The United States bombing of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietcong on Cambodian territory caused many civilian death and other casualties. Houses were burnt to the ground and rice fields were destroyed. Between February and August,

²² Harish and Julie Mehta, Hun Sen: Strongman of Cambodia (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1999), p. 28

²³ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison, p. 192.

1973, US bombers dropped 257,465 tons (Stearn said 540, 000 tons²⁴) of bombs on Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge were posted. This was nearly twice the tonnage dropped on Japan in World War II²⁵. As a result, between 30,000 to 500,000 people died and many houses were destroyed, especially on the eastern bank of the Mekong River. This bombardment pushed many people to the support communist movement, and also many people migrated to the city.

The Khmer Rouge gained more fighters while the Lon Nol regime faced many problems because too many people moved to cities, especially Phnom Penh. The population of Phnom Penh increased from 600,000 to 2 or 2.5 million. From day to day, the Khmer Rouge moved closer and closer to the city. The Lon Nol regime faced both fighting against the Khmer Rouge and cracking down on the uprising of the people.

All these factors made the Khmer Rouge movement becoming stronger, the strongest in its history. The good policy of the communists, the support of Prince Sihanouk, the US bombing, and social problems in the Lon Nol regime caused many people to support the movement from the ordinary people up to high ranking officials.

2. The Khmer Rouge in Power

As a result, on the one hand, in 1974 the CPK stormed Phnom Penh. At the same time, the US cut off military aid to the Lon Nol government so finally, in 17 April, 1975, CPK forces occupied Phnom Penh and Battambang and gained control of the whole country. The new regime was named Democratic Kampuchea²⁶, and Saloth Sar, known later as Pol Pot became its Prime Minister.

²⁴ Duncan Stearn, Chronology of South-East Asian History 1400-1996 (Australia: the Mitraphab Center Pty Ltd, 1997), p.253.

²⁵ David Chandler, Facing the Cambodian Past, p.224.

²⁶ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison, p. 193

The policy of the Pol Pot regime was to apply communist ideology and to create nationalism. Therefore, Pol Pot tried to eliminate Vietnamese people from Cambodia, defended Cambodian territory, cut off Vietnamese domination in his party, eliminated corruption and class in society. It is likely that Pol Pot and his supporters did not want Vietnam to involve in Cambodian affairs because Pol Pot stated: “Everything should be done on the basic of self-reliance, independence and mastery. The Khmer should do everything on their own.”²⁷

This policy brought the country to disaster. The Khmer Rouge made their supporters hopeless. They destroyed social structures such as religion, money, market, school. Furthermore, they killed and tortured their own people. Due to execution, overwork, disease, and war, about 1.7 million Khmers died under this regime.

2.1 Evacuation

There is no clear answer why the Khmer Rouge evacuated the people from the cities. The Khmer Rouge told people to leave the city because of imminent American bombing. Many people had already been traumatized by the bombing so the Khmer Rouge could easily convince people to leave their houses by saying that American would bomb the city. All people in the cities and other provincial towns heard that word: “Leave your house with a few things with you or America will bomb, and you can come back in three days.”

Some scholars said that the Khmer Rouge wanted to eliminate all their enemies and it would be easier to do it in the countryside than the city where the social structure is complicated. Some Khmer Rouge high ranking officials claimed that they evacuated people because it is too crowded in the city as people migrated from the countryside to flee the war and if we allowed the people to continue to live in the city they were afraid there would be no food for them. Another reason, to apply

²⁷ Ben Kiernan, The Pol Pot Regime. Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79 (Chiang Mai: Silkorm Books, 1996), p. 12.

their agrarian policy, Khmer Rouge needed to force city people to the country to work as peasants.

There were around two million people living in Phnom Penh and some other thousands who lived in provincial towns. All these persons were evacuated by the Khmer Rouge regime to live in the countryside. They closed school, markets, abolished money, reduced office work but extended rice field work. People had to plant all the existing rice field and clear new land for more rice fields. Most youths and adults worked on dam and irrigation work around the country or sometimes worked in rice fields. Children and elders worked in rice fields or related work such as taking care of bulls and cows, collecting fertilizer; the bulls or cows' drops, etc. Khmer Rouge told all children and youth that "your school is in these rice fields" and told adults that "your office is in these rice fields too."

During the traveling period, evacuees faced missing relatives, friends, shortage of food, shelter. Some older people and new born babies died on the road and some people were shot dead too. A researcher at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, who was evacuated to Pursat province, recalled: "Khmer Rouge threw bodies from the boat to the river during her traveling from Phnom Penh to Kampong Chhnang."²⁸

The Khmer Rouge forced some families to separate if they were on different trucks or different oxcarts. If those families went against their orders they were shot dead. The destination of evacuees were not sure, *Angkar* could change their orders without any reason or argument. All those people were not allowed to move back but they must move forward or they would be shot dead.

Because of the shortage of food, Battambang, which were well known for plentiful rice production, so it became the destinations that most people wanted to go since it was believed that there would have enough food to eat. When *Angkar* asked if someone wanted to go to Battambang, most people would say "yes". To trick the people and sent them to another place, *Angkar* would tell the people "if anyone want

²⁸ interview with informant Number 7, 11 November 2004

to go to Battambang please go to these trucks” but the real destination may not have been this province.

In general, there was no clear direction of the evacuation. Some new people were evacuated to many places and many times. A dancer said: “the Khmer Rouge forced me to go to Battambang and then they placed me in many other places: Kaling, Prey Svay, and then Dombokkrohorm.”²⁹ Sometime, the new village leaders did not know that they had to receive the new people into their villages because those people were sent by *Angkar* .

2.2 The Democratic Kampuchea Government

After they defeated the Lon Nol government, the Khmer Rouge created a unique government that had never happened in Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge abolished cities, bank notes, schools, and pagodas. The Khmer Rouge brought the country to a totally agrarian state.

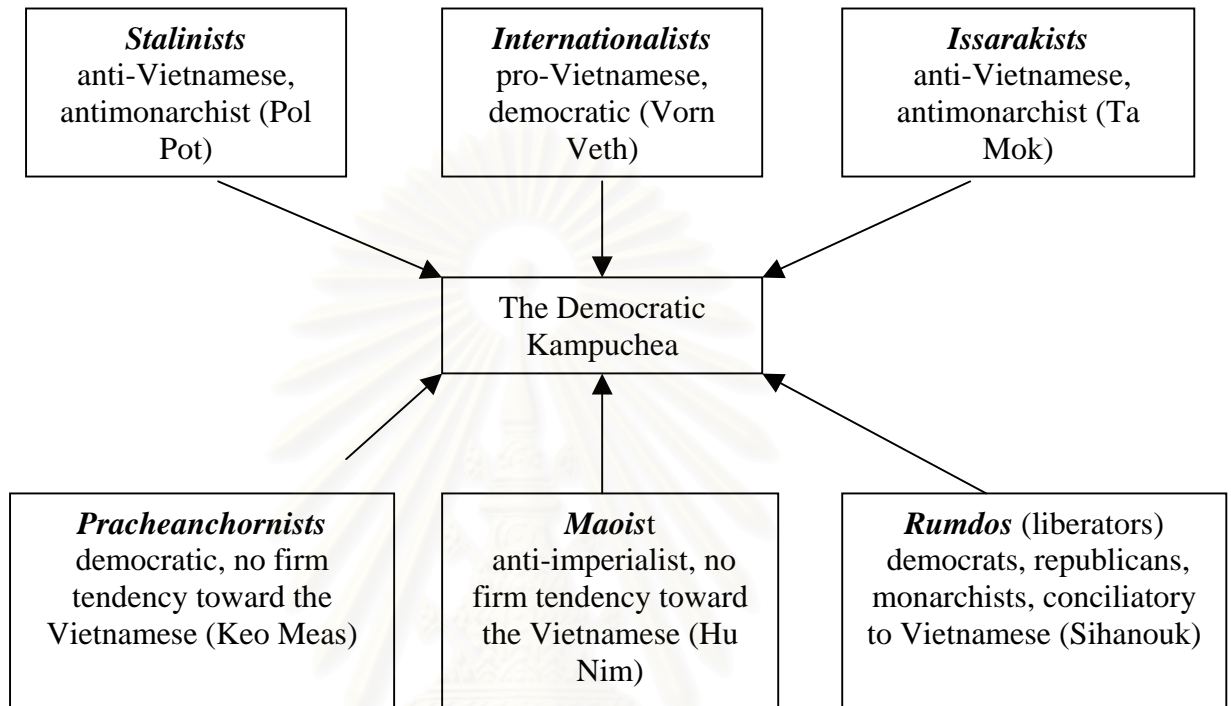
2.2.1 Administration

Craig Etcheson, in “*The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*”, identified six factions a coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea while Ben Kiernen identified three factions: the Pol Pot faction, the pro-Vietnamese communists, and the adherents of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Model.

After coming to power, the Khmer Rouge established a coalition government from a few groups of different factions.

²⁹ interview with informant Number 10, 15 November 2004

The Khmer Rouge Coalition ³⁰

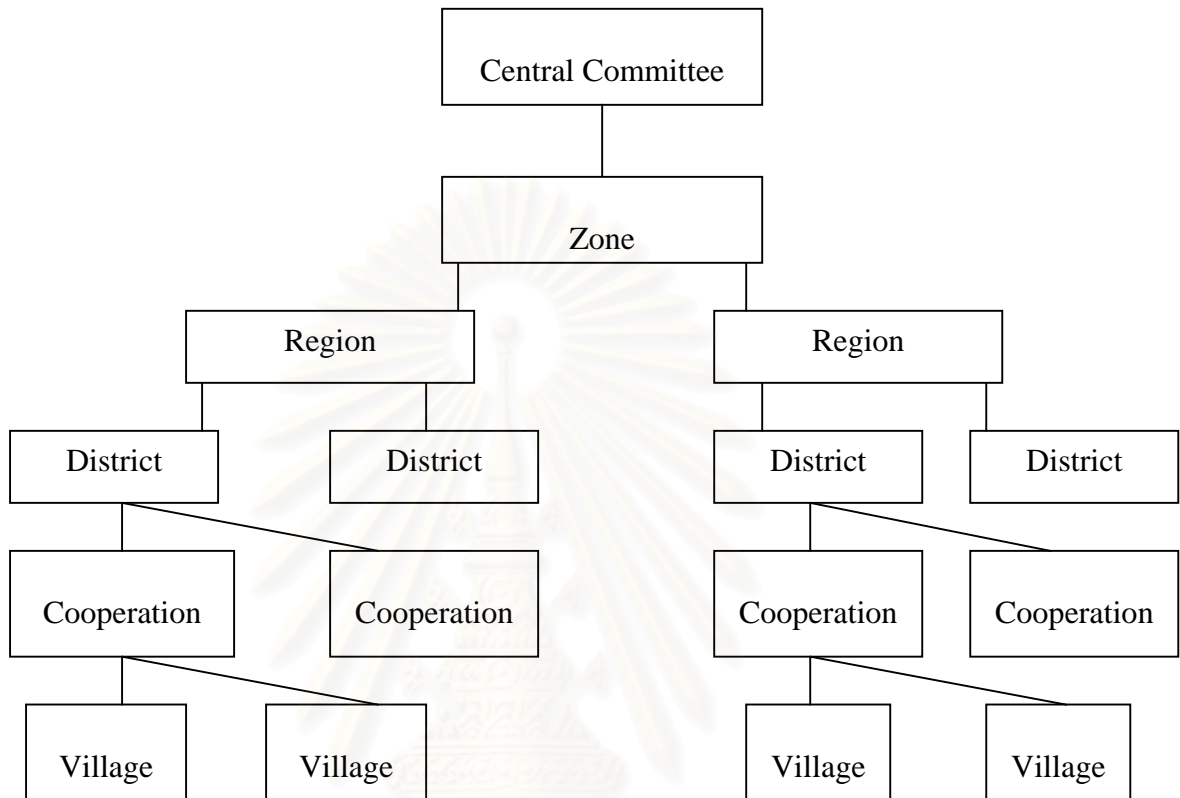


(Source: Craing Etcheson)

The Khmer Rouge regime created a very strong local governance to apply their cooperative policy. The regime divided Cambodia into zone, region, district, cooperative, and village. There are many regions in one zone and many cooperatives in one region. Every cooperative and village was divided into *korn*g or work unit of 50-100 people and every *korn*g was divided into *krom* or work team of 4 -10 people. With this division it was easy for the Khmer Rouge to control each individual, both in term of work and political ideology.

³⁰ Craig Etcheson, The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea (Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), p. 164.

The Democratic Kampuchea



The Khmer Rouge divided Cambodia into seven zones: Eastern, Southwestern, Western, Northwestern, Northern, Northeastern, and Central. The Eastern zone, known as *Boupea*, was controlled by the pro-Vietnamese communists. The policy of the central party was not applied completely there until 1978 when the zone leadership was removed in a bloody purge. The Southwestern zone was controlled by anti-Vietnamese communists. This zone, known as *Nearadei* was the central power of the central party. Its leader, Ta Mok, was very cruel and very powerful. Between 1977 and 1978, he sent his cadres to purge other cadres in the other zones around the country. The Western and Northwestern zones were famous for starvation because they sent rice to the central party instead of giving it to the people. The Northern and the Central zones were famous for execution. The Northeastern zone was the isolated zone in Cambodia. This zone was the origin base of Khmer Rouge because this zone was inhabited by hill tribe people.

The Map of Democratic Kampuchea³¹ (1975-1979)



2.2.2 Economy

The private property was abolished. The state-owned farm was introduced and the harvest became the collective property of people. The communal dining was in practice in 1976. The Khmer Rouge proposed the idea of economy of self-sufficiency.

There was no use of money and there were no sellers or buyers. *Angkar* fed the people so people did not need to earn for a living. All people had to work so that they will have something to eat. They worked to produce food so that they did not need to buy anything, *Angkar* told them. Interestingly, to survive people created their

³¹ Ben Kiernan, The Pol Pot Regime. Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979, p. ii.

domestic commerce secretly, based on various types of exchange. They used gold, silver, diamonds, precious stones, watches, clothes, even US dollars in exchange for food. Mostly, the new people had these things to exchange for food from the base people (people who joined the revolution or living in the liberated zone before the 17 April 1975. More explanation about base people is in chapter four.)

2.2.3 Health Care

Hospitals were not closed but doctors, nurses, and officers were replaced by the Khmer Rouge. Those Khmer Rouge were incapable of curing people. They could not even read the names of the medicines. People were very afraid of being sent to the hospital. Anyone who went to the hospital rarely came back. The hospital was a death place for them. Apart from the hospital, there were traditional healers, called *Sangkumakech*. Generally speaking, the *sangkumakech* was more successful than the hospital in curing people. The healers produced medicine by themselves. They used trees or parts of animal as their material. Most people would know that kind of medicine which they called *Thnam Ach Tornsay* or rabbit shit medicine. People named it from its shape and appearance, which was similar to the rabbit dropping.

2.2.4 Religion

Buddhist monks were forced to leave the temples. The Khmer Rouge believed that the monks were the social parasites so monks must be disrobed and work as lay people. Pagoda buildings were used as prisons, torture places, warehouses, or animal pens. Apart from Buddhism, other religions or beliefs were also forbidden. There were no any ritual ceremonies as people were used to. There was no ceremony for marriage or funerals. *Angkar* arranged wedding or *Pdach Nha* for the people with many couples marrying at a time. There was no music, no *acha* or priest, reception party or relatives in the *Angkar* wedding except the Khmer Rouge cadre who announced the wedding. There was no ceremony at all for anyone who died, they would just bring the body to bury right away. Chams or Muslims who lived in

Cambodia were forced to eat pork, and there was also no Muslim ceremony under the regime.

2.2.5 Education

All schools from pre-school to universities were closed when the Khmer Rouge captured power. There were no libraries or research centers. Once, the Khmer Rouge published text books and proposed the basic education but it never appeared.

The Khmer Rouge told the people: “Your school is in the rice field.” People must learn from their work, peasants, and workers. Political lessons were the one type of teaching that *Angkar* encouraged. People had to attend political meetings if *Angkar* requested, mostly at night time after meals. Children of 6 or 7 years old were separated from parents. The Khmer Rouge arranged a special place for them. They were not allowed to visit home. The Khmer Rouge told them: “You are the children of *Angkar*. *Angkar* is more important than your parents.” The Khmer Rouge wanted to build their new society from those children’s generation so they did not want them influenced by their parents, who were full of the ideas of the old regime.

2.2.6 The Democratic Kampuchea –Vietnam Conflict

The Khmer Rouge slaughter of the Vietnamese minority living in Cambodia began right after they captured the country. Then the Khmer Rouge had a conflict with Vietnam both on the sea and over land border between 1977 and 1978. Frankly, Khmer Rouge invaded some Vietnamese villages and executed some Vietnamese people there.

Along with that the Khmer Rouge continued to eliminate the pro-Vietnamese communists. The policy of eliminating the old communists caused many communists, who are not happy with Pol Pot’s policy, to flee to Vietnam to ask for assistance. They prepared to liberate the country. Both the conflict with Vietnamese and the intraparty purging may be one of the other reasons which caused the fall of

Democratic Kampuchea. In late December 1978, Vietnamese launched major offensive³² and finally, in January 7, 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime was ousted.

The Democratic Kampuchea policy will be talked more detail in chapter three.

3. The Khmer Rouge as the Rebel Force

While the communist movement in other parts of Southeast Asia was weakened, tension was high between China and the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc communists to play role in Indochina politics. The competition between the two giant communist groups resulted in the conflict between Khmer Rouge regime, who were supported by China, and Socialist Republic of Vietnam, who was supported by Soviet Union in 1977. The Cambodia-Vietnam conflict created the Third Indochina War and threats to regional security. After Vietnamese defeated the Khmer Rouge, a new government was installed by Vietnam. The leaders of the government were Heng Samrin, Pen Sovan, Chann Si, Chea Sim, and Hun Sen. It was known that this government's policy followed the socialist ideology of Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

Although they were defeated, the Khmer Rouge still controlled some parts of the country and they continued fighting against the Heng Samrin government. Khmer Rouge still got recognition from the international community, for example, in the early 1980s, DK³³ got a seat at the United Nations and got military aid from China and other ASEAN countries.

The Khmer Rouge continued both armed and political struggle against Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime. The heavy armed conflict mostly took place along the Khmer-Thai border and at that time the most famous political agenda was

³² David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison, p. 194.

³³ DK was the name of the Khmer Rouge government after they defeated Lon Nol regime in 15 April, 1975.

the Hanoi and Phnom Penh regimes pointing to “Khmer Rouge’s genocide” while the Khmer Rouge accused Hanoi and Phnom Penh of “Vietnamese invasion”.

This conflict drew attention from Thailand and ASEAN, and after that, the United States, the United Nations, France, and Japan. Although there were many outsiders involved, China, Thailand, Soviet Union, Kampuchea, and Vietnam were involved in this War most strongly and directly. The purposes of the involvement were different among these countries; China and the Soviet Union wanted to set up their communist networks in Southeast Asia; Vietnam wanted to build her power in Indochina or the so-called “Indochinese Federation”; Thailand wanted to protect herself for security reason; and France, Japan, and the United Nations wanted to build peace, development, and independence in Cambodia and in the region.

