
The Endurance of the Cambodian Family Under the Khmer Rouge Regime: An Oral History

Kalyanee Mam
Yale University

Introduction

Mam Soksann was watering sunflowers in his garden on the morning of 17 April 1975. A Buddhist monk approached him and informed Mam of his journey to the Thai-Cambodian border. “My intention is to go to Thailand as soon as possible, to any country in the world. I’m not sure. I will come back home someday. I love my motherland very much, but for the time being, I cannot live my life here. I must leave for a period of time. According to the predictions of Buddha, the time has come,” he explained. “The 500 Thieves are coming to town. When they come, they will rob us of all the things we possess—our families, our children, our property, and even our lives. Everything will belong to them—the bandits.”¹ The story of the 500 Thieves is a popular millennial story that predicts the coming of a group of bandits who would reverse the order of Cambodian society, turn life completely upside down, and halt all time for a period of years.

On 17 April 1975, the bandits came. The Khmer Rouge (KR)² invaded the entire country in preparation for a nationwide “liberation campaign.” Only a few days earlier, the streets had rung with peals of laughter and exploded with firecrackers in celebration of the Cambodian New Year. But instead, on April 17, blasts from guns and the cries of families foreshadowed a dreadful era. All families, urban and rural alike, were forced to abandon their homes with as few belongings as possible. They were assured by the KR soldiers that there was “no need to take anything, but just a little food, no need to take clothes or goods....Soon *Angkar*³ will bring you things” (Kiernan 1996:40). For thousands making the treacherous journey far from familiar surroundings, there was little certainty of what *Angkar* was or represented. This force became the very organization that would rend the basic fabric of Cambodian society and would attempt to tear apart the traditional Khmer family.

When the KR came to power in 1975, their aim was to achieve a communist revolution that would place state power in the hands of worker-peasants, increase agricultural production, and radically transform the Cambodian social order.⁴ To do so, the KR required the people's absolute loyalty. Before the KR rose to prominence, Cambodians' identity was bound to their class, religion and family. To achieve their objectives, the KR attempted to weaken these traditional loyalties and supplant them with new loyalty to *Angkar*.

This chapter examines the relationship between the loyalties within the family and those imposed by the state by reviewing KR policies intended to undermine the family and by evaluating the success of families in resisting these policies. Data for this paper was selected from the author's interviews of Cambodian subjects who survived the KR regime.⁵ The author's findings challenge those of Cambodian scholars in two respects: 1) the KR deliberately implemented new policies to undermine the traditional family structure and 2) the resistance of individuals and families against these policies was successful and has been unfairly marginalized in the academic discourse on the KR regime.

In contrast with the argument that the Khmer Rouge employed no deliberate policies to undermine the family (Vickery 1984: 175-177), as well as in contrast to those who assert that KR policies were designed to weaken the family structure and that they were successful in their implementation (Becker 1986, Ebihara 1990, 1993, Ponchaud 1989, Boua 1982, and Ledgerwood 1990), I argue that the KR policies were **deliberate but unsuccessful**. As part of a systematic process created specifically to establish a new and revolutionary social order, these policies were meant to control the social institutions that supported the family. However, the KR regime did not last long enough for their policies to succeed. In silent, covert ways, family members challenged KR policies and demonstrated their determination to preserve their family values. Becker and others have understood the impact these policies had on the family structure, but they failed to take into account how individual family members during this time responded to these destructive policies and how the notion of family actually survived this horrific era. Through small acts of resistance, individuals and families were able to prove the endurance of the family.⁶

Khmer Rouge Policies and Family Institutions

At the time the Khmer Rouge regime came to power, the extended family was the center of economic and cultural life. Families worked together as an economic unit responsible both for household production and consumption. Since children remained under the care and supervision of their parents, marriage was also a family decision. Furthermore, the notion of family was preserved through Buddhism and religious ceremonies that honored ancestors and family. During the pre-KR period, the family and the economic, cultural, and religious institutions that supported it, formed the very foundation of Cambodian society. The KR attack on the family and its institutions thus threatened Cambodian society in a very fundamental way.

Physical Separation of Family Members

The Khmer Rouge used three methods to separate family members and to fracture the family structure – deportation, execution, and the collectivization of work and living arrangements. Moreover, by controlling contact between family members, the KR attempted to weaken family bonds and strengthen the bonds of people and the revolution.