Khien Theeravit pointed out in a third conference on Kampuchea in 1987: “Knowing that Hanoi is not willing to negotiate on this basis, we must be firm to oppose Hanoi by giving the CGDK³⁴ all kinds of support- military, political, and economic.”³⁵

Since Vietnam backed by the Soviet Union invaded Cambodia, Chinese and Thailand agreed to support CGDK. Therefore, thousands of CGDK soldiers found shelter along the Thai border.³⁶ Many Khmer Rouge soldiers fought against the government because they thought that Vietnam had invaded their country.

ASEAN feared that Indochinese conflict could bring China and Soviet Union into the region again or could destroy the ASEAN’s Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN). For this reason, ASEAN tried to deal with the problem directly and neutrally with the regional and external actors as the prime regional organization.

³⁴ Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea, an exiled government formed by Pol Pot and Sihanouk.

³⁵ Khien Theeravit, A Proposed Solution to the Kampuchean Problem (The third International Conference on Kampuchea, Bangkok, July, 1987), p. 77.

³⁶ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison, p. 194.

They also decided to bring the problem to the international community or the United Nations.

After a long negotiation, all Khmer factors signed a peace agreement in Paris in 1991 and the United Nations agreed to prepare general election for Cambodia in 1993.

After general elections, the Cambodian government enjoyed international recognition as well as large amount of foreign aid, EU, ASEAN, IMF, WB, ADB, UNDP, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippine, and Indonesia. In contrast, the Khmer Rouge lost all its recognition and survived by selling log and gem-mining.

The donors were anti-Khmer Rouge and willing to help the government weaken and eliminate the rebel once and for all³⁷. US gave “full support to the decision by the Cambodian parliament to outlaw the Khmer Rouge”³⁸ and the US also even enlarged its anti-Khmer Rouge law to include not only military aid to Cambodia but also possible sanctions against any “group or country” aiding Khmer Rouge, whether it was “commercial” activities or something else.³⁹

Without any support from outsiders, the Khmer Rouge was weakened and there is no hope to win. In 1996, the Khmer Rouge General Keo Pong led 1,665 people to join the government. Ieng Sary led his commanders, Ee Chhean and Sok Pheap based in Pailin and Phnom Malai also joined the government, so the Khmer Rouge lost the most important center for the logging and gem-mining. It was estimated that Pailin alone used to provide them with about US\$ 100 million per year.

³⁷ Sorpong Peou, Intervention & Change in Cambodia (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 272.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 275.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 276.

Son Sen and his relatives were executed under Pol Pot's order in June 9, 1997⁴⁰. Then Ta Mok revolted against Pol Pot. He arrested Pol Pot and his followers and put on trial on July 25, 1997, finally Pol Pot was sentenced to life imprisonment by Ta Mok.

The final Khmer Rouge defectors were Khieu Samphan, and Nuon Chea in late December 1998,⁴¹ six months after the Pol Pot died.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

⁴⁰ Sorpong Peou, Intervention & Change in Cambodia, p. 358.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 359.

CHAPTER III

WHY DID KHMERS SUFFER AT THE HANDS OF KHMERS?

“There were two sides to it, as I told you. There’s what we did wrong, and what we did right. The mistake is that we did some things against the people.....but the other side, as I told you, is that without our struggle there would be no Cambodia right now”.....“I want you to know,”..... “that everything I did, I did for my country.”¹

____Pol Pot, 1997

Pol Pot himself claimed that his regime did some things wrong. In contrast, Pol Pot also argued that he did some good things for his country, but people still doubt this point. In opposite, Long Narin, a high ranking Khmer Rouge argued: “.....If we had been doing good things, all the population would have supported us and not run away as they did. We made some mistakes that is how the Vietnamese were able to invade Cambodia.”² Most Khmer Rouge leaders blamed the Vietnamese who caused their regime’s collapse, not lack of support by the Cambodian people. “Khieu Samphan admitted there were some things that affected the lives of the people but not on the scale of a massacre and only as a result of Vietnamese agents...”³

As a result, in three years and eight months under Democratic Kampuchea, 1.7 million people died (there are various figures of the number of dead but this number is

¹ David Chandler, Brother Number One, A Political Biography of Pol Pot (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000), pp. 183-185.

² D. W Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991 (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1991), p. 18.

³ Ibid., p. 19.

most widely accepted). A much larger number lives with trauma today. Some of them were executed and some others died of starvation, disease, and overwork. Some others lived in suffering due to losing relatives, friends, property, social status, and other suffering experiences.

There were not only ordinary people but also Khmer Rouge comrades experienced execution and suffering events.

In summary, there are three main groups who died under the regime in the largest numbers.

- Armed force and officials of the Lon Nol regime. Most of these died of execution. The soldiers, police, and high ranking officers under the old regime were taken to be killed immediately after the Khmer Rouge came to power. The Khmer Rouge were afraid that those people would fight again them.

- New people, who were the mixture of high and low ranking officials, scholars, students, vendors, businessmen or all people who lived in the cities or provincial towns on 17 April 1975. Most of them died of starvation, execution, overwork, and diseases. The Khmer Rouge wanted to purify these new people to become people of the revolution. Those who survived overwork, starvation, and disease were considered the people of the revolution.

- Khmer Rouge cadres who were members of the party. Most of them died of execution after being accused of being enemies of the party or after being accused of planning or plotting against the regime or for being CIA or Vietnamese agents.

If it is the same as Pol Pot said one may ask how could all these suffering events happen? A dancer said: “I don’t understand why Khmer Rouge, who were Khmers killed Khmers; it is incredible for them to do that.”⁴ It is hard to answer that;

⁴ interview with informant number 28, 03 December 2004

as a tourist guide at S-21 stated: “There is no answer that why Khmer Rouge killed Khmer.”⁵

There are various answers for this question but there are some reasons that could explain what caused this kind of genocide or these sufferings. The socioeconomic difficulty during King Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes, the Khmer Rouge ideology, the mismanagement of the Khmer Rouge machinery, and the perception of informants on foreigners’ influence are the main ideas in this discussion in this chapter.

1. Personal Hatred and Suspicious

1.1 Khmer Rouge Cadres

Cambodia under the Prince Sihanouk government showed some development but we should not forget other issues in the society such as poverty, corruption, and political unrest. These problems caused the big gap between the countryside and cities and caused the confrontation between the people and the government.

Capitalism had a direct influence on the lives of the peasants. The rich bought more and more farming land from the peasants and finally some peasants became landless farmers who had to work for the rich to survive. “Peasants were pushed off their land and forced to become share-croppers or farm laborers.”⁶ In this case the peasants were not happy because they worked very hard but they got less benefit than the middleman or most of their benefit went to the rich or the powerful men who did

⁵ interview with informant number 26, 02 December 2004

⁶ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism (Seminar: Vietnam, Indochina and Southeast Asia: Into the 80s, Institute of Social Studies, the Hague, Netherlands, 1980), p. 9.

not work in the field. With all this exploitation the peasants complain that the urban elite “plant rice on the backs of the peasants.”⁷

The majority of Cambodian people live in the countryside and from time to time those people became the victims of their own society. The lives of rural area dwellers grew further and further away from the lives of city dwellers during the Prince Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes. The rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer. All these factors combined to create discrimination and hatred among the rich and the poor, the countryside and the city. A deputy director of a local NGO assumed: “The Khmer Rouge cadres were full of personal hatred and they wanted to take revenge with the rich and educated people.”⁸

Another issue is the corruption and military brutality which were widespread throughout Cambodia. Corruption brought the government officials grew richer and richer and also created a negative image of the government in people’s minds. Burgler stresses: “Problems such as corruption and military brutality, the unwelcome interference of the Lon Nol administration and the rice-collection campaign were general problems, and although their intensity varied considerably from region to region, they created peasant discontent.”⁹ For instance, most U.S relief went into the hands of the powerful but not the poor. From day to day, according to Vickery, people in Banteay Chhmar village’s dislike of anyone and anything from the towns of Cambodia and their dislike especially of high ranking officials and their wives (who came to their village without keeping their promise of aid and development), was significant.¹⁰

⁷ Ben Kiernan, “Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia” Australian Outlook, 1976, p. 379.

⁸ interview with informant number 32, 07 December 2004

⁹ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State. An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 15.

¹⁰ Michiel Vickery , Cambodia 1975-1982 (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), p. 2.

Furthermore, the military reaction toward communists or population uprisings, such as the brutal events in Samlaut, Pailin, and other places in Battambang province which result in the deaths of thousands of people and much lost property, is another important issue that caused more confrontation between the people and the government or the peasants and the capitalists. According to Burgler, “Continuous Sihanoukist suppression drove a number of leftists to the jungle in 1963, among them, Ieng Sary, and Son Sen”¹¹ and the Prince’s policies caused increasingly confrontation between the communists and the government or government officials.

Unemployment and the economic crisis played a very important part in creating more confrontation between the people and the government, “...the increasing numbers of high school and university graduates found it increasingly difficult to find suitable employment.”¹² In addition, the Vietnam war caused more rice trafficking and the government lost income from the rice export tax. The people wanted to sell rice to Vietnam rather than to the Cambodian government to get a higher price.

Relatedly, the Lon Nol coup d’etat ousted King Sihanouk and Lon Nol became allies with the United States also caused more confrontation between the people and the government. Firstly, the coup was welcomed by most cities dwellers “it is illuminating that in Phnom Penh Lon Nol’s coup was welcomed by middle class, by intellectuals and by the mass of students”¹³ but not much from the countryside so “pro-Sihanouk demonstrations and riots.....Thousands of unarmed peasants marched.....Hundred were killed and wounded, many more arrested.”¹⁴ Another issue is that the Lon Nol government allowed the U.S to bomb the Vietcong and Cambodian communists on Cambodia territory, east of the Mekong River, and the

¹¹ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 12.

¹² Ibid., p. 13.

¹³ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

government itself bombed or launched offensives on some villages which were believed to be the shelter of the communists. These two offensives caused some people to flee to the cities. Others fled to the forest to live with the communists. “The bombing intensified hatred and brutality. More and more younger people were enrolled in the Khmer Rouge.”¹⁵ When the war became more serious, more people moved to cities. “The city’s population tripled from 600,000 in 1970 to about 2 million in 1975.”¹⁶

All these events combined to create conflict between communists or peasants and the government and the peasants and government officials as well. It created rivalry among Cambodian people. Evidently, the Khmer Rouge expressed their feeling by saying: “We [the Khmer Rouge] are so angry when we came out of the forest”... “that we didn’t want to spare even a baby in its cradle.”¹⁷ Similarly, “The Khmer Rouge replied by describing their ‘uncontrolled rage’ at people who supported the Republican regime and especially its bombing raids against them.”¹⁸ In another event: “...female Khmer Rouge troops ask several men if they were Lon Nol soldiers, then took them aside and execute them.”¹⁹ These personal reasons above shared a very important part in creating killing fields and other suffering events during the Khmer Rouge regime. A commune counselor said: “The hate from their mind and from the society around them.”²⁰ Most local cadres were from poor families and they

¹⁵ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State. An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 28.

¹⁶ Ben Kiernan, “Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia”, Australian Outlook 1976, p.380.

¹⁷ David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, and M. H.Lim, the Early Phases of Liberation in Northwestern Cambodia (working paper 10, Monash University, 1976), p. 9.

¹⁸ Ben Kiernan, Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia, p. 375.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 377.

²⁰ interview with informant number 40, 01 December 2004

felt jealous with the new people. A lecturer of a university agrees: “The Khmer Rouge hated new people who used to have better life.”²¹

It is not only the personal hatred of the cadre but also the mismanagement of Democratic Kampuchea involved in the scope and ferocity of killing. Every cadre used the word *Angkar* to fulfill their personal desires. There was no clear regulation for execution. Each cadre has the right to kill anyone who he or she thinks is the enemy of *Angkar*.

If the regime managed their comrades very well, those could not have expressed their personal hatred to kill people in anarchy like that. “It was not clear who was the commanding officer and there were no orders.”²² It seems that each cadre worked on their own idea or their group’s decision but not on the orders from the central government. However, the regime argued: “The overwhelming majority of our cadres whole-heartedly worked in the interests of the nation and people of Kampuchea but lacked the experience in running the State affair. The situation got all the more confuse[d because] of the subversive activities of Vietnam’s agents.”²³

In theory, the Khmer Rouge regime taught their comrades: “Each administrator must have righteous precepts for living and righteous, clean politics that is: “Love, respect and serve the people-workers-peasants...protecting the interests of the people.....must have burning rage toward the enemy.....”²⁴ but “when these young people returned they fiercely condemned religion and custom, rejected the mystical, rejected parental authority and showed a militant attitude and a marked

²¹ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

²² Ben Kiernan, *Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia*, p. 377.

²³ D. W Ashley, *Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991*, p. 20.

²⁴ Timothy Carney (Editor), *Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion*, pp. 50-51.

confidence in mechanical weapons.”²⁵ It may be some Khmer Rouge comrades misunderstood the central party’s policy and could not distinguish which one was their enemy and which one was their people. In opposition, “where the Khmer Rouge were better organized, persecution of the rich was much less violent.”²⁶

Each region had different ways to control the people, and the lives of the people were different from one place to another one based on each leader. For example, Battambang (except region 3) and Pursat were believed to be the hardest regions among others. At least, there was one common thread across regions and zones; that is they used the name of *Angkar* to do everything. There was no clear reason in killing or punishing people and sometimes killing was done because of personal interest or personal conflict or jealousy. Khmer Rouge could not control all these kinds of things and from day to day the situation broke down into anarchy around the country.

Some cadres interpreted party ideology in the wrong way because of their lack of knowledge or sometime because of their personal interest. It is hard to understand the Khmer Rouge machinery. They used the word “*Angkar Leu*” or “High Organization” in talking to the people. When they wanted people to do something they always said: “this is *Angkar*’s order” or if they need something from the people they always said: “*Angkar* needs it”. People doubt who is *Angkar* and what is its face. The Khmer Rouge always told the people that *Angkar* has “pineapple eyes” so *Angkar* can see everywhere and every activity of the people.

Angkar is the party itself but the Khmer Rouge leaders used the word *Angkar* to blind the people and their cadres. *Angkar* means everything. A small boy soldier is *Angkar*. With the word *Angkar*, the Khmer Rouge can do everything they wanted.

²⁵ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State. An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 26.

²⁶ Ben Kiernan, Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia, p. 382.

1.2 The Khmer Rouge Leaders' Suspicions

In another case, some scholars tried to find out the influence of the Khmer Rouge leaders' personalities on the killing field. Chandler is one scholar who argues that childhood experiences of Pol Pot may have influenced his policies. According to Chandler, Saloth Sar may prefer his home town to a palace and he may have lacked warm care from his parents or Sar might have been traumatized by the solemn discipline of the monastery.²⁷ In contrast, most people who knew Pol Pot felt differently from Chandler. They stressed that Pol Pot was very a lovely boy, very nice teacher and very nationalistic.

On the other hand, Chandler believes that Pol Pot's killing field may have derived influence from his work. Chandler notes that Pol Pot checked the file of S-21 and other files every night [most files were confessions from his own cadres admitting to be CIA, KGB, Vietnamese agents, or plotters of coup d'état]. All his work provided him the vision of a Cambodia surrounded by enemies. According to Chandler, Pol Pot was always fearful of assassination so he trusted the hill tribe people whom he believed to be the most honest people. In every party meeting, attendees were strip-searching during his presence. He was ill frequently, which led him to think that his cooks tried to poison him.²⁸ With this reasoning, Pol Pot might kill any suspected persons for his safety.

The Khmer Rouge were always afraid of people rising up against them, so killing and starvation were used to prevent this from happening. A university lecturer said: "The Khmer Rouge think that the new people are their *khmang*; if they were given enough food they would stand up and fight against them."²⁹ To keep their power, Khmer Rouge killed any suspected people. As a result, people were killed more and more.

²⁷ David Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, pp. 8-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁹ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

2. The Policy of Democratic Kampuchea

2.1 *Self-Reliance, Independence, and Mastery*

The Khmer Rouge asked the people to follow their revolution without giving food or health care. One of the most important issues that caused suffering was starvation. Based on the propaganda of the party, Carney stresses: “The discipline demands self-reliance and emphasizes “master of the task at hand” and never depending on foreigners.”³⁰ This policy could not restore Cambodia but it caused a worse situation as “Washington predicted that one million Cambodians could die of starvation after the war.”³¹

Economically, the war, which started in 1967 and lasted until 1975, destroyed most of national infrastructure, especially between February and August, 1973, “US bombers dropped 257,465 tons.”³² Without outside support, some Cambodian people could not survive. Most Cambodian people earned their living from agriculture but the bombing destroyed most of their farming land especially east of the Mekong River. “One can hardly imagine how devastated the rural areas are (...) Towns and villages on the map in reality don’t exist anymore.”³³ The war turned Cambodia from a rice export country to a rice import one which caused starvation everywhere throughout the country. Therefore, without foreign assistance Cambodian people would die of starvation.

³⁰ Timothy Carney (Editor), Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion (Ithaca: Southeast Asian Program, Cornell University, 1977), p. 11.

³¹ N. Chanda, “When the Killing Had to Stop”, FEER, 29. 10. 1976, and Le Monde Diplomatique, May 1977, cited in Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism , p. 6.

³² David Chandler, Facing the Cambodian Past, p. 224.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Significantly, the party wanted to change Cambodia into a new society which had never existed in 2000 years of Cambodian history. According to Article 3 of the Khmer Rouge's constitution which states: "...This new culture is absolutely opposed to the corrupt, reactionary culture of the various oppressive classes and that of colonialism and imperialism in Kampuchea."³⁴ It is likely that "The Khmer Rouge demand basic changes in Cambodian society and personality which require including new values under a discipline unknown to modern Cambodia."³⁵ The Khmer Rouge had destroyed social structures and community networks which used to support the peoples' lives. They abolished money, closed schools and Buddhist temples, isolated themselves from the world, forced the people to work in the fields. Without all these social structure, most Cambodian people could not cope with the new society and new ruling policy which was created by the Khmer Rouge regime.

All people had to work for themselves and for the nation because they were "the masters of everything in their country." According on Article 14 of the Khmer Rouge constitution: "It is the duty of all to defend and build the country together in accordance with individual ability and potential."³⁶ People were forced to work day and night, under the sun and the falling rain with little rest, without enough food and health care and as a result some of them passed away because of fatigue and disease. Khieu Samphan, quoted in the Beijing Review admitted: "We had intended to mobilize the entire people to boost agricultural production and improve living standards and improve living conditions as quickly as possible but we forced the people to do manual labor which was too harsh for some people."³⁷

³⁴ Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993) (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), p. 83.

³⁵ Carney, op. cit. p. 256; Kirk, Zasloff & Brown, (editors), op. cit. p. 223, cited in Burgler, *Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, an Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism*, p. 24.

³⁶ Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993), p. 86.

³⁷ Beijing Review 22 September 1980, p.217; quoted in W.E. Willmott, op. cit., p. 217; cited in D. W. Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 22.

The regime used overwork and starvation to re-educate the “new people” to erase their old traits and to foster new traits which the regime needed. Therefore, everybody had to work. If they did not work they could not survive because “No work, no food. Money was abolished.”³⁸ Sophi, a survivor, remarked: “Khmer Rouge control over rations was a way of controlling the people...”³⁹ People who were not healthy faced starvation because they could not go to work for the regime. For instance, “In one village in the Phnom Srok area, 1,500 out of 2,000 people are said to have died of starvation in the last months of 1975.”⁴⁰

2.2 Agrarian State

The Democratic Kampuchea applied most human resources to agriculture. The youth had to build dams, irrigation, or sometimes worked in farm while the middle age had to work in rice fields. The children had to collect the bulls and cows’ drop for producing fertilizer while the elderly worked to support the youth and middle aged group by caring for cows and bulls, producing baskets, gardening, raising animals, or taking care of babies.