Forced Evacuation

Almost all urban families were separated during the tumultuous evacuation process that took place on 17 April 1975. Of the individuals I interviewed, 93% confirmed that they and their families were deported from one place to another, while 33% replied they were separated from family members during evacuation.⁷ Family members were also separated by death, as some perished from lack of food and water, from physical exhaustion, or were executed by KR soldiers. Many families were informed that the trip would only take three days. Most of the treks lasted from two weeks up to three or four months. Meas Sokhom, who was forced to evacuate from Phnom Penh to Takeo province, had to walk six months before she reached her destination. Before she undertook the journey, she had been separated from her parents and from the rest of her family.⁸ Like Sokhom, Son Chundara was parted from members of her family during the evacuation. Her mother was forced to leave for Battambang province with her brothers, while she left with her sisters in the opposite direction, to

Prey Veng province. At the time she was only 13 years old, her older sister was 15 and her younger sister, eight.⁹

For many families, including the families of the women cited above, the evacuation process during this time of trauma and confusion spelled the loss of a support system fundamental to their survival. The only way each of the women could respond to their situation was by continuing their journey. Indeed, many endured the trek with the hope they would once again be reunited with family members at a later time.

For the less fortunate, there was no hope of family reunions. Thousands died in forced evacuations from urban areas to the countryside. According to Kiernan, in Phnom Penh, the death rate on the trek was approximately 0.53 percent or a death toll of 10,600 in an evacuated population of two million (Kiernan 1996:48).¹⁰ Most of the family members who died were children, the elderly, the sick, and women who went into labor (Ibid.). Men executed during the exodus were Lon Nol¹¹ officers, police officers, high-ranking officials or civilians who disobeyed orders (Kiernan 1996:49). During the KR regime all high-ranking officials or civilians were considered enemies of the revolution. Oul Narom, who was evacuated with her family from Phnom Penh, lost her father in this way:

When we were evacuated from Phnom Penh I was separated from my parents. We lived next to Lon Nol and we were afraid they would bomb our house, so my parents took us to live with our aunt. When Pol Pot came, we were separated and evacuated to Kompong Cham, my father's native province. I told my parents to find us there. They followed us and halfway there, the KR took my father to be killed because they knew what he did. They knew he was a capitalist. Since then I was separated from my father forever. I never saw him again. But I was reunited with my mother.¹²

Although she lost her father, Narom later rejoined her mother, who had the increased responsibility of caring for five children alone.

When Srey Mony was deported to Svay Rieng from Phnom Penh, all four of her brothers were executed because they were members of the military. Her father was also taken away to be killed. Her mother died only ten days after they arrived in Svay Rieng province. Even after the death of her brothers and her parents, Mony managed to reach Svay Rieng successfully with her husband and two children.¹³ Since her husband was a college professor, Mony continued to fear for his life in the new village they had arrived at.

Execution

When families finally settled into the collectives, the KR continued their policy of execution. In fact, the majority of the people who were killed during the KR regime lost their lives either by execution or starvation in the village (*phum*).¹⁴ Of the people I interviewed, 48% responded that one or more of their family members were executed, while 24% attributed the deaths of their family members to starvation and malnutrition. Mony's own husband was killed soon after they arrived in the *phum*. He had been plowing and became so exhausted from lack of food that he fell in the fields. He was consequently beaten with bamboo rods until unconscious, and died.¹⁵

The deaths of family members devastated the surviving family. Tom Rattana was only twelve years old at the time, but she remembers vividly what happened to her father, an official in the Ministry of Commerce, and to her brother:

In Svay Rieng they took my father, then after two months they took my brother to be killed. One of my brothers came back [from the jail] to see my mother around midnight. She cooked rice for him and he told her how difficult it was for him. He had to work so hard. Around 3:00 a.m. he returned and they took him and beat him up. They accused him of stealing away to see his mother. My mother realized that my brother had been away for so long, so she cooked some potatoes for him and placed it in a can. I went with my little sister and had her take the can of potatoes to my brother. But they would not let her see him because he had been beaten up so badly. They took the can of potatoes and ate it among themselves. After two days they took him to be killed. He died before my father. My father died from sickness and lack of food. They would not give him any food. They knew he had a high position.¹⁶

Although the imprisonment of Rattana's father and brother threatened the strength and solidarity of the family, Rattana's mother continued to maintain her traditional role as wife and mother, cooking potatoes and sending them away with Rattana to give to her brother in prison. By receiving her son and cooking for him, Rattana's mother risked her life, defying the rules of the Khmer Rouge. Rattana's brother jeopardized his own life by stealing a visit to his mother.

Phan Phalla also feared her husband would be killed because he was a Lon Nol soldier. Like Rattana and her mother, Phalla did everything she could to see her husband again for the last time. She and her family were evacuated from Phnom Penh to Svay Rieng and immediately on their arrival, her husband was taken away from her:

They said they wanted to take my husband to be educated. Instead, they placed him in prison. They said they would only take him for three days. Three days turned into six months. I was so frustrated I walked with my family to where he was imprisoned. My husband recognized my *sarong* hanging on the clothesline [near his prison] and he came over to see his daughter. He was so thin. We had barely spoken a word to each other since he left. In his hand he held a letter that revealed he would soon be killed.¹⁷

Reasons for such executions stemmed from a desire to eliminate family ties and to transfer the bonds of the family to *Angkar*. Contrary to the desired effect of the policy, these difficult times brought many families closer together. The loss of a father and/or husband was devastating for traditional families dependent on a male figure of support. It also meant that women assumed a more important role within their families and served only to strengthen the bonds of family. This was the case for Nhet Teng. Her husband was tied to a horse and dragged to death for giving advice about farming. Two of her children died of starvation. After her husband's death, she was left to care for her remaining two children alone. Soon after, she was separated from her children and sent to Koh Kong province to work. Her daughter was not allowed to accompany her and she could not even visit her five-year old son who was put in prison for two years for eating a raw chicken he had stolen from the communal kitchen.

They would not let children live with their mother. Here [in Koh Kong] I was given rice to eat, because there was enough food here. I wanted to bring food back to my children, so I would eat only half of the cooked rice they gave me and save the rest, until I had enough in three months to fill a *krama*¹⁸ for my children. Everyday I would eat the old rice that I saved and keep the warm rice for my children. When they made dessert I only ate a part of it and saved the rest for my children. When I returned to the village I asked the leader of my group to allow me to visit my son in jail. His wrist was so small. He wore tattered shorts and a torn shirt. He had no place to sleep. He did not even have a *krama* to cover himself. I could not even recognize my own son. When I went to see him, he did not even recognize I

was his mother. I suffered so much. I saw the marks on his head from all the beatings that they gave him.¹⁹

Although Teng's husband had passed away and she was prevented from seeing her children, her sense of duty and sacrifice remained. Like Rattana's mother, Teng was risking her life by storing food for her children. The storage or cooking of food in any manner was punishable by death during the KR period. To offer, seek or "steal" food, a highly prized commodity in a time of need, for one's family, became the ultimate symbol of sacrifice and love.

Collective Work and Living

In addition to the separation of family members through evacuation and execution, the KR separated families in their work and living arrangements. The collectivization of work and living arrangements attacked the very structure and foundation of the traditional Cambodian family. Before the KR regime, families worked together as an economic unit. Each family owned the modes of production as well as the fruits of their labor. Families were also social units that offered emotional support. During the KR regime, these units were viciously attacked and supplanted by collectives supported by the state.²⁰

Michael Vickery believes it was never policy to separate families:

it is impossible to infer that it was ever policy to separate children from their parents...Children were expected to do productive work, although it should already be clear that children, as distinct from adolescents and young adults, were not systematically separated from their families...and children old enough to work were only absent during the day (1984: 177-87).

It was in fact policy to separate children from their parents and many children old enough to work were absent for more than a day at a time. It is true that depending on the area or village one belonged to, some families were allowed to live together after a day of working separately. However, it was rare for children and adolescents to live with their parents. Even husbands and wives were often separated. 89% of those interviewed recalled being forced to work separately from their families, while 80% said they were forced to live apart from their families. Of those who would have been children at the time, close to 70% remembered living apart from their parents and their families.

During the KR regime, families were divided into three different types of work teams.²¹ These work teams were determined by age and sex. The first work team was called *senah chun*.²² *Senah chun* consisted of adult males and females aged 50 and above. Males belonged to *senah chun boroh* and females belonged to *senah chun neary*.²³ They were given lighter work and usually remained within the village. Although some of the younger members of this group still labored in the rice fields, older members of *senah chun boroh* usually looked after the *chamcar* or gardens, collected wood, or did other kinds of light work.²⁴ Older members of *senah chun neary* looked after other people's children, bound palm leaves, or sewed clothing.²⁵ Neou Heang, who had to work far away from the village, was forced to give up the care of her children to one of these older women:

No, children could not live with their mothers. I never saw my children.