Soon after the 17 April victory, the Khmer Rouge regime evacuated people from all cities and provincial towns of Cambodia to the countryside. Those people were classified to be the new people. Some new people needed re-education to become members of the new society. To succeed in this re-education, new people had to work and live as the peasants. Work sites were the schools for re-educating those from the cities.

³⁸ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 29.

³⁹ Sophi interviewed by Chandler, Kiernan, and Lim, the Early Phases of Liberation in Northwestern Cambodia, working paper 10, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ben Kiernan, Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia, p. 380.

In the DK regime all people had to work as mentioned in Article 12 of the constitution saying: “...Every citizen of Democratic Kampuchea is guaranteed a living. All workers are the masters of their factories. All peasants are the masters of the rice paddies and fields. All other laborers have the right to work. There is absolutely no unemployment in Democratic Kampuchea.”⁴¹

The changing from office work to farm work was one issue and the new environment was another one. Diseases, shortage of food, lack of shelter, and forced labor were the biggest problems for those from the cities in their new home in the countryside. They had no experiences to live in the new area as the “base people” did. There they faced the new environment and new job which was hard for them to cope with. As a result, some of them died from malaria, diarrhea, malnutrition, starvation, overwork, mistreatment, and punishment.

2.3 Class War

While some new people were executed, some others were purified to be “people of *Angkar*”; the people who could follow the revolution. First, soldiers, police, and high ranking officials under the Lon Nol regime were classified to be the regime’s enemies. They were targeted by the regime for execution. According to Kiernan, “Police, officers, military policemen, and pilots were killed immediately.”⁴² A Khmer Rouge cadre represented *Angkar* and he or she could decide to kill or not to kill. Sometimes, if the cadre wanted to kill someone, they could just accuse him or her of being a soldier even if he or she wasn’t.

The Khmer Rouge took entire families to be executed if the Khmer Rouge learnt that the family heads were their enemies. As Heder states: “.....When Phnom Penh was captured certain military units were given orders to round up and kill

⁴¹ Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993), pp. 85-86.

⁴² Ben Kiernan, The Pol Pot Regime. Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79, p. 170.

military officers and civil servants.”⁴³ The Khmer Rouge had to be careful with all their enemies as Nuon Chea, one of the keys Khmer Rouge leaders, said: “We worry most of all about the enemy inside.”⁴⁴ For the security of their party, the Khmer Rouge set up a policy to purge their enemies, “.....pulling them completely out by their roots so as to defend the party, to defend the proletariat, defend the line of independence and mastery.”⁴⁵

Khmer Rouge thought that the number of people lost due to killing was not so important to them. They wanted to keep only those who could follow their policy. Who ever did not want to follow *Angkar* was considered *khmang* (enemy) who must be purged from *Angkar*.

The Khmer Rouge always spied on people to find out who was *khmang* and then they killed people whom *Angkar* found to have done something wrong or against the rules. It is too strict to follow *Angkar*; not to work hard, love affairs, disease were against the rules of *Angkar*. A head of a technical group of the Royal Railway of Cambodia complained: “*Angkar* is very strict in practice, they would torture or not give food to whom they thought were *khmang*. This is the Khmer Rouge policy that asks us to sacrifice. There was not enough food but people had to work hard.”⁴⁶ A nurse of a hospital in Phnom Penh said: “This is the cruel policy of the Khmer Rouge who force us to work under the cold or heat.”⁴⁷

Educating the capitalists and imperialists to become the people of *Angkar* is another key issue which caused a lot of people suffered. Generally, the Khmer Rouge

⁴³ Stephen Heder, *Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan* (Working Paper No. 70, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991), p. 8.

⁴⁴ D. W. Ashley, *Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991*, p. 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ interview with informant number 49, 30 November 2004

⁴⁷ interview with informant number 46, 09 November 2004

divided Cambodian people into two big groups, the “base people” and the “new people”. The “base people” were empowered while “the deportees [new people] were last on distribution lists but first on execution lists and had no political rights.”⁴⁸ “The party.....put a feudal, imperialistic, capitalistic, reactionary, and oppressor class over an oppressed class of worker-farmers, poor and lower-middle peasants.”⁴⁹ “The organization continually guides them to get rid of individualistic traits, “such as the traits of intellectuals”⁵⁰.

With this new system the Khmer Rouge hoped to eliminate the old working system of the previous regimes. In the new system “The Organization attacked the chronic diseases of Khmer bureaucrats: officiousness, authoritarianism, and affecting a lifestyle different from that of the peasants.”⁵¹ Contrarily, the Khmer Rouge regime says: “...our measures to send intellectuals to live with the people in cooperatives.” Similarly, Article 2 of the constitution states: “All important general means of production are the collective property of the people’s State and the common property of the people’s collectives.....”⁵² The regime explains: “Only in the countryside can the intellectuals got [sic] to know better the people’s problems.”⁵³

This was class war. The Khmer Rouge wanted to kill intellectuals but appointed the uneducated people to positions of power. It was the policy of *Angkar*

⁴⁸ Stephen Heder, Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance (Asian Studies Monographs No. 027, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1989), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Timothy Carney (Editor), Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State, An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 24.

⁵¹ Timothy Carney (Editor), Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion, p. 11.

⁵² Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993), p. 83.

⁵³ D. W Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 28.

Leu (High Organization or Central Party). They considered people who were not peasants as capitalists and corrupters. A journalist of a Khmer language newspaper said: “Khmer Rouge wanted to eliminate capitalist, imperialists who they believed caused the poor to suffer.”⁵⁴ The Khmer Rouge believed that educated people were people of the old regime but their revolution did not need those persons who they were afraid of being against them. Therefore, the Khmer Rouge asked the educated people and government officials to further their study or to work in their government but in fact they tricked those people into identifying themselves so they could be killed.

It seems that the regime empowered peasants, laborers, and the lower class people but it put pressure on the intellectuals, government officials, and the businessmen. “...the objective of our revolutionary struggle has been to seize state power and put it into the hands of workers and peasants by attacking and toppling the entire political administration of oppression.”⁵⁵ The Khmer Rouge constitution also stresses the power of the peasants, for instance, Article 1 of the constitution notes: “.....State of Kampuchea is a State of the people, workers, peasants, and all other Kampuchean laborers” and Article 5: “...the Kampuchean People’s Representative Assembly shall be made up of 250 members, representing the peasants 150, representing the labors and other working people 50, and representing the revolutionary army 50.”⁵⁶ The Khmer Rouge leaders believed in a different way that “poor and ignorant to be head of something believe they were honest men....party candidates had to be from the lower class such as poor and lower middle peasants..... in contrast, the party believes that those who knew how to read and write were already corrupted by old system.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ interview with informant number 31, 07 December 2004

⁵⁵ Stephen Heder, Pol Pot and Khieu Sampan, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993), pp. 83-84.

⁵⁷ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State. An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 25.

The Khmer Rouge rarely gave officials of the old regime posts in their government because they did not trust all those officials :“...we don’t use old workers, because if we used old workers without carefully selecting and purifying them first, there would be many complications, politically, which would lead to more difficulties for us.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, when power came to the hands of the people who dislike the city dwellers, their hatred would come out and the revenge and jealousy exploded.

Similarly, some scholars believe not just Pol Pot but also Khmer people influenced this kind of killing. From day to day, new people did not support the regime but they tried to fight back or did something against *Angkar*. A commune leader said: “we could not be patient because we saw the suffering with our own eyes”⁵⁹ and a hospital officer agreed: “we were not happy with *Angkar* and we wanted to fight against them.”⁶⁰ Pol Pot argued: “Each man that you kill has family. These relatives will bear a grudge in their heart against usso by your actions, you have increased our enemies and decreased our friends”⁶¹ and all this circle of hatred caused more confrontation and more killing between the Khmer Rouge cadres and the people or the Khmer Rouge cadres themselves. The more aggressive the people became, the more killing and torture.

In contrast, the Khmer Rouge cadres and some base people were assigned to live and work in cooperatives as group or team work leaders. They worked directly with the people. Every leader was the most powerful person in their own area. Those leaders could arrest, torture, or even execute their cooperative members any time with or without reason if they wanted. They had their own bodyguards who played a very important part in execution and punishment in their cooperatives.

⁵⁸ D. W. Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 9.

⁵⁹ interview with informant number 42, 06 December 2004

⁶⁰ interview with informant number 45, 06 November 2004

⁶¹ D. W Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 23.

2.4 Intraparty Purging

It was not only the old regime's officials and new people who were the victims of the regime but also the Khmer Rouge's comrades and base people were the victims of the regime as well. Khmer Rouge comrades were executed because of the conflict inside the regime itself. Truly, the Khmer Rouge movement comprised a few groups which had different ideologies. Evidently, since 1970 they killed each other in a struggle for party control.

In addition, "cadre-building" policy concentrated on forcing *Angkar* officials to "study from the people to become like the people."⁶² To achieve that, "All personnel of the *Angkar*, including military and ordinary peasants, engage in weekly criticism and self-criticism sessions aimed to root out "individualistic, personal character traits."⁶³ "Self-interest is the essence of the capitalist class"⁶⁴ and "each member has the duty of checking on his fellow man. Judging each other and getting rid of these personal characteristics..."⁶⁵ This policy brought the Khmer Rouge cadre to kill each other in the cause of individual hatred, jealousy, or for power. They may accuse their colleague of doing this or that if they want to destroy any cadre.

This policy also brought DK to eliminate anyone who was pro-Vietnamese communist, and DK supported anyone who was pro-Cambodian communist. One faction of KPRP supporters, who were considered "old communists", was pro-Vietnam while another, "new communist", were independent communists. In fact, the new communists started to arrest and kill the old ones who came back from Vietnam

⁶² Timothy Carney (Editor), Communist Party Power in Kampuchea: Documents and Discussion, p. 11.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁴ D. W Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 8.

⁶⁵ Roel Burgler, Democratic Kampuchea: The Origins of A Totalitarian Socialist State. An Attempt to Analyse Khmer Rouge Authoritarianism, p. 24.

in the early 1970s, as Steinberg notes: “There is evidence that many of returnees who trained by Vietnam, were assassinated under the order from the party’s Central Committee.”⁶⁶ The purging continued up to the fall of its regime, for example, Keo Meas was arrested in 1976⁶⁷ and Touch Phoeum and Koy Thuon, were arrested and accused of being part of a CIA network, in January, 1977.⁶⁸

It seems that the Cambodian communist faction who got education from France (new communists) had more power than another faction of Cambodian communists who established under Vietnamese patronage (old communists). The new communists said that the birth of CPK was in 1960 and the old one said that the birth of CPK was in 1951.

As Chandler states: “The decision to purify the CPK was related to the decisions already discussed. “Old” communists were useless in a “New” kind of revolution. Anyone who suggested that Cambodians should take note of the balance of power in post- American Indochina was considered a traitor to a primarily national struggle which the Cambodians, by dint of their previous victories, were uniquely equipped to win.”⁶⁹

The cadres were used to spy on each other and if one was found doing wrong he or she would face serious punishment or execution as stated in Article 10 of the constitution: “Actions violating the laws of the people’s State are as follows: Dangerous activities in opposition to the people’s State must be condemned to the highest degree. Other cases are subject to constructive re-education in framework of the State’s or people’s organization.”⁷⁰ There was no court system or regular rule for

⁶⁶ D.J Steinberg, In Search of Southeast Asia, p. 379.

⁶⁷ David Chandler, Facing the Cambodian Past , p. 216.

⁶⁸ David Chandler, Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s secret Prison, p. 130.

⁶⁹ David Chandler, Facing the Cambodian Past, p. 231.

⁷⁰ Raoul Jenar, The Cambodian Constitutions (1953-1993), p. 85.

arrest, torture, or execution at all and it seems that the Khmer Rouge did that based on individual or group decisions. So base on this regulation some of the Khmer Rouge comrades were executed by their own colleagues.

Furthermore, different ideologies among the Khmer Rouge themselves also led to suffering events throughout time of their struggle. Pol Pot started killing Khmer Rouge who belonged to other groups since the early of 1970s in some liberation zones such as in Koh Kong province and other places. “On November 1973, the KK[Khmer Rouge]⁷¹ kidnapped three KR [Khmer Rumdos]⁷² cadres near Angkor Borei Mountain who have not been since [heard from then].”⁷³

Among those main groups, there were only two groups, Stalinists and Issarakists which were secure because they had the same anti-Vietnamese policy and other groups were purged by the Pol Pot clique. Evidently, in 1977 and 1978 the biggest conflict within the Khmer Rouge occurred and as a result, thousands of Khmer Rouge cadres were executed while others fled to Vietnam. The central party ordered their militants to arrest all those in every region around the country. They used only one word “*Khmag* or enemy” to arrest all those people. Sometimes they invited those whom they wanted to arrest to the central party to study or have a meeting or sometimes they went to their homes to arrest them. Day by day, Pol Pot and his close fellows worked directly with his militants. However, other groups were forgotten or placed in inactive positions or replace by Pol Pot’s people and finally, they were kicked out of the party to work as simple people.

⁷¹ Pol Pot group

⁷² Sihanoukist

⁷³ Kenneth Quinn’s studies, U.S. State Department officer, cited in Kiernan, The Pol Pot Regime, Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979, p. 66.

3. Foreigners' Influence

China has had a good relationship with Cambodia since Funan, a pre-Angkor kingdom, which focused on trade. But in the Prince Sihanouk period, China-Cambodia relationship focused more on communist ideology. After the 1970 coup d'état, China strongly supported the Khmer Rouge and Sihanoukists. When the Khmer Rouge took power, China continued supporting the regime and when the Khmer Rouge was overthrown, China still supported the Khmer Rouge and Sihanoukist.

Vietnam was not so different from China. During the Prince Sihanouk era, he supported North Vietnam to fight against the South and the United States. At the same time the North gave shelter and trained many Cambodian communists who became high ranking officials in the Democratic Kampuchea. When the Prince was overthrown, Hanoi helped Khmer Rouge fight against Lon Nol and the United States from the East and Northeast of Cambodia while other groups of Khmer Rouge fought from other directions. Finally, they defeated Lon Nol.

All these connections among the Khmer Rouge, Hanoi, and China gave some clue to survivors to think about foreigners' involvement in the Khmer Rouge's killing. The victims of the regime blamed China while the regime itself blamed Vietnam as responsible for this killing field. A Christian at New Life Church in Phnom Penh believed: "This is the plan of someone to order Khmer kill Khmer."⁷⁴ Similarly, a head librarian remarked: "Other country used Khmer Rouge to kill Khmer and then get Khmer territory for their people."⁷⁵ Someone or other countries in this case refer to China or Vietnam.

During the war with Lon Nol regime, the Khmer Rouge got military assistance from China and got some fighters, as Vietnamese troops, from Vietnam. Most Khmer Rouge in the Eastern and Northeast zone were under Vietnamese patronage, in the

⁷⁴ interview with informant number 6, 10 November, 2004

⁷⁵ interview with informant number 4, 8 November, 2004

term of both armed force assistance and cadre training while the other zones were mostly supported by China. When those different groups took power, some groups favored Vietnam but some others favored China. Later on, China and Vietnam turned from friend to enemy, and the Khmer Rouge faced conflict inside the party which led to the purging of some high ranking cadres, who favored Vietnam, namely, So Phim, Vorn Vett....

What survivors find hard to believe is that there is no easy explanation why Khmer killed Khmer and for what. That is why they believe that Khmer Rouge must have been following someone's order.

Some survivors believe that one reason for this killing field is the actions of China. They believe that Khmer Rouge killed people not from their own mind but from an outsider's. This theory holds that it was not a Khmer's idea to kill Khmer people but that there was someone [or country] who ordered them to do so. Some survivors thought that foreigner wanted Khmer Rouge to kill all Khmers and then replaced them with their own people. A researcher said: "The Khmer Rouge killed Khmer people in order to replace them with other nation, China."⁷⁶ An administrator at one local NGO agreed: "The Khmer Rouge were influenced by Chinese policy."⁷⁷ Some others thought that China wanted to apply their communist theory in a new environment. A writer stressed: "China chose Cambodia to apply their communist theory so they killed the democratic people."⁷⁸ In addition, a deputy director of department of Ministry of Planning said: "I think China ordered the Khmer Rouge to apply their communist theory." On the other hand, some survivors believe the Khmer Rouge might copy Chinese communist theory. A lecturer at one university in Phnom Penh said: "Khmer Rouge followed the Chinese cultural revolution."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ interview with informant Number 32, 08 December 2004

⁷⁷ interview with informant number 12, 18 November 2004

⁷⁸ interview with informant number 34, 09 December 2004

⁷⁹ interview with informant number 13, 19 November 2004

Chandler writes: “Chinese inspiration and patronage were concealed from the people, but Chinese “guests” of the regime were impossible to hide. Over five thousand of them worked in Cambodia in the Pol Pot era.”⁸⁰ According to Chandler, the regime exported several thousand tons [of rice] to China to pay for Chinese aid.⁸¹ Evan Gottesman stresses that the PRK accused Pol Pot of exporting between 100,000 and 150,000 tons of rice to China.⁸²

In reality, Democratic Kampuchea received aid from China, mostly, military assistance. And the regime tried to hide the truth, the suffering of the people from China. A S-21 tour guide, who was evacuated to Kompong Cham province, claimed: “Khmer Rouge hid us in a hole in the ground when Chinese delegates visited the dam project at our working site.”⁸³ However, there was no convincing evidence that China ordered the Khmer Rouge to kill people or to follow their communist theory.

The informants believe in China’s involvement in this killing field might be due to the fact that they could not find any convincing answer for the killing of Khmers by Khmers. Therefore, they assume it was the act of another nation. Another reason was because the informants learnt that China was the only country who was Democratic Kampuchea’s friend, and there were a number of Chinese advisers in Cambodia during the period of the killing field.

In another case, the perception of the survivors may be influenced by the political propaganda of the Heng Samrin regime, the post-Khmer Rouge era, who blamed the Khmer Rouge and China for the killing field due to the regime’s alliance with Vietnam and the Soviet Union, which had a strong rivalry with China, so the

⁸⁰ David Chandler, “Foreword”, Pol Pot’s Little Red Book by Henri Locard (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), p. xiv.

⁸¹ David Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History (Yale University, 1991), p. 260.

⁸² Quigly DeNike and Robinson, “Genocide in Cambodia”, p. 538, cited in Evan Gottesman. Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge (Yale University Press, 2003), p. 151.

⁸³ interview with informant number 26, 02 December 2004

regime tried to educate the survivors that China was involved in killing their relatives, friends, and a cause of their suffering.

The perceptions of the informants play an important part in studying of the Khmer Rouge regime, however, there is no convincing evidences. As such, it is only the belief of some informants, so it must be careful to generalize this part.

Chandler quotes Pol Pot as saying: “We do not wish to copy anyone; we shall use our experience gained in the liberation struggle. There are no schools, faculties or university in the traditional sense, although they did exist in our country prior to liberation, because we wish to do away with all vestiges of the past.”⁸⁴ It seems that Democratic Kampuchea used their own theory, as a new creation to apply to Cambodia. They believed that the poorest of the poor were honest and blank, children and uneducated people were clean and obedient.

This was their mistake in leading Cambodia into a disaster. There was a big gap between the central cadres and the local cadres. The central cadres were well educated persons and they created the theory but the local cadres were poor peasants and low or uneducated persons and they applied the theory in practice. Unfortunately, they interpreted the theory and practiced it in the wrong way that is in such a way that their degree and type of control of the country varied from one place to another. It seemed that this difference was based on the local cadres themselves but not based on the central party. Each of them had each own interpretation of the same theory.

In contrast, without blaming themselves, the Khmer Rouge leaders accused Vietnam of being involved in this killing field by saying that Vietnam set up Vietnamese agents inside Democratic Kampuchea and they killed people without the acknowledgement of the central party. Khieu Samphan in 1980, admitted there were some acts on the part of the party that affected the lives of the people but not on the

⁸⁴ David Chandler, The Tragedy of Cambodian History, p. 304.

scale of a massacre and only as a result of Vietnamese agents, Khmer agents whom the Vietnamese used to infiltrate the ranks of state power.....⁸⁵

To answer to their defeat, Pol Pot gave a speech in 1988 by saying: “Two sources of errors. Firstly, during the 1970-75 period, they had concentrated on defeating US imperialism and building socialism and had therefore not noticed the work of Vietnamese agents building up a network within CPK ranks. Secondly, we appointed cadre from [among] poor farmers who didn’t have the knowledge for leadership. Many of them were subverted by Vietnamese agents....”⁸⁶

In short, the killing field and other suffering events which happened not only resulted from Khmer Rouge ideology but also from poverty, personal hatred, and mismanagement of the Khmer Rouge government and maybe from foreigners’ influence, as survivors believed.

The Prince Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes played a very important part in these sufferings. Government officials and the businessmen grew richer and richer while the peasants and the workers grew poorer and poorer. Corruption and war caused poverty and hatred among Khmer people.

The Khmer Rouge ideology and policy motivated the poor people’s hatred and jealousy which resulted in all the sufferings, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the mistake in managing the government allowed some people to use the regime to their own advantage. In addition, Khmer Rouge leaders were worried too much about their enemy inside the party which resulted in the purging their comrades.

⁸⁵ D. W. Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 19.

⁸⁶ D. W. Ashley, Pol Pot Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking 1985-1991, p. 22.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SUFFERING

Before start talking about the new people, we have to know a little bit about the difference between the new people and the base people. According to Heder's *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance*, as early as 1973, there was a clear classification of Cambodian people in the liberation zones. They categorized people into three groups; the first category was *penh sith* or full rights [base people] who received the full theoretical food ration, had rights to join any political organization, including the army and party, and could hold any political position. The second category was *triem* or candidate [base people] who were second on the ration distribution list and had rights to hold certain low ranking political positions. The last category was *bannheu* or depositors [new people] who were last on distribution lists, first on execution lists and had no political rights. The *bannheu* could become the *triem* if they cooperated with the regime very well and they also could have minor positions. In contrast, the *penh sith* could fall into the *triem* or even *bannheu* or the *triem* could fall to *bannheu* if they opposed to the regime.

In practice, the Khmer Rouge divided Khmer people into two principal groups clearly; new people or devotee or 17 [April] people and base people or 18 [March] people. Base people, who comprised of *penh sith* and *triem*, could be called *neak moulthan*, or *old people* or 18 [March] people, or the *black people*. They were defined as people from liberation base areas or from the "basic classes" of revolution, the poor and the middle peasantry. While new people, who were categorized into the *bannheu*, could also be called *17 April people*, was defined that people who newly liberated in 17 April 1975, who lived in the towns or urban areas.¹

¹ Stephen Heder, *Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance*, p. 5.

From this point we could understand that the new people or April 17 People (as called by the Khmer Rouge) were the middle or high class people who lived in urban areas, and were forced to labor in the countryside after the victory of the Khmer Rouge on the April 17, 1975. These people did not have the same rights as the base people, the peasants or workers who joined the revolution before April 17, 1975, had received.

1. New People and Base People

On the 17 April, 1975, the Khmer Rouge captured the whole country. First, they ordered people, who lived in cities and other provincial towns, to leave their homes for three days by warning them that America would bomb soon. They told the people not to bring much with them because they will be allowed to come back home in three days. Needless to say, this was a lie told to convince people to leave. Those evacuees were categorized to be the new people.

Khmer Rouge considered the new people as their enemies. The new people who were from families of army and police, high ranking officers, and wealthy were targeted by *Angkar* to be eliminated. All those families were killed right after the Khmer Rouge took power. Usually, the Khmer Rouge killed the whole family which they called “the family of the enemy”. They didn’t want to keep anyone in the family as they said ‘dig grass, dig its root’. Educated people such as teachers, medical doctors, students, and government officials were killed later because all those people were “the people of imperialism or capitalism.” All these words, the Khmer Rouge used to refer to new people, even small children or new born babies.

Angkar differentiated base and new people in respect to the right to join the party. New people could not become party members but some base people who joined the revolution could. Some base people were appointed to positions from the central to local level and some others were not. The base people went to work just like the new people but most of them were group leaders, they showed the new people how to work. Then they rest or went from one group to another. Base people who joined the revolution had more power while the base people who did not join the revolution but

lived in liberated area before April 17, 1975 had to work the same as new people, however they were trusted more than the new people.

A traditional dancer at the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts noted: “the relationship between base people and new people is the same as master and slave.” The differentiation did not exist in Cambodia before but the Khmer Rouge created these categories to divide their liberated people and the people who belonged to the Lon Nol Regime. Students who came to Phnom Penh to study were categorized new people while their parents who lived in liberated zone were categorized base people. These differentiations were caused by *Angkar*'s policy and also work experiences in the rice field. In some regions, there was a big difference between the base and the new people in term of food, work, health, and power. Base people had more rights, had shelter, had enough food, and had a good relationship with the local Khmer Rouge cadres. A NGO staff, whose father died of starvation in Takeo, said: “The base people accused the new people of being *khmang* and eat their food but the new people accused the base people of treating them badly.”²

Moreover, among groups of *triem* and group of *penh sith* people, the *triem* group was more friendly than the other one. In general, some base people were very kind but some were not. A deputy head of office, who was evacuated to Battambang, assumed: “new people are their *khmang* because we lived under the Lon Nol regime. Base people thought new people go to eat their crops because we brought nothing with us. They looked down on new people. Base people said that new people eat everything and eat badly.”³

Base people were empowered by Democratic Kampuchea. Most base people lived in their homes and they had some food left to eat. If their sons or daughters joined the Khmer Rouge army, or they themselves had positions, they had more power in their community, as Loung Ung, the author of “*First They Killed My*

² interview with informant number 11, 17 November 2004

³ interview with informant number 17, 23 November 2004

Father”, points out: “Among them, the chief’s family is the fattest and wear only new black, shiny clothes, not the faded gray rags we have on.”⁴ New people in some areas were placed in the forest to establish new villages with no any base people there. Khmer Rouge asked them to grow rice or other agricultural crops in order to support themselves. In nearly every place they had to clear the land first and then plant the crop. Faced with this situation, old aged people and small children died every day because they could not adapt with hard work but less food and no health care.

New people were given more attention than base people. The cadres closed their eyes if base people did something wrong but open their eyes if new people did the same. A tour guide at Tuol Sleng Genocidal Museum, who was evacuated to Kampong Cham province expressed her feeling: “To live with the base people in her area the same as living in a tiger hole.”⁵

Not only shelter and food but also working conditions were different too. A commune councilor, who was evacuated to Kandal province said: “The hard jobs the base people kept for the new people and the easy or good jobs such as cooking, and gardening they kept for themselves or their group.”⁶

At the first stage, new people faced execution and starvation while base people did not face all these things because there was no threat of execution over them and they could still have their own storage so they were not starving. For new people, this stage was “the purification stage.” The Khmer Rouge killed all their *khmang* but they wanted to keep only those who could follow their *padevat* or revolution. Later on when storage of the base people finished some of them were not very different from new people. Furthermore, at the end of the regime, around 1977-78, some base people who had position were executed. The cadres from *Nearadei* (Northwestern zone) were

⁴ Loung Ung, First They Killed My Father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), p. 89.

⁵ interview with informant number 26, 02 December 2004

⁶ interview with informant number 39, 30 November 2004

sent to do this execution across the country. However, some other base people who still had positions in their community were not starving.

2. New Settlement

2.1 *New Life in the Countryside*

Survivors who were away from their families to study or work in Phnom Penh during the evacuation went back to meet their families and their relatives in their native provinces. In this case, the Khmer Rouge did not allow those people to live with their families but found the new places for them. The reason was that the Khmer Rouge considered those people as new people who did not join the Khmer Rouge before April 17, 1975. A lecturer recalled that she was evacuated to Kompong Thom for a month and then she asked to go to Takeo, her native province. At Takeo she was evacuated to a different district. She did not know the reason for this evacuation and she was worried about the new situation in the new place. She was single and a first year university student but she lied to *Angkar* that she was a widow so she was grouped in a widow unit and worked less than the youth.⁷

Some evacuees were placed to live in the same villages with the base people while some other evacuees were placed in new villages in the forest or abandoned villages. *Angkar* gave seed to the new people to plant the crops. Because of the shortage of food, new people tried to plant some supply but sometimes, after their crop was ready to harvest, the Khmer Rouge asked them to leave for another place and leave all their crops behind. They survived by gathering wild vegetables from the forest, fishing, and catching frogs or others small wildlife.

The Khmer Rouge urged people to work hard so that they would have plenty of food but under this regime people never had enough food. Moreover, they told

⁷ interview with informant number 1, 05 November 2004

people to be patient and to work and when “we had rice we will sell rice to buy machines so we don’t need to work hard like this.”

Day by day, food conditions grew worse and worse but work conditions never changed. Together with the execution and diseases this caused many new people to die. New people had no shelter, farming land, and basic things for survival because they left all those things in their houses during evacuation. In most area, the discrimination was evident between new people and base people. Environment and their lack of experience also hurt the new people. They could not cope with the new environment and the lack of mosquito nets, the lack of information on which kind of wild vegetable they should eat, and the lack of knowledge how to fish, to hunt, or to catch animals. From time to time they were attacked by malaria, malnutrition, and starvation.

Most new people who had no experience on rice field or farms got punished or blamed more often. Some new people did not know rice plants or oxen and buffalo and so they did not know how to work in the rice fields. As a result, some new people got *Korsang* (educate or blamed) from *Angkar*, because they did not work very well or made mistakes.

In most new places, new people had to build their own shelter or they had to live on the ground under the base people’s homes. A lecturer at university and a former head of study office, who was evacuated to Pursat province during the Khmer Rouge regime said: “The Khmer Rouge cadres were the same as *Tevada* (angels), and the new people were the same as *Norouk*, people who live in hell.”⁸

Beside all those things, there were political lessons. After work, people had to listen to political ideology often, during night time after meals about two hours. A Christian said: “It took us up to 10 pm and sometime I fell asleep in the meeting.”⁹ This lesson was quite different from the real situation. The Khmer Rouge always

⁸ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

⁹ interview with informant number 6, 10 November 2004

talked about development and their success but in reality people were starving. The Khmer Rouge cadre wanted to repeat the same thing more and more because they were not tired and their stomachs were full but the people wanted to go to bed because they were very tired and very hungry.

The Khmer Rouge always told the people in the meetings: “The historical wheel moves now if someone dares to stop and put their hands into it, they lose hands and put their legs into it, they will lose legs.” A policeman whose parents were killed in Svay Reang province recalled: “In every meeting, the cadre warned that to keep you brings no gain, to lose you brings no loss, and it made us frightened.”¹⁰

2.2 Grouping and Working

Starvation was not the only thing that new people faced. Overwork was also one of the most serious difficulties. The Khmer Rouge divided people into many groups based on age and gender. In general, Khmer Rouge grouped the people into:

Mobile group: group of mixed single youth of 15 to 30 years old or young married couple with no children from different villages. The mobile group worked for district, or region. They did not belong to their village so they had to move around in their region away from their families. This group was the most important one. They were the strongest labor group of *Angkar*. Khmer Rouge divided this group into groups of female youth and groups of male youth. They worked mostly on big dam and irrigation projects. There were very strict rules for this group. If someone went home without permission, he or she would be killed, or if they fell in love with each other, both of them would be killed too. The male and female groups were sheltered in different camps. A dancer who was in the female youth group said: “I worked mostly on agriculture; building dams, irrigation, rice planting, and building

¹⁰ interview with informant number 38, 25 November 2004

earthwork..... When I was sick I never asked for rest because I was afraid the Khmer Rouge would kill me.”¹¹ This group work mostly outside their village.

The middle age group was group of married people with children. This group worked in their villages and stayed with their own family. They worked on rice plantations and doing small irrigation projects in their villages. They were the most important group of rice production. When the region needed more force to finish their projects earlier, the middle age group was sent to help the mobile group as well, especially after they finished plantation.

The elderly group was made up of old, ill, and disabled people, who produced tools for agricultural work and maintained village gardens and they helped to repair thing in their own village. They were also assigned to take care of babies while their parents were working.

The children group collected fertilizer such as cow dung and worked in earthwork projects. In some places children also studied some Khmer language and political lessons. This group was the most important one for the Khmer Rouge and was considered the pillars of their revolution in the future because the Khmer Rouge believed that children were blank and clean so they tried to teach those children their communist ideology in order to make those children follow them. The Khmer Rouge separated children from their families in order to protect them from their families' influence of the old society. They told the children: “ You are the children of *Angkar* and *Angkar* will take care of all of you. Don't go home, *Angkar* is more important than your parents”.

In some case the groups were divided into small working teams. Work was divided among each group and if any group could finish first they could rest.

People in all groups, except the children's group, had to work from very early morning around 5 or 6am until to 6 or 7 pm with 30 minutes to one hour of noon break for a meal. When *Angkar* wanted to complete a project quickly, people had to

¹¹ interview with informant number 10, 15 November 2004

work at nighttime as well, under the moonlight. The work, mostly, start from 8 or 9 pm to 10 or 1 am. They called this work *samrock* or intensive work.

The village chiefs or local Khmer Rouge cadres were responsible for assigning people in their village to work. One person could be assigned to work in many kinds of job depending on the needs of *Angkar*. Today you could be assigned to work in fertilizer group, and the next day you could be asked to work with the cooking or plowing groups.

2.3 Food Condition

The rations were divided among each group through their *seitakech* or economist or the cook if they were assigned to work far away from the communal kitchen. The cook of each group had to carry rations for the laborers. If they worked close to the communal kitchen they ate in a communal kitchen in their village. The Khmer Rouge cadres and the group leaders normally, ate separate from the workers with different food, the special one, prepared by the cook, at the kitchen.

Enough food was available only during the harvest period or short time after that. Khmer Rouge cadre told people that if they worked they had food but if they did not work, there was no food for them. For the ill person who did not go to work, the ration was cut to half or cut all ration if they stayed home longer than tree days.

A few months after the Khmer Rouge came to power, people could cook by themselves for their own family and the food condition was not so serious because they had some food from their houses or they had things for exchange. After that *Angkar* ordered that all people had to eat communally and had to bring all cooking materials to the communal kitchen except one spoon and one plate for each.

With this policy, it was hard to cook because when they saw any smoke the cadres would come and check because *Angkar* did not allow people to cook any food. Still some people could cook but they had to do it secretly. For example, if they cooked potato, they had to hide them under wild herb in their kettle so that the Khmer

Rouge could not see potato and they would think that people boiled traditional medicine.

Everybody tried to do many things in many ways to survive. The product of rice crop was good but the food was less and less. Some families had conflict because of starvation. Some children stole food from their own families. Some family members tried to hide their food from the other members in the same families. To survive, stealing, picking up the wild vegetable, and doing exchange were the key things to do. People had to eat everything that they could eat to survive. A dancer said that people's foot print but animal's dropping because they ate wild vegetable the same as animal, sometimes without cooking and all those things were the food of animal that is why their excrement was not different from animal.¹²

People started to catch small frog, grasshopper, or farm crab and then they ate it without cooking. The wild vegetable and animal was less and less while people starved more and more. Some people ate human flesh, especially from their dead children.

In most areas, new people could not pick the crop which they had grown around their house because all those crops were considered belonging to *Angkar*. Because of too much starvation some people picked those crops secretly, especially during night time so that the cadre would not know. If they found out, those people could be killed or jailed. A lecturer, who was evacuated to Kandal province mentioned that we were the thieves who steal our own crop because the Khmer Rouge considered that all crops belonged to *Angkar* so there was no individual crop.¹³

Exchange was another way to do to survive. The exchange could be fish, chicken, rice, sugar, potato, or other foods. There was no clear measurement for this exchange. It depended on food quantity. If there was more food in the village they could get more food from their exchange. For example, one watch for one chicken,

¹² interview with informant number 28, 03 December 2004

¹³ interview with informant number 33, 08 December 2004

one *dormleung* (ten ounces) of gold for two or three cans of rice, a necklace for a can of salt. A vice head of office said that people exchanged sugar for fish, tobacco or fish for rice or chicken for rice and medicine.¹⁴ New people did not have tools to fish or they did not have livestock but the new people had some valuable things such as watch, gold, clothes, medicine etc. So to survive new people had to do exchange as the base people needed all those things. Exchange was done in very secret way. When they got food, they had to eat secretly too. If the cadre learned that the exchange was going on they would kill those who exchanged things.

The base people and the new people had the same rations, officially, but the base people ate extra food secretly because they had a good relationship with the cadre and they could pick their own gardens.

Due to the lack of food, people became thinner and thinner. Some people fell down and died in the rice fields, some other people were swollen and had diarrhea. Some others died of malnutrition.

Not every area around the country faced all these starvations. In some areas people did not starve but they had enough food to eat. A Khmer literature lecturer, who was evacuated to Kompong Cham province, said that in the village where he lived, he had enough food. He ate rice but not watery rice; no starvation.¹⁵ And a Christian, who was evacuated to Rorveang village, Pursat province said: “Everybody in the village where I lived ate rice and had enough food.”¹⁶

2.4 Torture and Punishment

Beside starvation, torture and punishment was another threat. The torture was not the same from place to place; it depended on the local leaders in each area. There was no policy from the central government how to torture or how severe it should be.

¹⁴ interview with informant number 17, 23 November 2004

¹⁵ interview with informant number 14, 19 November 2004

¹⁶ interview with informant number 32, 07 December 2004

More often in the torture in rural areas was not the same as in S-21 (now Tuol Sleng Genocidal Museum). The Khmer Rouge normally used their hands and feet to beat and kick or sometimes they used a stick, mostly bamboo, or tied the victim up at night and left them to be bitten by mosquitoes, or covered their heads with plastic, or increased their work load and reduced their food ration.