They had two old women who acted like the mother. They would give them a little bit of rice porridge and she would wash and clean other children.

They had to be the mothers, while their real mothers were off working in the fields. When their mothers returned then they picked up their children to take home. It was that difficult. There was so much suffering.²⁶

Such an arrangement was awkward and unprecedented for the traditional Khmer family at that time. Heang expresses frustration over the fact that she was forced to have complete strangers care for her children. During the pre-KR period, although grandmothers sometimes helped to ease the burden, child-care remained a mother's responsibility.

The second work team was called *kong chalat* or the mobile work brigade. *Kong chalat* consisted of adult males and females aged 14 to 50 years old.²⁷ Males belonged to *kong boroh* while females belonged to *kong neary*. Members of these groups did the heaviest work. They plowed the fields; planted, transplanted and harvested rice; or dug and carried dirt for the irrigation projects. Srey Mony describes some of the work she was forced to do:

I was called the *neary kandal*, the woman with great strength. They made me dig dirt to build canals, work in the gardens and plant for the *sahakoh* (cooperative). Then I had to water the plants. After all that was done they made me sew clothes for their "old" people. During the rice planting season, we did not have any time to rest. We only had half an hour to eat lunch. After that we didn't have anything to eat until 10 at night. At 1:00 in the morning we would wake again to plant rice seedlings by torch light, all

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

the way until 12:00 then we would stop. While the women were planting rice seedlings, the men remained to plow the fields.²⁸

The younger and unmarried members (although married men and women were sometimes included in this group) usually traveled great distances from the village to work in the forests cutting timber or on construction projects and state farms (Ebihara 1990: 27). Liv Phrum's mother was married but she was also forced to join *kong neary* and work far away from her husband and children.

The third and youngest work team was called *kong komar*. *Kong komar* consisted of children aged 13 years and under. Boys belonged to *kong komara* while girls belonged to *kong komarei*. Members of these groups had the lightest work, although Vongchan Someth declares that his younger siblings did the same kind of work as he did; they only worked with the strength of children. He claims they even woke up before the older people. Young children who were really weak were made to watch after the cows and buffaloes.²⁹ Children also had to dig for planting, look for firewood, and gather cow dung for fertilizer. Ly Huh, now a policeman in Kampot, describes his work day:

When Pol Pot came, I was separated from my mother and placed in *kong komar*. I was about 10 years old. We were dispersed elsewhere, but we remained in Kampot. My mother was placed in *kong chalat*. I watched the cows and buffaloes and dug dirt. We worked from 6:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. and then they called us to eat in the collective. At about 1:00 p.m. we started work again until 5:00 p.m.³⁰

The division of families into separate work teams had important implications. Although members of *senah chun* remained in the villages, most of their children in *kong chalat* and *kong komar* either worked outside of the village or did not return home. They worked, lived and ate with their own work groups.³¹

Ear Sophal was allowed to stay with her family only in the first two months. After two months each member of her family was placed in *kong chalat*:

I was in *kong neary*. We all worked but we were in different *kong*. When we slept, ate or rested we did it separately with our *kong*. When we ate, we ate with our *kong* not our family. Every three or four months they would let me go visit my father. Sometimes when my father was sick they would not allow me to go visit. They said even if he was sick they would not let me see him. I was not a doctor. They already had doctors watching him. I should

just concentrate on getting my work done. They really oppressed us. There was no freedom like today.³²

Even early in the regime, families were separated for months at a time. The regime controlled people's movement to and from their families. Sophal could only visit her father every three or four months. During her father's sickness, the most crucial period in which a family member should have been present, she could not be there.

Yek Kamann was also separated from her parents and her family only one or two months after they were evacuated. She recalls: "Everyone worked separately. I never saw my younger brothers and sisters either. Every family was separated like this. My parents died before I was even able to see them. I did not even know they had died."³³ Lach Vorleak Kalyann's relationship with her parents was so completely severed that she also did not know her mother had passed away until a relative informed her through a letter.³⁴

My interviews yielded different responses about the effects of lengthy periods of separation from family members. Some felt desperate about their own situations, others missed their families, while still others feared even thinking about them. Mom They and Vongchan Someth felt that work was the only way to get their mind off of thinking about their families. They admit that "even if I wanted to think, the thoughts would not flow. Living only to work, always working forever."³⁵ Someth argues there was no time to think about family since everyone was so busy thinking about ways to fill their stomachs:

We did anything we could to survive. Everyone was so hungry. No one thought of anything else. Even our families and husbands and wives were cut off from us. For most everyone, the husband never thought about the wife, the wife never thought about the husband. They just thought about the problem of not having enough to eat. Even when you are going to the fields and your wife is going to the fields, you're too busy thinking about catching frogs. If you don't look, your stomach will be empty.³⁶

Since families were already cut off from each other, They and Someth felt it was useless to contemplate what had already happened. While Someth felt most people placed their stomachs before their hearts, Low missed her children so much she could barely eat:

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

They took the children to work somewhere. In one year we would only see them once. Only my husband and I were left. We never saw our children. I missed them so much, I almost could not even eat. I never stole to eat. I wasn't even hungry because I missed my children so much. They never tortured us but they made us work in the fields and we just worked.³⁷

In contrast, Chan Youn was too scared even to think about his wife and children: "I was able to see my wife and my children only once every four months. I never thought about it. If you think about it they will kill you. I was very scared, I did not like it."³⁸ Youn's response emphasizes how necessary it was to repress open manifestations of familial sentiment during the KR regime. Family members separated from each other could not even safely think about their family while they were away.

While some individuals responded to their situations with feelings of helplessness, many others attempted to resist the oppressive policies enacted by the KR and to bridge the distance between family members. Even Someth, who felt that searching for food was a priority during the KR period, could not resist thinking about his family during a crucial moment:

I was rarely home with my mother. In three years, I only stayed home for about 20 days. My mother would always tell me, if I am able to run away, I should leave and I should not think about her. However, I could not divorce my feeling of her. Even if I wanted to run away, I didn't know where to go. I also thought about my younger siblings.³⁹

Family was so important to Someth that he could not endure the thought of leaving them and saving his own life. Even if he only saw his family for 20 days out of three years, the prospect of not being with them at all was unbearable. While Someth's inability to escape the KR regime proved his love for his family, it was Lundi's willingness to act against KR policy that confirmed his loyalty towards his family. While Lundi was in the forest with his work brigade the leader of his group got married. His wife was soon pregnant and he asked Lundi to search and bring food to his wife. The following excerpt reveals the tremendous risks people took to help their families:

The place where I was cutting forests was about 12 km away from the village. It was very far away. The leader of my group knew that if he brought food to his wife personally, he would be killed so he asked me to help hide some food and save it for his wife. He asked me if I wanted to go visit home, because my house and his wife's house were next to each other.

I really missed my mother. I was still young and I wanted to be close to her instead of working so far away. So he gave me permission to go home....Inside, I wondered why he would give me permission to go home. According to the KR policies, I was only allowed to return home every two to three months. I thought that if they caught me I would be killed....So every time I left to bring food to his wife, I had permission to also visit my mother....At that time I started being clever for myself. When my group leader asked me to hide food for his wife, I would also hide some food for my mother. My parents were able to live more comfortably because of that. My group leader also told me to save some food for my mother, so I saved a little bit more than that for my mother. I would save about 2 kg of food for his wife and also 2 kg for my mother.⁴⁰

In defiance of KR policies and at the risk of death, the group leader sought to bring food to his pregnant wife. With opportunities to visit his parents often and to make their lives more comfortable with extra food, Lundi agreed to make the numerous and dangerous journeys home. Like Rattana's mother and Nhet Teng, Lundi expressed his family loyalties by bringing food to his loved ones. During the KR regime, food, a rare but essential commodity, became one of the few means for families to convey their emotions and familial sentiments.

It was because of the great risk of punishment that few defied the regime as Lundi had done. Instead, many quietly subverted the regime or accepted their fate, in order to survive and reunite later on. Chey, who soon became a widow, decided to adhere strictly to the KR policies in order to protect her family. Her daughter, however, could not resist coming home to see her mother, and by doing so, risked punishment:

My children were already gone. They went to a different *kong*. The children worked in one place, the mothers worked in another place. We were all separated from each other. We hardly saw each other....After a while my children would come and visit me. My daughter came to see me and I asked her if she had asked permission before she came. She said, "No, mother, I haven't." I told her to go back. As soon as I said that, one of the Khmer Rouge cadres came over and started yelling at her and said, "Look at her walking around so freely." My daughter told me she just wanted me to coin⁴¹ her and she'd go back. When she returned they made her dig even more dirt. And if she couldn't finish the job they would not give her any food.⁴²

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

During the KR period, even young children needed to receive permission before they could visit their parents and family. By visiting her mother without permission from *Angkar*, Chey's daughter was challenging its authority and asserting her loyalty to her mother.