Some survivors did not know why they punished them. There was no clear reason for that, sometimes. There was no regular rule in torturing, it depended on the feeling of the local cadres. They did what they wanted to do. A dancer witnessed Khmer Rouge buried people up to the neck level and they kicked and beat them.¹⁷ The Khmer Rouge did what they wanted and happy with. An traditional dancer teacher said that in his village in Kompong Thom province the Khmer Rouge cadre interrogated people in a crocodile farm while he was in the prison, and when everybody heard the scream of the victims, they shock and panic.¹⁸

Arn Yan of "*Children of Cambodian's Killing Field*", described what the Khmer Rouge did with his father, at first they let his father eat what he wanted and then they interrogated him with torture, they hit and covered his head with plastic bag, and then put his head upside down into the full water jar and three days later "the King of Death" killed him.¹⁹

A teacher at the Royal University of Fine Arts, who once was jailed in Sandann district, recalled that a small girl was jailed in Kompong Thom Province because she said: "I wish America would bomb all of you [base people]" because she was angry with a daughter of base people who beat her. She was jailed for her words. The small girl was tortured to her death in that prison. He continued that he himself did not know why the Khmer Rouge jailed him. He was charged with beating his wife

¹⁷ interview with informant number 10, 15 November 2004

¹⁸ interview with informant number 2, 05 November 2004

¹⁹ Dith Pran (Compiled), *Children of Cambodian's Killing Fields* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1997), p. 135.

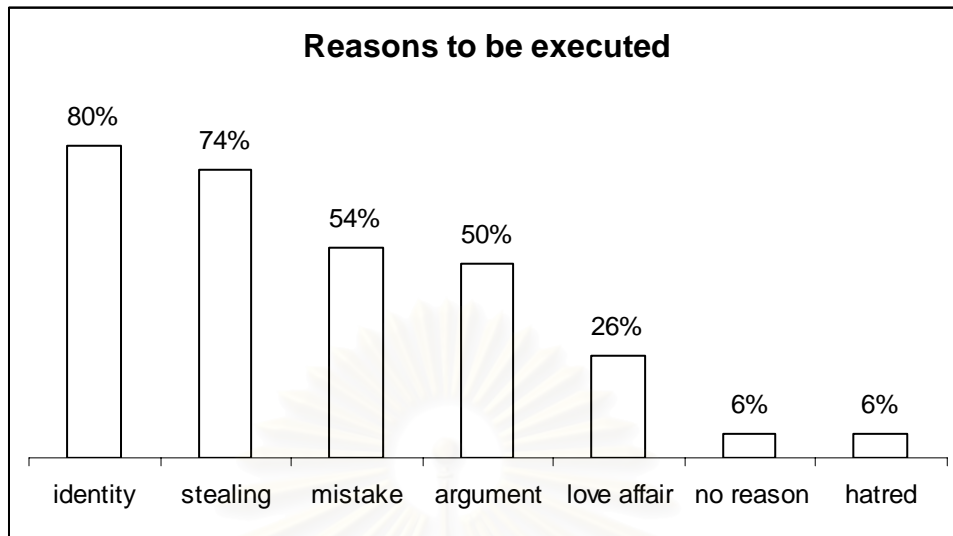
but that was not true. After he was released, a villager told him that he was jailed because he had a small argument with a Khmer traditional healer over a watch. Once, he got malaria, the Khmer traditional healer cured him and then he lent his watch to him. One day, his wife saw a Khmer Rouge cadre wearing it and then she asked him to ask the healer to go to get it back but the healer refused by saying that if that cadre moved to another place he would ask to give him back. After that he saw another cadre wearing his watch, he came to ask the healer to return his watch and then the healer replied angrily: “Yi! He is the high ranking cadre here and if he wears it what is the problem? “But you promised to return it back to me”, he replied, and then he continued that he never heard that *Angkar* ordered the Khmer Rouge cadre to seize the people property. This word made the healer angry and the next morning they arrested him when he was on guard the potato farm.²⁰

2.5 Killing

There was also no proper regulation for execution. Sometime, a man who committed a big mistake was not killed while another man whose error was small was killed. Some people did not know the reasons that their relatives or friends were killed. The killing happened every night and the people did not know who the next person would be. It was hard to learn which mistake they were being killed for.

When asked the reason why the Khmer Rouge killed people? The survivors gave us many reasons as shown in this chart:

²⁰ interview, 05 November 2004



Identity here means personal information. The Khmer Rouge paid the most attention to armed forces, high ranking officials, wealthy people, well educated people, Vietnamese agents, Vietnamese people, and CIA or KGB. The informants agreed that personal background and stealing are the most common reasons that Khmer Rouge killed people. Being a Lon Nol government official was a definite death sentence under DK, especially soldiers, high ranking officials, police, and teachers or other professionals. Those people were their *khmang*. DK accused them of being traitors or working for imperialism or the traitor Lon Nol. DK cadre scanned to find all those persons since the first day they captured the country until the fall of their regime. First, they executed the most high ranking persons, next the lower ones and last the suspected ones. If a man, a high ranking official, was executed, his whole family would be executed too, as the Khmer Rouge called them “a family of traitors”. The same thing, sometimes would not happen with the families of low ranking officials.

A staff of the New Life Church in Phnom Penh remembered that the Khmer Rouge brought her husband to be killed because he was a soldier. At first, the Khmer Rouge did not know he was a soldier but his friend, whose younger brother, a soldier,

was killed, told the Khmer Rouge about his background because he was jealous of her husband being a soldier too but living in safety while his brother was killed.²¹

Stealing is a different issue. Stealing in this case involves stealing for eating only. During that time new people needed food such as potatoes, rice, salt, fish, vegetables, and other edible things. New people stole because they were hungry. They stole only something edible or something they could exchange for food. If the people were arrested, the Khmer Rouge accused them of stealing the property of *Angkar* and betraying the cooperative because all those things were for the larger group, not for the individual. Therefore, those who stole were accused of betraying *Angkar* and therefore must be destroyed. Even family grown crops, if people wanted to eat them they had to ask for permission from *Angkar* first but no one dared to do so. *Angkar* means the cadres in your village. If *Angkar* said “yes” they could use the crops but if they said “no” they could not. If anyone still did so they would be considered a stealer.

Mistakes included losing a bull, breaking a cart or plow, being lazy, or even being sick.

An argument meant any form of argument against *Angkar*. It could be a complaint about *Angkar*, a criticism of *Angkar*, conflict with cadre, disagreement with cadres, not giving the cadre what they asked for, or saying any word which did not support *Angkar*.

Love affairs included relationship between single male and single female, married male and single female, or any kind of love affairs without marriage. Interestingly, this did not apply for the cadres who often raped new people before they killed them. Anyone who was involved in love affairs, or rape faced the dead punishment. A teacher of traditional dance recalled that a base person asked a 17

²¹ interview with informant number 6, 10 November 2004

April girl to go with him as *Angkar* wanted her to do something but he raped her, instead. He was killed after the village chief found out that he raped the girl.²²

Some victims were not in any of the above categories but *Angkar* suspected that they were. As a result, the Khmer Rouge executed them and they were not able to defend themselves.

Killing became a normal thing for the Khmer Rouge cadres. Human beings were valued less than animals. Killing was done without any warrants. The Khmer Rouge killed people mostly during the night time. They never told people that they would be killed but they used other phrases such as “go to study, go to work, go to meet someone, go to fish, accompany them, attend a meeting, or move to a new village.” The reason was that the Khmer Rouge did not want people be frightened of the killing. Even though, they used different phrases, people learned all the meanings. If Khmer Rouge asked them to go doing something during the night time it meant they would be killed but if they asked them to go during the day time, they may not be killed.

Technically, Khmer Rouge did not want population to know that they killed people so night time was the best time for them. However, but if they killed in the day time they turned on a loud speaker or started a truck engine so that people could not hear the dying screams of the victims. In contrast, for people to see the Khmer Rouge killed someone was very dangerous and if someone saw that by chance, he or she had to escape from the scene as fast as possible and not let the Khmer Rouge see his or her first or they would kill him or her too. People learned that when someone did not return home for three days or more, she or he could be considered killed already.

People did not need to ask about where the Khmer Rouge killed their friends or relatives. The Khmer Rouge could not cover up all this killing. It smelled everywhere in the forest around their villages and they saw corpses often but no one dared to announce this news because if the Khmer Rouge heard that, bad luck would

²² interview with informant number 2, 05 November 2004

fall to whoever spread that news. Finally, they would be killed. People never knew when it would be their turn to be killed. They lived day by day but what the survivors mention most often was that they felt they would be killed at night, especially when they heard the sound of foot steps, they felt that those were foot steps of Khmer Rouge soldiers coming to their house to bring someone to be killed. When the night passed they felt that they could live for another day.

In some cases, Khmer Rouge cadre intended to show their killing activities to the people to warn them in advance. A former head of study office recalled that she witnessed a Khmer Rouge soldier interrogating a small boy by holding his legs and hitting his head against a tamarind tree stump in a Buddhist temple in Pursat province. The boy was covered with blood and then died. The soldier accused the boy of stealing.²³

In that regime, Khmer Rouge never explained why they killed a person or what kind of mistake they were accused of. No one dared to ask such a dangerous question. During that regime life was easy to lose but difficult to save. A man had to follow *Angkar's* orders but sometimes with different cadre, the order was different too. When one followed one cadre over another one, the cadre was not happy. Neither of them could save the person but both could take his or her life. Most people learned that the Khmer Rouge would kill them but there was no place for them to run to survive because it was dangerous for them to escape from their village. If a man moved to a new village they would kill him or her if he or she didn't have any permission letter from their previous village.

The way Khmer Rouge killed people was very frightening. They asked the people to dig a hole for themselves, one hole for all, and then they hit them with a pickaxe or bamboo or other stick to conserve their bullets. They buried the surface only and within two or three days the smell came out or all those corpses became food of some wild animals.

²³ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

If one's mistake was small, Khmer Rouge would ask new people to *korsang* "be educated" and would advise that next time they don't do that and try to work hard and be honest to *Angkar*.

The Khmer Rouge would not only kill new people but would also kill their own cadre. As a head of department of a university, who stayed in Kampong Cham province during the Khmer Rouge said: "When we had new leaders in our area, it meant the old ones had been killed."²⁴ Only during the party purge in 1977 and 1978, Khmer Rouge executed 11,000 of their own cadres, accused of being Vietnamese agents, and about 8,000 of those appeared to have been truly involved in trying to overthrow the Democratic Kampuchea.²⁵ For the regime, it was possible to kill in error but not to release in error.

A traditional dancer whose husband died in Battambang under the regime said: "The Khmer Rouge hit a man's head the same as one hits a fish's head."²⁶ When the Khmer Rouge killed the parents, they left their children live by themselves, even new born babies. A study office staff at a university in Phnom Penh said: "I saw a new born baby suck his dead mother's nipple in the corps hole."²⁷

2.6 Fear of Being Killed

Killing and torture without any clear reasons made everybody lived in fear for their lives. The survivors did not want to live under this regime but there was no choice. Some people escaped while some others fought against the regime. Some others could not be patient with this regime. They criticized or complained to the

²⁴ interview with informant number 20, 30 November 2004

²⁵ Steve Heder, "Khieu Samphan", Searching for the Truth, March, 2004 (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia), p. 52.

²⁶ interview with informant number 28, 03 December 2004

²⁷ interview with informant number 29, 04 December 2004

cadre and as a result they were killed or jailed. Everyone wanted to express their feeling but could do only inside their mind without speaking out. Some others slept to die. Some people thought that to die means freedom but to be alive meant suffering. Sometime, during the night time *chhlorb*, Khmer Rouge soldiers, would hide under any house to listen what people were saying about *Angkar*. If they learned someone said bad things about *Angkar*, he or she would be tortured or killed. Therefore, people could not express their feeling easily.

Some new people tried to save their lives with hope for the future. A deputy head of staff office of one university in Phnom Penh persuaded himself saying: “It will be better soon, be patient.”²⁸ Some people still hoped for the near future that this regime would collapse, as a librarian, who was evacuated to Takeo province said: “The Khmer Rouge regime could not survive longer because they had no support from the people.”²⁹ The deputy head of one department of Ministry of Planning, who also was evacuated to Takeo province explained his feeling under the Khmer Rouge regime: “I did not want to live, I wanted to die because I was living for nothing. But I also had another idea that this regime would not last long, so I tried to save my life.”³⁰ While other tried to defend themselves against execution, a geography lecturer said: “It was a very boring time with less rest and sleep and fear of being killed. I kept a big knife to fight if the Khmer Rouge took me to be killed.”³¹

A librarian, who lost 21 relatives in Takeo province, explained: “It was a hard time under that regime; we worked very hard but we got very little food to eat and we

²⁸ interview with informant number 17, 23 November 2004

²⁹ interview with informant number 13, 19 November 2004

³⁰ interview with informant number 11, 17 November 2004

³¹ interview with informant number 20, 30 November 2004

lived in fear of being killed; during the daytime we worked together and then when the night came one of our work team was brought away to be killed.”³²

When the night came, the survivors felt that they could be asked to be killed tonight but when the sun shined they felt that they could live for another day. In this condition to live under this genocidal regime, “one day is equal to live for one year in the present day.”³³ A former head of study office said the time was so long for new people under the Khmer Rouge regime. Worry of their relatives who went to work in different places; they didn’t hear from each other so they might be killed or not. Hope one day we would free and be patient and try to work hard to save our life. A Christian, whose husband was killed and the only one of her daughter died under the Khmer Rouge regime said: “My life under that regime was over fear but the same as the death person.”³⁴

A former head of study office expressed: “Because Khmer Rouge brought the people in our village to be killed nearly every night I wanted to commit suicide twice in order to die before they came and took me to be killed. But I could not do it because I pitied my children and my husband. When I opened my eyes each morning I felt that I could live for another day.”³⁵ A journalist, whose father was killed in Svay Reang stated: “It was hard to find any words to describe all the events I faced. It seemed that our lives belonged to *Angkar*, if they wanted us to die we would die.”³⁶

³² interview with informant number 4, 08 November 2004

³³ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

³⁴ interview with informant number 6, 10 November 2004

³⁵ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

³⁶ interview with informant number 31, 07 December 2004

3. Things to Do to Survive

To survive under this regime, people had to know what to do and not to do. Generally, new people had to work hard, listen and follow *Angkar*, did what *Angkar* ordered whether right or wrong, give away what *Angkar* needed, talked less, be careful with their words, and in some cases, be honest, and be careful in stealing. Don't argue with base people, or Khmer Rouge cadre, don't trust anybody, don't show your ability, don't get sick, don't complain, don't criticize *Angkar*, don't tell your real background, in some cases, don't steal, and don't lie to *Angkar*.

3.1 Hiding Identit

To survive, new people had to hide their identities if their profession was a target of *Angkar*. When new people hid their identities from *Angkar* and then *Angkar* learnt that they lied to them it was another story, they would be killed for sure. Some informants said that to survive “don't lie to *Angkar*” while some others said that “hide identity” to survive. Truly, when *Angkar* learned about their real identities even if their careers were not in their *khmang* list, they would kill them. The Khmer Rouge accused them of lying to *Angkar*. But if they told them the truth, the Khmer Rouge might kill them immediately. So it depends on their identities and the local cadres they should tell them the truth or not. For example, if a man was a soldier he must hide his identity because if he told them the truth the Khmer Rouge would kill him for sure, but if he was a vendor he didn't need to hide his identity because the Khmer Rouge would not kill him. However, if he lied to them and later on *Angkar* learned that he lied to them, he would be killed for sure, but if *Angkar* did not learn that he lied to them, he would be okay.

3.2 Stealing

The danger of starvation caused new people to find ways to get food. Therefore, stealing was one thing that people had to do to get food, but one had to

know how to steal. People even had to steal their own crops. The Khmer Rouge did not allow people to pick any things from their own garden around their house. If they did so they would be punished or killed. Stealing could save their lives but could finish their lives sooner too. Stealing carried a death sentence, so if the Khmer Rouge cadre arrested someone because of stealing, they would kill him or her. Sometimes if one stole a small thing they would only be punished but sometimes they would be killed. It depended on the cadre.

A traditional dancer, whose father died of starvation in Battambang province, was caught by the Khmer Rouge, when he was in hospital, because he stole *Sakou* (a kind of eatable vegetable, carrot family). He explained: “When they arrested me I was sure I would be killed. In the last minute I had to save myself. When one cadre asked me why I stole, I answered that I didn’t want to steal at all but now I was not strong enough to work for *Angkar* and I was very embarrassed that I used to work strongly but now I could not do anything, I embarrassed all my friends, so I stole *Sakou* to eat and then I would become strong again and could work for *Angkar* sooner. When the cadre heard my words, he said that so now you are strong and tomorrow you have to go to work again, I answered happily, yes.”³⁷

Some informants warned that if you stole you had to be careful and not let the cadres know you stole. A lecturer, who was sick and stayed in one hospital in Battambang province, showed his skill in stealing the potatoes: “During night time, I went to the garden to steal potatoes. First, I throw stones into the garden to check if anybody was guarding that place or not. If nobody appeared, I would go in and get what I needed. I did this very often for about one month, and one night when I threw a stone into the garden as usual, one man appeared and lit an oil lamp so I went back to my bed.”³⁸

³⁷interview with informant number 19, 30 November 2004

³⁸interview with informant number 18, 24 November 2004

Some other informants said that to survive you should not steal while some others said that to survive one had to steal. It is a contradictory idea. If you stole and the cadre arrested you they would kill you, so don't steal, some informants warned. In contrast, some informants explained that if you didn't steal you would starve to death, stealing was the best way to do to avoid starving.

3.3 *Be Obedient to Angkar*

Theoretically, *Angkar* needed and loved who were honest, worked hard, didn't argue or complain, but followed *Angkar* even when they ordered people to do the wrong thing. Being crazy or knowing nothing was the most important thing to do to avoid being killed. New people had to follow *Angkar*'s policies and not do anything against this policy. A vice head of staff office of a university who helped to bury around 200 corpses in Battambang province, gave the saying: "*Leakar Khoposh Rosh Barn Yu* [keep your secret, live long life], work hard without complaining."³⁹ Not all people wanted to do all these things but to survive they had to.

Dam Diem Kor, Si Plie La'nguong: Plant a *Kor* tree, eat *Laghuong* fruit is another proverb that people used to warn their relatives and friends. *Kor* (Kapok tree) is a name of a tree in Cambodia, but *Kor* has another meaning. *Kor* in this case refer to "speaking-impaired". *Laghuong* means "know nothing" or "not clever". So it means "Don't talk, and hide your intelligence." To survive you had to talk less but worked hard, not disagreed but accepted every one of *Angkar*'s word, and followed *Angkar* even if it was wrong. *Angkar* was never wrong as Khmer Rouge cadre told new people. "If we say *Angkar* is wrong, it means we are wrong in the mind of the Khmer Rouge cadres so we must be killed." Any person who disagreed with *Angkar* was considered *khmang* and must be killed.

³⁹ interview with informant number 17, 23 November 2004

A traditional dancer who fled to Banteay Meanchey province to hide his soldier background said: “If we know “ten” we have to say “five only” to survive.”⁴⁰

3.4 Building Good Relationship with Local Khmer Rouge Cadres

Building a good relationship with local cadres was another important thing to do to protect yourself from any bad things happen. Although the central party promised to lead the country with justice, equality, and no corruption, the reality was different. The local cadres preferred valuable things from the city very much. Watches, radios, golden necklaces were the most popular. And food is another thing they liked. A lecturer at the Royal University of Phnom Penh remembered that once he was assigned to be a fisherman for his cooperative. This was very wonderful job, he said, since he could eat fish and keep some for his family. He picked out the big fishes for the cooks, who controlled food distribution in the cooperative, and in return the cook liked him very much and gave him rice, vegetable, fruit, and other food.⁴¹ Giving gifts was the best way to build your relationship with Khmer Rouge cadre. Gift could be given to the base people who had power in their village which could save your life sometime. People didn't volunteer to do all these things but they were forced to do them to survive. Some people could not do that and finally, they were executed.

4. New People after the Fall of the Khmer Rouge Regime

After their invasion of Cambodia, the Vietnamese installed a new government in Phnom Penh and installed Heng Samrin *as* the head of state. The country was called the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK).

⁴⁰ interview with informant number 22, 01 December, 2004

⁴¹ interview with informant number 5, 10 November 2004

The new government was led by mostly Vietnam-trained revolutionaries and the Eastern zone defectors who fled to Vietnam between 1977 and 1978. These cadres captured the politburo but remaining government positions were offered to new people. The state urged the masses to help to rebuild the country, and said that anyone could participate. Each person in the office tried to find their friends and suggested them to work. Dr. My Samady of “*Survivre Pour Participer a Faire Vivre*”, who was evacuated to Kompong Thom province, explains how he was invited to work in a hospital by the new government. After he fled from the Khmer Rouge zone, he met with a friend, Dr. Lam Lin, who was working in Kompong Thom hospital. After Dr. Lin told the deputy governor of Kompong Thom province that Dr. Samady was alive, the governor invited him to work in Kompong Thom hospital and there they gave him a house and food to eat.⁴² Ten days later, the Ministry of Public Health invited him and three other medical doctors to Phnom Penh because the Ministry needed them to work there.⁴³ In Phnom Penh, he got a warm welcome from the Minister and Deputy Minister of Public Health as well as the director of Calmette Hospital, Dr. Tep Tho. Then he was offered a house located between the Hospital and Faculty of Medicine.⁴⁴ Dr. Samady believed that they [the new government] considered us to be important persons for public health service.⁴⁵

In theory, new people were believed to be noncommunist and unrealistic. The new government and the Vietnamese advisors need the cooperation of prerevolutionary people but most of them owed “blood debts,” and the masses hated them very much. To get the masses to support their government, they allowed the masses choose their own local leaders. In this case, the government had to examine carefully the selection of who would work in their government. Evan Gottesman of “*Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*” states that where Vietnamese advisors and

⁴² Mey Samady, *Survivre Pour Participer a Faire Vivre* (Phnom Penh, 2000), p. 252.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 256

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 270-273

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 285

Cambodian officials were able to supervise the selection of local leaders, they were careful not to allow the administration to be dominated by former officials from the Lon Nol and Sihanouk regimes.....Nonetheless, the Vietnamese did not wish, at such a delicate moment, to alienate Cambodians by denying them their choice of leaders and thus did not entirely exclude prerevolutionary officials.⁴⁶

At the beginning, the new regime did not trust the new people very much because they were either noncommunist or people of the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes. However, they were nevertheless offered positions in government. The Party kept a close watch on them because they were not prerevolutionary. As Dr. Samady stresses: “the Vietnamese advisors played a very important part in investigating and examining our every activity and our stand as to whether we were loyal to the revolution or not.”⁴⁷

In contrast, some new people distrusted the new government because they were afraid that this communist government may not be different from the Khmer Rouge regime. These people fled to the Thai border or they joined the noncommunist resistance to fight against the Vietnamese invasion. According to Dr. Ngor Haing of “*Surviving the Killing Fields*”, who was evacuated to Battambang, the governor of Battambang went to his house three times to invite him to work in the provincial hospital because he knew of him through Dr. Dav Kiet, his medical classmate. He agreed to work as the governor requested but shortly thereafter he left the country for Thailand because of his suspicion about the new regime.⁴⁸

The new government tried very hard to make people trust them. Pen Sovan, one of the regime leadership, offered many reassurances. “Cast away all the doubts you may have about our revolution,” he told a group of educated Cambodians on

⁴⁶ Evan Gottesman, Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 56.

⁴⁷ Mey Samady, Survivre Pour Participer a Faire Vivre, p. 275.

⁴⁸ Haing S Ngor, Surviving Killing Fields (London: Chatto & Widus, 1988), pp. 368-370.

March 5, 1979. “We will never mislead our people. We will never turn white into black. It is enough for our nation to have endured the danger of extermination. It is more than enough that it has had to suffer such destruction and devastation. Let us rebuild our nation. Your active contribution is needed.”⁴⁹

Occasionally, some prerevolutionaries turned to support the Khmer Rouge fighters while they were working for the new government, while some new people turned to support other resistance groups. The Party considered these people “bad elements” or a “two-faced element” which the Party needed to investigate carefully to see whether these elements were real reactionaries or whether the enemy had simply deluded or misled them with propaganda.

By July 1979, the leadership had decided to “clean out and remove the bad elements.” The removal of prerevolutionary leaders created a power vacuum which the party hoped to fill with “core people”, Cambodians who had suffered under the Khmer Rouge but had not been associated with the Sihanouk or Lon Nol regimes.⁵⁰ The core people would be identified by “mass organization”-classic communist groups such as the Women’s Association and the Youth Association and then “built” through political education, a process that required that they be removed from their villages and communes and sent for several months of training in Vietnam. The state cadres were identified with six qualifications:

- loyalty to serve the revolution unconditionally,
- activities in accordance with all domestic and international edicts of the Party, the government, and the Front, including respecting the Party’s revolutionary disciplinary organization
- having a close relationship with the masses and being loved, esteemed, and trusted by the masses,

⁴⁹ Evan Gottesman, Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge, p. 73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

- living cleanly and appropriately,
- having competence and personally guaranteeing the work of the Party, the government, and the Front,
- they must have a clear personal history⁵¹

Pen Sovan and his colleagues empathized with the new recruits, characterizing them as “cadres who have just sprouted up from the revolutionary movement of the masses following liberation, who were oppressed and suffered terribly and have a lot of anger against the old regime and are working hard at implementing the duties of the new revolution.”⁵²



⁵¹ Evan Gottesman, Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge, pp. 59-60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECT OF PAST EXPERIENCES ON THE LIVES OF THE NEW PEOPLE

The Khmer Rouge regime lasted three years, eight months, and twenty days. It was not too long for those who had no experience under this regime but it was quite a long time to wait until they, the survivors, were freed from the “prison without walls”. And it was too short time to kill 1.7 million people by hand; it was as if they were killing machines.

When you meet Cambodian people who experienced Democratic Kampuchea and ask them about their lives during that time, it takes about at least a few hours to listen to them. Life under the Khmer Rouge regime becomes popular folklore which people like to tell to each other or parents like to tell to their children in daily life. The experience of people under the Khmer Rouge regime creates thousands of thousands stories. Parents tell their own experiences to their children or even grandchildren to show that they have a big struggle to survive and are very proud of themselves to have survived but they still have sorrow over their loved ones who passed away under Democratic Kampuchea.

It is too deep to forget what they faced, both their own suffering; even nearly losing their own lives, and the loss of their loved ones; husbands, wives, children, parents, other relatives, and friends. On the other hand, they feel regret that their loved ones passed away without any monks or religious rites. Deeper than that their loved ones passed away due to many kinds of violence; forced to dig their own graves, tortured before death, sex abuse, sex harassment, and their liver taken for food.

It is incredible that the Khmer Rouge leaders refused responsibility for all these suffering events by accusing someone or something else, instead. And it is not fair for the survivors and for the dead that some Khmer Rouge leaders live freely today without any punishment.

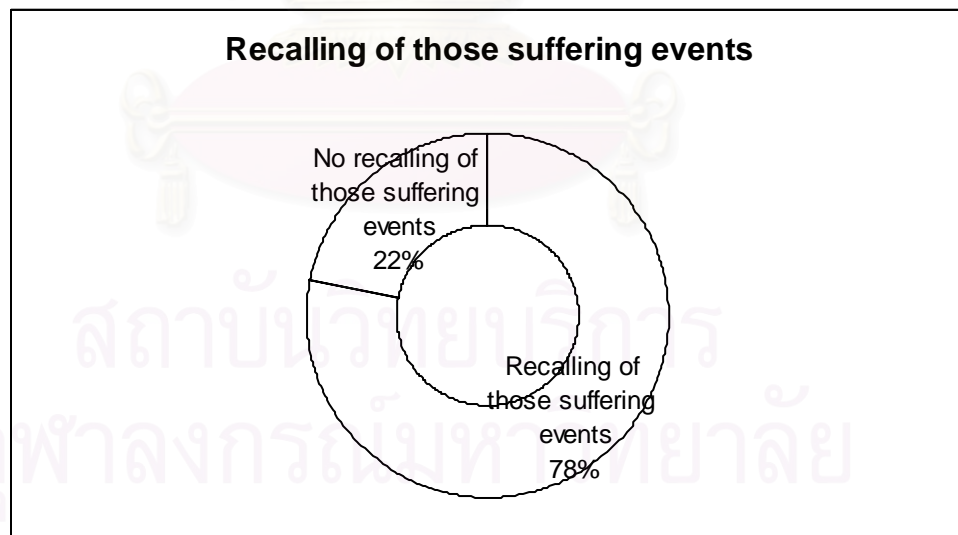
All these make survivors live with the shadow of the past suffering events today.

1. The Suffering Events Stay around Their Lives

1.1 *Recalling of the Suffering*

It has been 25 years since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime and people were free from being executed, and free to earn a living and free to be untied with their families. Living in this new society, the survivors still recall their suffering events. For families who lost children, parents, or siblings or people who faced particularly traumatic events, their memories are deeper.

To date most survivors still recall the events because those events still affect their lives. Everything around them reminds them of those events; they recall their memories. The survivors don't want to recall the events because they cause them to suffer very much but they cannot escape from that. An artist at the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, claimed: "All people who experienced the Khmer Rouge regime cannot forget all those suffering events."¹



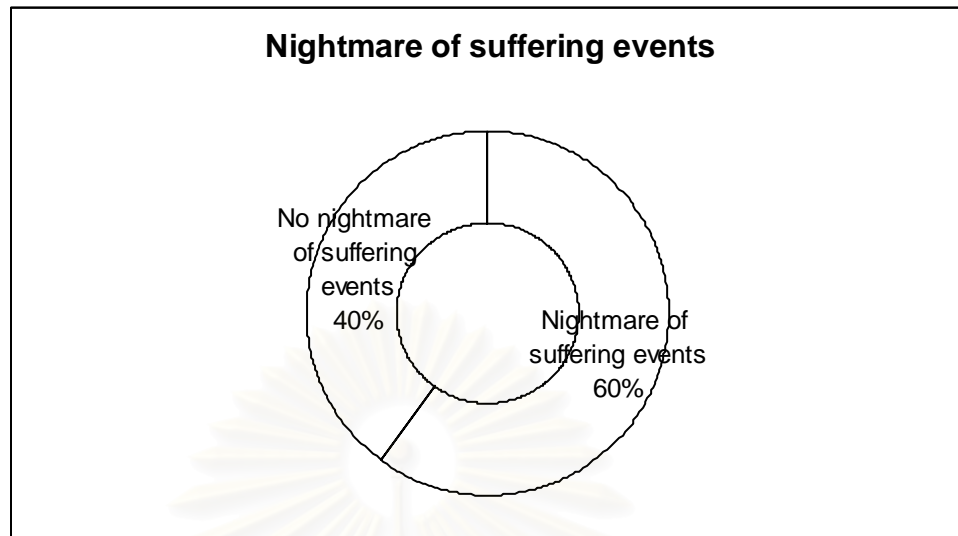
¹ interview with informant number 2, 05 November 2004

Nearly one fourth of informants replied that they don't want to recall their experiences because it is too fearful to recall them. In fact, they don't want to recall all these events because it disturbs them a lot. But a few survivors try to suppress their recall so that they can concentrate more on earning a living. For these informants to recall those suffering events affect their lives very much. Those informants complain that, although they don't want to recall those experiences, they come out by themselves.

Most informants replied that they recall their past experiences but do not recall them all the time or very often; it happens only when they are asked and only when they see something that reminds them of the Khmer Rouge regime. Most informants recall their experiences as an example to educate their children or grandchildren. If they do not want their children to waste rice during eating they will tell them "please be careful do not waste the rice, rice is very important than everything, even gold or diamonds, during the Khmer Rouge regime." They also recall their memories as a kind of sharing their experience with each other among their friends. However, a few informants recall their experiences because they have a hard life in the present time. They feel angry with the regime. They recall those experiences to blame the regime for making them fall into such a hard life today to express their stress.

1.2 Nightmares of Past Events

Although some survivors don't want to recall those events or see something related to their suffering experiences, they have nightmare about the Khmer Rouge regime. Mostly, their nightmares are related to working hard, being arrested, killing, torture, being hungry, the places they used to live, and their love ones.



Nearly half of the informants replied that they never have had nightmares about the Khmer Rouge regime while the rest of informants said “yes” they did but only sometimes. Their nightmares show that those events are alive in the survivors’ memories. A tour guide at Tuol Sleng Genocidal Museum who lost eight members of her family under that regime, once had a nightmare: “Khmer Rouge brought me to be killed” and she explained: “This means all those sufferings stay in my memory.”² A man, who was evacuated to Kompong Thom province when he was 27 years old as a traditional dancer, a monkey character, told his nightmare: “I dream I was jailed in the same place, Prey Kanlieng, where I was jailed during that time. I was very afraid and in panic but when I woke up I felt better because it is just a nightmare and not the real thing.”³

Nightmares about the Khmer Rouge regime play a very important part in analyzing the lives of new people in the present time, as they reflect their past experiences which relate to their present lives. Their nightmares are a repeat of their experiences; the appearance of a past picture in their memories. This is not only a dream but it reminds new people of their past experiences.

² interview with informant number 26, 02 December 2004

³ interview with informants number 2, 05 November, 2004

1.3 Remembering Suffering Events

When they were talking about the Khmer Rouge regime, the survivors could use their countless words to describe their experience during that time, however, it is too sensitive for some survivors to talk about this. During the interviews, the informants can recall the name of their leaders, their co-workers, and the names of the places they were and sometimes the date as well. Moreover, they remember all their suffering events.

The events are still in the mind of the new people because there was a big change between their lives before and after the Khmer Rouge. Some had to change from students to laborers, and some others changed from office to rice field. And some others changed from being leaders to being slaves.

A traditional dancer, 17 years old when the Khmer Rouge evacuated him to Prek Kdam, Kandal province, lost 30 to 40 relatives under the Khmer Rouge regime. He said: “I will remember all those events until I die, because for me three years under that regime is too long; one day under that regime seems equal to one year today, and it was a very hard time that I faced. He continues to tell his most dangerous experience one night: all in his team went to their own farm to pick corn, his group leader saw that. He was very panic and very worried about his security. However, that leader did nothing with his team, he only brought up the stealing issue in every meeting.”⁴



⁴interview with informant number 21, 01 December 2004

From this study, there are a few informants who cannot remember their past experiences clearly because they were too young during the Khmer Rouge era.

Most informants remember clearly everything in the regime such as names of people, details of situation chronologically, description of things and places. What they witnessed became pictures in their memories. A police, whose father, a soldier, was tied and forced to run follow a horse, recalled: “The picture of my father, and other people, I witnessed still in my memory and I am still angry with the Khmer Rouge.”⁵

They remember because they live in Cambodia, especially in Phnom Penh, where the trial is going on and they see things related to the events everyday. All those things are stimuli to recall those events. All those things stay around them and they appear repeatedly.

Following their memories, they experience a scary feeling when they see something that caused them suffering during the Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge regime traumatized the survivors. When they see or hear something related to the Khmer Rouge regime such as the movie “*The Killing Fields*”, someone talks about their experiences under the Khmer Rouge, when they hear the sound of a bell, black clothes with *krama* (scarf) and automobile tire sandals, a dam, earthwork, and other things related with the regime they remind them of their hard time. A dancer expressed: “I feel scared because the Khmer Rouge were too cruel, and I suffered so much under that regime.”⁶ A lecturer said: “If someone reminds me about the regime or if I see something related to the Khmer Rouge regime, it reminds me of the events in that regime.”⁷

⁵ interview with informant number 26, 02 December 2004

⁶ interview with informant number 21, 01 December 2004

⁷ interview with informant number 5, 10 November 2004

1.3.1 Things in Everyday Life that Relate to the Regime

Hearing someone talk about the Khmer Rouge regime or seeing someone who they met during the regime will remind them of their experiences. The survivors cannot avoid these things because they may meet them often in their everyday lives. A teacher who was 23 years old when the Khmer Rouge evacuated her to Prey Kalong, Battambang province, recalled one of her suffering events when the Khmer Rouge forced her to marry a former Khmer Rouge soldier, a handicapped man. She really didn't want to marry any man, and he was a handicapped person and a Khmer Rouge so she was very distressed and she cried and cried. There was a young man, who later became her husband until today, came and asked her why she was crying, she described her story. He replied "don't cry I will marry you, do you agree?" Then she ran to meet her group leader and told him that she would not marry the former Khmer Rouge soldier because she had a man to marry her already. She feels she is in debt to her husband very much that he helped her in that difficult time.⁸ Today, she lives with her husband [everyday], so that reminds her of her experience that the Khmer Rouge forcing her to marry the former Khmer Rouge soldier.

Read something about the regime in newspaper, books, documents or pictures or movies about the Khmer Rouge also remind them of their experiences. A lecturer of the Faculty of Pedagogy, who was evacuated to Takeo province when he was a second year university student, said that his feeling was full of the picture a member of his work team, who was arrested by the Khmer Rouge, when someone asks him about Khmer Rouge regime. He continued, one night, that he witnessed the Khmer Rouge cut and opened his friend's abdomen."⁹ Relatedly, a lecturer at the Royal University of Phnom Penh said that he was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Kandal province when he was 12 years old as a pupil. When he was sick the Khmer Rouge gave him only one kind of pill, known as a rabbit shit pill, for every kind of disease. For any serious sickness they would inject coconut juice, [which they used as

⁸ interview with informant number 10, 15 November, 2004

⁹ interview with informant number 13, 19 November 2004

intravenous fluid].¹⁰ So every time when he sees a pill he recalls his experience in the Khmer Rouge regime.

Clothes: black clothes, *krama*, tire sandals of Khmer Rouge cadre. The Khmer Rouge wore Mao's black cap, black shirts, black trousers, and tire sandals with a *krama* around their neck. Most survivors don't like the black color and if they see someone wearing black they may say that they wear black like the Khmer Rouge.

Nature: moon, rivers, trees, rice. They used to work under or walk under the moon light, take baths, swim, or catch fish in the river. They used to have meal or sleep under trees close to their working site. A staff of an NGO, 26 years old in 1975, who was a soldier in the former regime, told how he escaped to survive as a soldier in Battambang province. He said that first, the Khmer Rouge gathered all soldiers in three places, a place for troops, another place for middle ranking officers, and another place for higher ranking officers. Soon after that his friend who came from Thailand, told him that the Khmer Rouge took soldiers and killed them in Thmor Kol district. However, what the Khmer Rouge told the soldier was different. They asked the soldiers to welcome King Sihanouk. Then he escaped to Takream mountain and stayed there for about three months. He heard that his colleagues were evacuated to Ta'ngien, which was close to Takram mountain. So he decided to move from the mountain to stay with his colleague in Ouporngmornn. "We were given a plot of land with 20 meters width and limitless length" he recalled. Three or four months later, his family learnt that he was alive and was living in Oupongmornn so they came to meet him. About a half month later, the district secretary, named Ta Torl, gave him permission to live with his wife in Toul Kha'sach in the same province. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, he and his wife could survive but unfortunately, all their three children were too young to survive starvation.¹¹ So when he heard the name of Battambang province, it reminded him of the place he used to flee to the forest and the place that he lost all his children.

¹⁰ interview with informant number 27, 03 December, 2004

¹¹ interview with informant number 12, 18 November, 2004

Tools: basket, bamboo, pickaxe that new people used to work with and basket they used to carry more often and the bamboo and the pickaxe that the Khmer Rouge used to hit people with to save their bullets. A traditional dancing teacher, who was 23 in the Khmer Rouge era, worked in Phnom Penh in the former regime. After his evacuation, he became a member of a mobile group for region 5, in Battambang province. He describes his witness of killing. One day, at Prey Mornn, he asked his team leader for a rest because he was not well. On that day, there was a delegation passing through that village so the soldiers blocked the road. That day, there was also an old Chinese lady who walked pass the blocked road, then the soldiers asked where she was going to but the Khmer Rouge could not understand what she said because she cannot pronounce Khmer language very clearly. They checked her small bag and found a bag of *Bi Cheng* (MSG). They charged her with betraying *Angkar* because such spices “belong to the communal kitchen” but not to individuals, then they tied her up; it was around 10 o’clock in the morning. A soldier came to the kitchen and asked the informant if he had a pickaxe he could borrow to dig ground. The informant was very afraid and panic, then he gave him his pickaxe. A few minutes later, he heard the sound “*Porsh*”[sound of the Khmer Rouge hit the lady], then he heard the dying sound of the poor lady. “*Khors, khors*” and then “*porsh*” and there was no sound from the lady. After that he heard the sound of digging. Finally, the Khmer Rouge returned the informant his pickaxe covered with blood.¹² The pickaxe reminds him of this event.

Places: rice field, dams where they worked very hard and were controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

Sounds: bells, dogs barking, cows crying. The sound of the bells was the sound they used to wait to hear because when they heard this sound it signaled time they could have something to eat. They were starving so the sound of the bell was very important for them which they heard only twice a day. The sound of dogs barking was the sound of the Khmer Rouge bringing someone neighboring them or

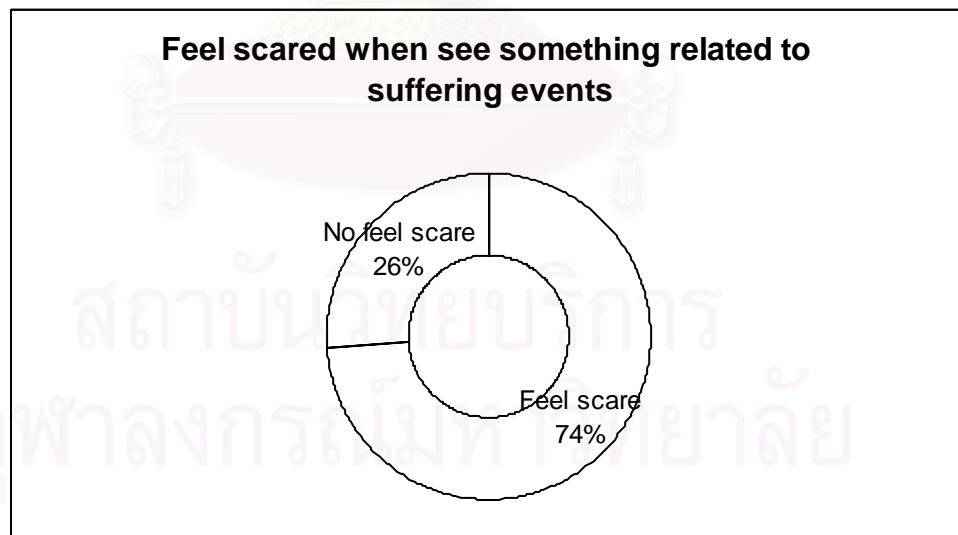
¹² interview with informant number 19, 30 November, 2004

their family to execute. The cow crying was what they used to hear when they were working in the rice fields.

In the same case, in a survey conducted by the Khmer Institute for Democracy, it was reported that the things that most remind them of the regime are black clothes, automobile tire sandals, and dams and irrigation work.¹³

1.4 Feeling Scared

In addition, some informants argued that all these things not only reminded them of their suffering events, but also scared them. When they see all those things, they feel that they are living under the Khmer Rouge regime again. In this case, a small number of informants dare to see all those things because they want to learn more about the Khmer Rouge regime.



¹³ A survey on “Khmer Rouge Regime and the Khmer Rouge tribunal 2004” (Phnom Penh: The Khmer Institute for Democracy, 2004)

Most informants do not want to see what reminds them of the regime because they hate the regime and it is hard for them to face those things. They want to escape from those things. They want to leave them behind and start a new life in the present day. However, their lives are surrounded by those things.

A small number of informants wanted to learn more about the regime because they want to find out why the regime did such a cruel thing. They said that they really want to see movies related to the Khmer Rouge regime or they want to see more things about the Khmer Rouge regime so that they can learn about the regime. What they really want to know is “why did this regime kill its people?”

2. Their Feelings when Talking about Their Experiences

Some survivors like to share their experiences but some others feel uncomfortable to talk about them. Sometimes they cry while they were talking about their lives during that time. Some others show their anger with a very loud voice and say very bad words against the Khmer Rouge cadres that they hate.

From the interviewer’s observation, some informants, mostly women, cried during the interview process. They cry because of their suffering experiences and because of their pity and the fact that they miss their parents, husbands, or children who passed away.

There are three survivors refused to give interview during the dating process. I asked them why and one by one had the same reason; they are afraid of talking about their experiences because after they recalled those events they could not sleep for a while and it is hard to stop their recalling after talking about that. There are about five or six informants feel hesitate to give interview, however, they did finally. They told me that they wanted to give those information but they could not sleep or even stress for a while after they talked about their experiences.

3. Share Their Experiences

The regime created millions of stories. One survivor, at least, can tell one story about his or her life under the Khmer Rouge regime. Those experiences are told in the family, the way the older tell the younger how they can survive and those experiences are also told among their friends, the way they express their feelings.

To complain: Some other informants like to talk about their experiences to complain about their suffering; a kind of coping by letting it out so that they feel better and better. In contrast, some informants feel uncomfortable to share or to talk about their experiences. They still feel pain. The survivors feel that all those events disturb their lives a lot so they don't want to recall them. They want to escape from those suffering pictures and turn to think about their living in the present time. A teacher said: "Those events still remind me but I try to forget so that I can work for a living."¹⁴ Roeun Sam, one survivor who lives in the United States after the Khmer Rouge regime, wrote her experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime entitled "*Living in the Darkness*". She was fourteen when the Khmer Rouge took power. After she arrived in the United States, she never forget her suffering as she recalled: "I prayed for it not to get dark. This happened every day from 1975 until 1979. Today I still have nightmares. I feel sad when the sun sets."¹⁵

To show their heroic deeds: Some informants are eager to share their experiences. Those experiences are also told when the survivors meet with their friends who are survivors. Mostly they tell about their hard times and how they survived through this difficulty. They tell about their intelligence to survive such as, how they worked, stole, behaved, talked to *Angkar*, in the way that they survived is a kind of heroic deed. A teacher and a traditional dancer, who was evacuated to Kompong Thom province, said: "My monkey dancing skill saved my life when I was jailed in Kompong Thom. First, the Khmer Rouge asked me my identity. I told him

¹⁴ interview with informant number 1, 05 November 2004

¹⁵ Dith Pran (compiled), *Children of Cambodian's Killing Fields*, p. 81.

that I am a monkey dancer, he laughed and he asked me to dance for him. When I did, he laughed and he was very happy to see that. Then he told me that “you had to dance for other people to see and I will give you more potatoes”. The informant continued: “Since then I was not chained anymore and the Khmer Rouge did not torture me because they believed that I am a honest person who told them the truth.”¹⁶

4. Take Revenge

Fear and anger mixed in the feelings of the survivors and combine to create a feeling of revenge against those who caused them to lose their loved ones. Most informants want to take revenge with any Khmer Rouge who hurt them or killed their relatives and friends directly but not the Khmer Rouge leaders.

After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, the Khmer Rouge cadre turned to be victims and the target of new people to take revenge. Those cadres were in fear of being killed by the new people.

Stephen R. Heder wrote that the poorer peasants and the base people who stayed behind after the Vietnamese came no longer dared to tell anyone what to do, they stopped giving orders and started taking them; they stopped making criticisms of new people, which previously often led to the execution or at least disappearance of new people, and starting fearing for their own lives. These fears were intensified when the occasional former cadre or militia member who had failed to make a run for it was found with his or her throat cut or his or her neck broken.¹⁷

A survivor, an S-21 staff, was 23 years old when the Khmer Rouge came to power. Her family was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Takeo province. She told that her husband was executed because of arguing with *Angkar*. She continues that her husband, who was a soldier, was not happy with the Khmer Rouge government so he

¹⁶ interview with informant number 2, 05 November 2004

¹⁷ Heder Stephen, Kampuchean Occupation and Resistance, pp. 10-11.

did not want to follow what they ordered him to do and he also complained a lot about Khmer Rouge regime policy. Apart from this, her older brother was also executed because of attempting to flee the country to Vietnam. Furthermore, her father, a younger brother, and a younger sister starved to death. In all, she lost five members in her family under that regime. Then she has kept in mind that after she free from the Khmer Rouge regime she would kill those who killed her husband and her older brother. At the time of interview, she admits that now her feeling of taking revenge is less and less from day to day.¹⁸

Not just the survivors who live in the country but the survivors who live abroad also feel they want to take revenge against the Khmer Rouge. As Loung, the author of *“First They Killed My Father”*, describes in the scene of people executing a Khmer Rouge soldier in 1979, “An old woman’s hands, who claims this soldier killed her husband, shakes as she raises the hammer high above her head and brings it crashing down into the prisoner’s skull.....I almost feel pity for him. But it is too late let him go, it is too late to go back. It is too late for my parents and my country.”¹⁹ A literature lecturer at the Royal University of Phnom Penh remembered: “After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, a Khmer Rouge cadre went to visit his parents by a motorbike but when the villagers saw him they tried to kill him until he escaped and left his motorbike in a rice field.”²⁰

5. Emotional Problems of the Survivors

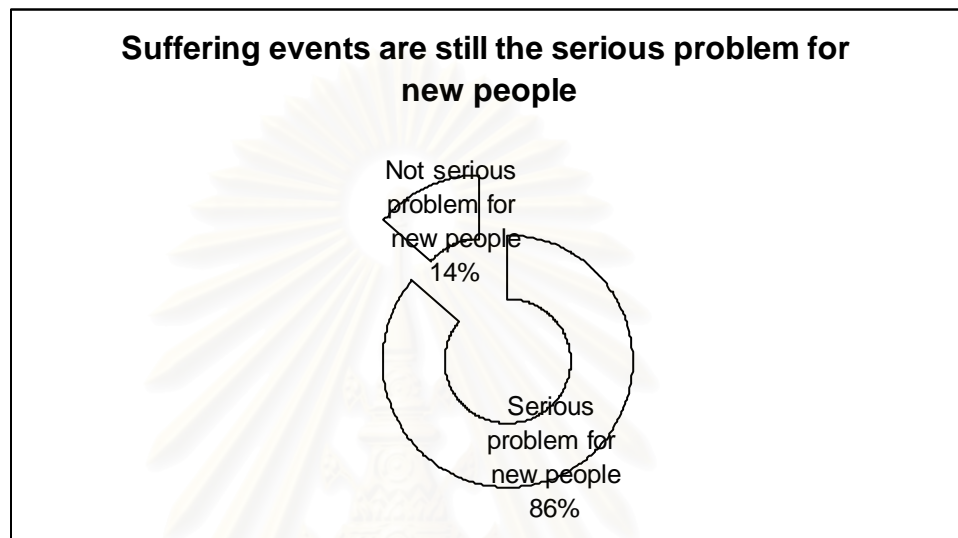
All informants were asked if their past experiences were still serious problem for the new people in the present time. In general, the survivors who have had better lives or can restore their lives with less lost relatives and less suffering feel that the

¹⁸ interview with informant number 30, 05 December, 2004

¹⁹ Loung Ung, *First they Killed My Father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers*, p. 206.

²⁰ interview with informant number 14, 19 November 2004

past experiences are not serious problem anymore. In contrast, the survivors who faced deep suffering, lost most of their loved ones, and had a big change in their life before and after the Khmer Rouge regime; from the rich and high class families to the poor, said that past experiences still serious problem for the new people.



A few informants claim that past experiences are not such a serious problem for the new people because now their lives are better.

Most informants believe that their past experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime are still a serious problem for the new people, especially, for the most suffering family or persons. They lost their property, their husbands or wives, children, parents and today they live in poverty or they cannot rebuild their families. The survivor who loses everything and never gets back, their problems are still serious. Especially, when the survivors faced new problems that would remind them of their sufferings during the Khmer Rouge regime. They blame the Khmer Rouge regime for causing these problems. An informant who was evacuated to Battambang with her husband and their children said: “When the Khmer Rouge took my husband to execute in 1976 I nearly become psychotic; I pity him and love him very much”. She continues: “Not long after that all my children passed away so I was left with nothing. “Until today I

still cannot feel well with my great loss”. Now she lives alone without husband and children, she said she feels lonely.²¹

Similarly, a teacher complained that her feelings changed so quickly and when she gets angry it is hard for her to control her feelings. She, sometimes, hurts her students or even speaks loud voice with her director.²² Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia stated in his preface to a book on the Khmer Rouge trials: “...Those of us who survived have lived for a quarter of a century bearing pain and grief for those we lost and being haunted by nightmare of our own experiences.”²³ An NGO administrator complained: “When I am happy I forget those events but when I face the problem, those suffering come back.”²⁴ A survivor, a deputy director of a department, Ministry of Interior, said that his life before the Khmer Rouge came to power was wonderful. His father was an educated person and he had a good position in the government. He sent all his eight children to study and not to think about earning money because he could earn for the whole family. The survivor continues: “I do not know what is difficulty in life, what is poverty, surely, I lived happily before the Khmer Rouge took power.” After that his family was evacuated to Svay Reang province, in Tlork village, Kroulko commune, Svay Reang district, region 23. He was twenty, a high school student. There, the Khmer Rouge took his father to “educate”, which meant execution, and his siblings were separated to work in different places. He was assigned into a mobile group and his younger siblings assigned into a children’s group. The hardest work he experienced was building a canal. He returned to the adult group when he married in late 1978. He said: “In my region, the food was not so bad, if we had porridge, it was not the watery so starvation was not a problem but execution was the biggest problem; if we did a small thing wrong, we would be

²¹ interview with informant number 28, 04 December, 2004

²² interview with informant number 10, 15 November 2004

²³ Hun Sen, “Preface”, An Introduction to the Khmer Rouge Trials (Phnom Penh: the Royal Government of Cambodia, 2004), p.1.

²⁴ interview with informant number 12, 18 November 2004

killed. I think all my family would be alive if there was no Khmer Rouge regime, my life would be better than this. I still miss my father, I hate the Khmer Rouge. I still miss my study even though I have a better life now.”²⁵

For most new people, to talk about the Khmer Rouge regime is to bring back their hard time and their suffering experience. A security guard said that: “Don’t talk about the Khmer Rouge regime, it gives me a headache.”

Chanrithy, the author of “*When the Broken Glass Floats*”, reports that out of forty students in her class at Cleveland High School who had lived under Pol Pot, half were diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), and half suffered from some form of depression.²⁶ Haing Ngor, an actor in a famous movie, *The Killing Field*, and an Oscar winner, stated in his book entitled “*Surviving the Killing Field*”,: “We had all been traumatized by our experiences. We had all lost parents or brothers or children. Many of us had horrible dreams, night after night. We felt isolated and depressed and unable to trust anyone.”²⁷ He also claimed: “.....I developed the habit of secrecy under the Khmer Rouge. It was still hard for me to trust people.”²⁸

A survey by the Khmer Institute for Democracy shows that nearly ninety percent of their respondents were still thinking about past events under the Khmer Rouge regime. The reason that they are still thinking about those events is because they are still angry with the Khmer Rouge.²⁹

²⁵ interview with informant number 38, 25 November, 2004

²⁶ Him Chanrithy, *When Broken Glass Bloats* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 16.

²⁷ Haing Ngor, *Surviving the Killing Field* (Suffolk: Chatto & Windus, 1988), p. 433.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 452.

²⁹ *A survey on “Khmer Rouge Regime and the Khmer Rouge tribunal 2004”* (Phnom Penh: The Khmer Institute for Democracy, 2004).

6. How to Cope

In general, new people suffered very much under the Khmer Rouge regime. In particular, their experience is different from one to another and their suffering is different too. It depends on their own experiences, how hard it was, and their personality or their process of learning. Therefore, the way they cope with this suffering is different too. Still some informants cannot cope with their past experiences.

6.1 Can Cope

There are many ways to cope with their suffering experiences, the informants explained.

Religious way: As most Cambodian are Buddhists, a few informants try to think in the Buddhist way as “*Khama*” or sin. Their sufferings are seen as their *khama* from a previous life. A few others try to use Buddhist teaching to calm their feelings. A lecturer said: “I read Buddhist teaching and some novels so that I will not think too much about those events.”³⁰

Focus on present life: Apart from religious way, some new people try to think more about their daily lives combined with the truth of life. “Everyone faced the same problem and we have to work to survive but if we are still thinking about those events we cannot work” a dancer said. He continued: “Work and earning for a living made me forgot those events.”³¹

Making a compensation and pursuing hobby: Similarly, an artist said: “I make my life happy and eat what I want to eat because I was starving in the past.”³² Some

³⁰ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

³¹ interview with informant number 2, 05 November 2004

³² interview with informant number 10, 15 November 2004

survivors think that those events are normal in society as a lecturer stressed: “Sufferings happen to people as normal for us as human being.”³³

Speaking out: Another way that new people cope with their suffering experiences is they speak their experiences out to tell others. To speak out their suffering experiences is one way to express their feeling of suffering. Loung states: “As I tell people about genocide, I get the opportunity to redeem myself. I have change to do something that’s worth my being alive. It’s empowering, it feels right. The more I tell people, the less nightmares haunt me. The more people listen to me, the less I hate. After some time, I had talk so much I forgot to be afraid; that is, until I decided to return to Cambodia.”³⁴ Pin Yathay of *Stay Alive My Son*, told in his speech about his experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime in November 2004 at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Phnom Penh: “Now I feel not much suffering because my life is better and I talk to people and write so much.”³⁵

Loung and Yathay are not survivors who live in Cambodia but they share the same experience with the informants, so their way to cope with their past experience may not be so different from the informants.

If the Khmer Rouge leaders get any punishment: Bringing Khmer Rouge leaders to trial to repay what they did to Cambodian people is a common thing that informants want. They made Cambodian people lived in starvation, threat, and lose their relatives without any ceremonies. The trial may help to release their anger with the Khmer Rouge because the killers get punishment. As Richard Goldstone, the head of Hague tribunal for Bosnia and Rwanda remarked, “justice is a form of healing....The most important function of justice is healing wounded people.”³⁶

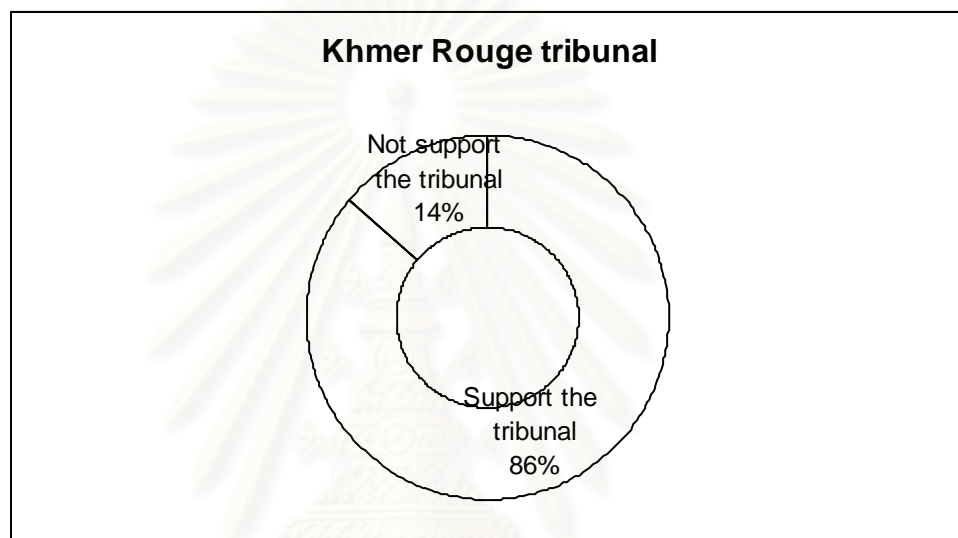
³³ interview with informant number 14, 19 November 2004

³⁴ Loung Ung, *First they Killed My Father: a daughter of Cambodia remembers*, p. 237.

³⁵ Pin Yathay, “speech”, Phnom Penh, 18 November, 2004

³⁶ J.V. Monville, “Justice and the Burdens of History” in M. Nimer (editor). p. 134 cited in Ea Meng-Try, *Justice and Reconciliation*. Master Dissertation (Conventry University, 2003), p. 5.

The majority of informants wanted to bring Khmer Rouge leaders to trial. They believed that a Khmer Rouge tribunal will help to reduce some suffering from the memories of the survivors because when the Khmer Rouge are punished the soul of the dead will not stay around because they will have received justice. On the other hand, the survivors themselves get justice too. They really want the Khmer Rouge to be punished for what they did to them in return.



A few informants disagree on bringing the Khmer Rouge to trial and they gave a few reasons that they do not want revenge, and that we should let the Buddha or God punish them, while some others feel afraid of renewing war.

Most informants really want to bring the Khmer Rouge to trial because they want to punish them, they want to pay the price of their relatives' soul, need justice, and as an example for the next generation. Also they want the Khmer Rouge leaders to be punished so that their relatives and friends who passed away will calm down and the survivors will release their suffering. But a few informants are afraid of war because the former Khmer Rouge may go back to the forest and continue fighting again. A researcher at the Royal Academy of Cambodia said: "To bring the Khmer Rouge leaders to trial as an example for the others but to trial them without the

emergence of the war again because their former soldier may stand up and fight to help their leaders.”³⁷

From this point, the survivors may recover from their past suffering to some extent if they try them with justice and no war.

6.2 Cannot Cope

Not all informants can cope with their sufferings, some still cannot cope with their deep suffering experiences. There is nothing to repair their broken heart. A study office staff, whose husband was killed and who lost all her children in 1976 in Battambang province, said: “Today, when I hear dogs barking I cannot sleep, I am afraid because during the Khmer Rouge regime when dogs barked it meant the Khmer Rouge were coming to take someone to kill.”³⁸ She continued: “I cannot forget that because I lost my husband and all my children, I really cannot cope with that.”³⁹ Relatedly, a deputy of one Department at Ministry of Planning said that he is better now because he can restore his life but if someone cannot restore his or her life, he or she still suffers deeply.⁴⁰

It seems that survivors with great loss under the Khmer Rouge regime who cannot find a way to return to their old time still cannot cope with their sufferings, but with those who had less loss and have a better life in the present time can cope with their past experiences.

³⁷ interview with informant number 16, 21 November 2004

³⁸ interview with informant number 29, 04 December 2004

³⁹ interview with informant number 29, 04 December 2004

⁴⁰ interview with informant number 11, 17 November 2004

7. Suffering Experiences Affect New People's Lives

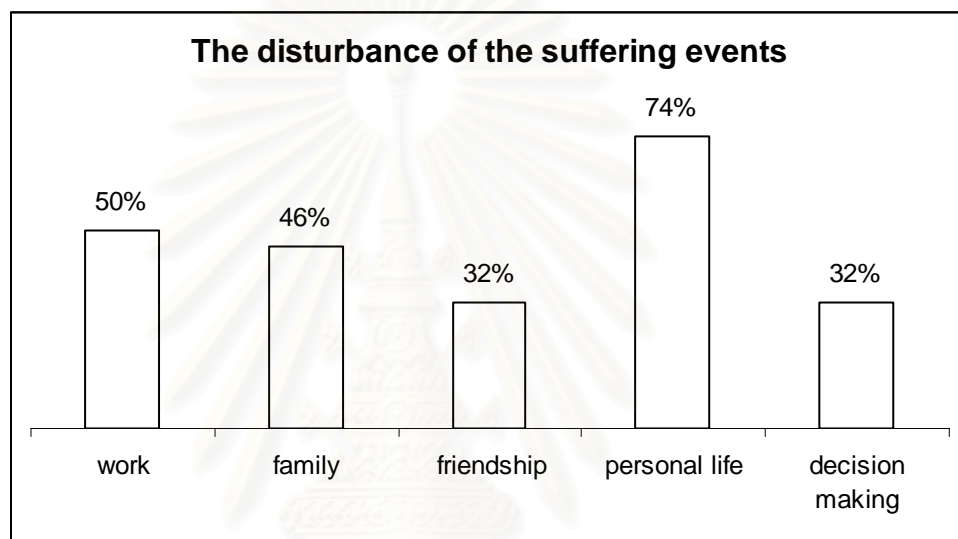
7.1 Individual Life

All the above issues, such as recalling, remembering, wanting to take revenge, sharing experiences, are evidences to show that past suffering experiences still affect the lives of new people.

A policeman who was 15 years old in 1975, a student when the Khmer Rouge evacuated him to Angkanh village, Angkanh commune, Trang district, Takeo province, was assigned into a children's group, but his group worked as hard as a mobile group. He was jailed for 6 months. He said that events under the Khmer Rouge regime affect him very much. "It wasted my time, my study, and my work", he continued: "If there was no Khmer Rouge, my life would not be so difficult today. It interrupted my study, I lost my parents, my relatives, now I am a parentless and live in the Buddha pagoda. I still feel suffering in my life. Without parents, I feel lonely. Today, I cry sometimes, I cry to pity myself that the Khmer Rouge forced me to work too hard under the rain and sun without enough food. Living today is very hard, I feel that if my parents were alive I would not have difficulty like this. When I see anything related to the Khmer Rouge regime I feel sad and afraid and it reminds me of the suffering; I feel the suffering is in front of my eyes because all those things made us suffer too much. I am very angry with the regime but I can do nothing; it depends on the United Nations and the government to punish the Khmer Rouge leaders. I do not keep anything that reminds me of the regime, I try to run away from those things; I do not want to see that. Not just me, the regime hurt all the new people in the country. I hate those who controlled me directly, the cadre in my region, if I saw them today I would kill them because they caused me to become an orphan and hurt me. I remember my group leader, Chhorn alias Mok, Khat who killed my father, Sorn who ate my father's liver."⁴¹

⁴¹ interview with informant number 36, 26 November, 2004

Another informant, a policewoman, who was 12 in 1975, was evacuated with her family to Kandal province first and then to Battambang. She said: “If there was no 17 April 1975, I would study further and my family would still be rich; I wasted a lot of time during that regime; I have not studied or worked after the fall of Khmer Rouge regime; I do not want to continue my study to a bachelor degree because I want to earn a living; I do not have parents to support me anymore.”⁴²



In family: Some informants agree that their past experiences affect their lives in the family. When the survivors face difficulty in their lives they miss their families or if they are alive they may help them. Also, when they have happy lives they pity their families. If they were alive they could enjoy their happiness together. They miss family member or relatives or feel guilty for not having a chance to help them to survive or even perform funeral rites. Most survivors lost their loved ones and they did not have the ability to take care them before they died and also they did not perform religious rites for the dead. All this makes them feel sorry for the dead that they cannot forget. A literature lecturer whose mother died of starvation said: “when I see things related to my family I cannot sleep because it is a very deep suffering.”⁴³

Under the Khmer Rouge they lost their husbands, wives, parents, children, or close

⁴² interview with informant number 37, 24 November, 2004

⁴³ interview with informant number 23, 01 December 2004

friends which can never come back. The loss of their loved ones left them with a very strong memory of the past. If not for that time, their families would be united today and live happily together. On the other hand, they also lost their wealth that they also cannot get back.

Some survivors faced their siblings asking for a spoon of rice before they died, while some others could not save the lives of their loved ones when they asked for help. One informant, a writer, shared her deep memory of the death of her grandmother from starvation. She remembered the last sentence her mother spoke before she died as she said: "I'm hungry,...please give me a bowl of water" and then she slept and she never woke up again. Until now she still regrets how her grandmother passed away from starvation.⁴⁴

Some survivors became widows or widowers because their husband or wives were killed or died during the Khmer Rouge regime. Some of them decided to remarry. A survivor whose husband, a soldier, was killed by the Khmer Rouge left her a child, decided to remarry after the Khmer Rouge regime. She complained: "I wanted to have only one husband in my life. I do not feel very well yet with my new family. There is a problem among us, me, my child with the first husband, and my new husband. I feel I want to live only with my first husband. I am not very happy with my new family."⁴⁵

Personal life: Most informants agreed that past suffering events affect mostly their personal life. The Khmer Rouge regime destroyed their future. They missed education, job and everything that they were going to get. They became poor. They lost of all their relatives and friends who can never come back to see them. Some survivors faced a big change before and after as a result from the Khmer Rouge regime. They become poor, orphans, widows, widowers, and missed other opportunity in their lives such as education and jobs.

⁴⁴ interview with informant number 34, 09 December 2004

⁴⁵ interview with informant number 06, 10 November 2004

At work: Life at work relates to their personal life. Some informants complain that because the regime cut off their education, they do not have enough ability to work in the present time. A traditional dancing teacher stressed that she is very aggressive with her pupils and sometimes, she speaks with a loud voice to her director without being afraid of her director getting angry. Afterward, however, she realized that she was too aggressive. Her aggressive behavior results from her hard time under the Khmer Rouge regime, she explains. This behavior may affect her relationship with the pupil and her relation with her director.⁴⁶

Decision making and friendship: There is not much effects on respondents' thinking and decision making or friendship. The informants believe that their suffering experiences has very little or no effect on those things.

7.2 The Whole Society

As I described above, the experience of the new people under the Khmer Rouge regime has affected on their lives in the present day. The most effect is in their personal lives, families' lives, and their work. Through social interaction, each survivor's life influence on the society. Each survivor's life of hatred, anger, aggression, and regret combine to create the society of conflict among Cambodian people themselves, especially the rivalry between the former new people and base people. The discrimination between the former new people and the former base people in the present day is also still an issue. The former new people hate the former base people or Khmer Rouge very much, and they blame those people for causing them suffering for years. In contrast, the former base people feel afraid for their security or feel they lost face in society after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime. The suffering experiences of new people combined with their long term memories of those suffering pictures create the feeling of revenge against those who made them suffer,

⁴⁶ interview with informant number 10, 15 November 2004

distrust for each other, hatred, aggressive behavior, regret for their relatives, as well as hopelessness in their lives.

In addition, through the experience under the Khmer Rouge regime, people developed the idea of distrust, competition to survive, and selfish to each other since then up to now. If each survivor developed the idea of hatred, distrust, competing to survive, and selfish, most people in society would influence from these things, included the young generation. All these interactions among people effect on the Cambodian society.



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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Democratic Kampuchea led the country from April 1975 to January 1979, from victory to destruction. They isolated Cambodia from the world, they distrusted foreigners, and made enemies of their own people. Their policies, their management, and their comrades led the people, especially the new people, to die of starvation, execution, overwork, and disease. The others who survived live with suffering.

Their self-reliance, independence and mastery policy led the people to starvation and led the country to isolation from the rest of the world. As a result, inside the country, people were starving and outside the country, the international community did not know.

The Khmer Rouge started evacuating people from every city to the countryside right after they captured the country. The city people were classified as “their enemy” and called “new people” who did not join their revolution rather they were the people belong to the previous regime. Those people needed to be “purified” to become the “*people of Angkar*” or the people of revolution.

The *Angkar* used many ways to purify the new people. First, they killed the family of soldiers, police, and high ranking officials who worked for the previous regime. Second, they killed educated persons and the rich. The Khmer Rouge were afraid that those people may fight against them and believed that those people deeply held the ideas of capitalism and imperialism. Third, they purified ordinary city people to root out capitalist idea and follow the revolution. To succeed in this purification, new people had to work as peasants, live with the peasants, and eat with the peasants. Some new people could not adapt to the hard work, new environment, and insufficient food and they died of starvation and diseases. Some others could not accept the regime’s purification way and argued with the Khmer Rouge, and they were executed or punished or jailed and died.

The new people, who could survive under the regime's policy, execution, disease, and starvation, are mentally suffering till today. They also experienced starvation, overwork, disease, or even imprisonment, punishment, and torture. However, they were able to survive.

The survivors have not released their suffering yet. Those events are alive in their memories. They come out and disturb their daily life. There are two big reasons that the survivors live with these suffering events. They themselves experienced suffering under the Khmer Rouge regime and the loss of their relatives and friends, the loss forever, the loss of property and opportunity for their lives. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, new people experienced losing their loved ones, starvation, diseases, overwork, torture, imprisonment, and fear for their lives. As a result, in the present time, their suffering experiences live around them. Some of them feel sorry for their loved ones, while others faced a hard time in their own lives, both physical and psychological.

This study found that the new people, the survivors, still remember those suffering experiences although it has been almost three decades since they happened. Some survivors, who suffered extremely under the regime, try to suppress their memory not to recall all those past events, but they cannot because they live with things that remind them of the events. These things include pictures of the death, the basket and pickaxe that they used to work with, rice fields, rivers, trees that used to stay around them, or black clothes, the uniform of the Khmer Rouge which is the symbol of killers.

The study also found that some survivors feel scared to see all those things while some others try to avoid seeing those kinds of things because those things made them suffer and killed their relatives and friends. Every family, at least, lost one of their relatives or friends and every new person experienced at least one of the events described here, such as starvation, overwork, disease, imprisonment, torture, or the threat of death.

It is too deep to release their experience of suffering and too late to sorry for their loved ones. Their past experiences still stay around them. The informants are

still angry with the Khmer Rouge who made them suffer and killed their relatives and friends, in particular, and with the Khmer Rouge leaders who destroyed the country in general. Their anger combined with their trauma creates a feeling of unrest in their lives.

The new people don't want to recall their past events. Their memories come up and they cannot concentrate to do anything else. Therefore, earning a living is a barrier to prevent the new people from remembering past events. Some new people who have better lives have less memory but with whom cannot restore their lives, have deeper memory. In any case, the new people still feel sorry for their loved ones.

Although some new people don't want to recall their past experiences, those experiences come out when they see or hear or nightmare about something related to their past. When those events come out, they feel sorry for their relatives, friends, and themselves and they are angry with the Khmer Rouge regime.

Some survivors can cope with their sufferings and their loss while some others cannot. The reason is they suffered too much and they lost nearly all their close relatives, on the one hand, and on the other hand, they still do not know why the Khmer Rouge did this while the Khmer Rouge leaders have not been punished yet.

A number of survivors blame foreigners involved in the Khmer Rouge's killing field because what the Khmer Rouge did to their people was so cruel they cannot believe that Khmer did those things to Khmer who were the same blood as themselves. It is incredible that Khmer dared to kill Khmer. To accuse foreigners of committing this killing field is a kind of coping with themselves. If they accept that Khmer killed Khmer, their emotion will be affected more.

Other survivors still ask themselves why the Khmer Rouge killed Khmer people. It is very hard to find the right answer for this question. While one cannot find the answer, another question is raised: who should take responsibility for the killing? Every Khmer Rouge leader blames each other for their mistakes. If they cannot find who is responsible for that, how can anyone compensate or satisfy the survivors?. People need justice. They feel that there is nothing to pay back their suffering yet

because Khmer Rouge leaders have not received punishment and their relatives and friends will never return.

This study found that the memories, the recall, nightmares of those suffering experiences affect, mostly survivors' personal life and their family lives, which lead to affect the whole society.

In short, this study found that new people suffered very much under the Khmer Rouge regime. Therefore, the suffering events still stay in the memory of the new people, more or less. Those experiences live on their mind too deep to forget; they experienced too much suffering to release. New people were hungry every day and night. They witnessed their family members dying of starvation. They were forced to work hard without rest. Also they lived with fear of being killed. They witnessed their relatives and friends being killed. They experienced torture or imprisonment. All these pictures are in the memory of the survivors and they created the feeling of aggressiveness and hopeless among the survivors.



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APPENDICES

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Appendix A

Information of informants

1. Government official, 50
2. Teacher and traditional dancer, 56
3. Accountant, 49, NGO
4. Librarian and researcher, 56
5. Lecturer, 52
6. Staff of New Life Church, 51
7. Researcher, 49
8. Staff of New Life Church, 50
9. Policeman, 54
10. Traditional dancing teacher, 52
11. Government official, 49
12. Staff of NGO, 55
13. Lecturer, 48
14. Lecturer, 59
15. Lecturer, 49
16. Researcher, 40
17. Government official, 55
18. Lecturer, 42

19. Government official, 52
20. Government official, 58
21. Traditional dancer, 46
22. Government official, 47
23. Lecturer, 60
24. Museum official, 40
25. Museum official, 44
26. Lecturer, 41
27. Traditional Dancing Teacher, 53
28. Government official, 52
29. Museum official, 52
30. Journalist, 41
31. Staff of NGO, 53
32. Researcher, 41
33. Writer, 50
34. Staff of NGO, 40
35. Teacher, 58
36. Policeman, 45
37. Policeman, 41
38. Policeman, 51
39. Commune Councilor, 51

40. Commune Councilor, 75
41. Policeman, 49
42. Commune Councilor, 46
43. Commune Councilor, 60
44. Buddhist Nun, 70
45. Hospital official, 48
46. Hospital official, 52
47. Hospital official, 47
48. Writer, 62
49. Railway official, 43
50. Railway official, 45



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Appendix B

Sex and age of informants

Sex of informants

Male	33
Female	17
Total	50

Age of informants

40- 50	27
51- 60	20
61 up	3
Total	50

สถาบันวิทยบริการ
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BIOGRAPHY

LY Vanna was born in Pursat province, Cambodia. He graduated from the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia with a bachelor degree in psychology in 2000. The following year, he graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy with a diploma of psycho-pedagogy. In 2003, he enrolled in the Master program in Southeast Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.



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