Like Chey's daughter, many children were separated from their families. Few children were as openly defiant. Nevertheless, each questioned and regretted their separation from their parents. Mann, who was about nine or ten years old, could not understand why she could not visit her family. Mann considered this the most significant problem for her at the time, far worse than the exhaustive work she had to endure and the lack of food.⁴³ The purpose of the KR policy of separation was to make children independent of their parents and increasingly loyal to *Angkar*.

For some children, family dissolution affected how they viewed their parents and how they reacted to them when they did meet. Ly Huh was separated from his mother at age seven and placed in *kong komar*. He explains the embarrassment he felt when he met his mother after a long period of time:

In your life your mother could not live with you. But when you went out to work in different places, sometimes you could see her face. In that way you were very disappointed. When they do this to you and when you see your mother again, you get embarrassed. You get embarrassed when you see your parents and brothers and sisters again and sometimes you don't want to see them since it's been so long since you've seen them. We could only see each other every three to four months and so you get embarrassed. She comes and tries to grab her child, but you move away. Throughout the whole time I stayed in *kong komar*. I never saw my mother until Vietnam invaded and freed us.⁴⁶

Huh's testimony evokes the growing disappointment and distrust he felt towards his mother, after catching repeated glimpses of her face, yet always unable to live with her or even meet with her. The desired effect of the KR policies was that after a certain period of time children would no longer miss their family.

Nonetheless, most children cherished the opportunity to meet with their parents and their families. Eim Saram was happy when she met with her family:

"I did not get to live with my parents. I had to live with my *komar*. I only saw my parents once every month or two for a little while. We were so happy when we saw each other, mother and child. Sometimes we did not even recognize each other, because we were all so thin."⁴⁵

Sann Sokha, who was only four years old at the time, did not live with her family either and hardly saw her parents. Nevertheless, she still felt love for her parents and remembers the crabs or frogs they brought her when they did meet.⁴⁶

Regardless of age and geographic/economic background, individuals from every group were separated from their families in work and living arrangements. For most of the individuals interviewed, being separated from family members was extraordinary. Many expressed a feeling of unbearable loss.

The collectivization of work and living arrangements, in conjunction with other policies such as evacuation and executions, was a systematic and deliberate policy aimed at undermining the traditional family structure. One cannot overestimate the impact these policies had on individuals and families. At the same time, the strength and will of individuals and families endured. As with the other policies implemented to separate family members, individuals and families responded resourcefully to the problems of working and living apart. Some dealt by working harder and not thinking about the issue; others openly challenged the problem and defied their situations. The bonds unifying families and the idea of family prevailed.

Attack of Personal Property and Everyday Family Institutions

The Khmer Rouge used two methods to undermine the family as an economic and social unit and institutions that preserved family interests. These policies included forcing family members to eat in a communal setting and depriving families and individuals of their rights to personal property.

Collective Dining

Many families, in the first few months following evacuation, were allowed to eat together and even to plant potato and vegetable plants to supplement the rice that was distributed to each family. Through the months that followed, the amount of distributed rice dwindled and families were no longer permitted to plant potato and vegetable plants. They were not even allowed to catch fish or small crabs or to gather wild fruits and vegetables in the forests. For Thung Hour and her family, it only took four months before eating was collectivized. Hour recalls the process:

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

In the beginning, for two months, we all ate together. At first they gave us 30 kilos of rice for eight people. That was only enough for some rice porridge every week. Afterwards they only gave us 25 then only 20 kilos a week. About four months later, we were all separated and we were just left with my mother and my older sister. All of my nieces and nephews were placed in different *kong chalat*. We planted things to eat, but after four months, even if we tried to pick anything, we would get in trouble. It was all their property now.⁴⁷

Work and dining became collectivized. Most of Hour's family was separated into different work teams. Her family was no longer allowed to supplement their allotted amount of rice with other foods they had planted or gathered. Any attempt to do so would have been punished since everything had become the property of *Angkar*. For the KR, planting and gathering food for oneself and one's family represented a selfish practice that opposed a regime that supported collectivism. Only four months after Hour and her family arrived at the village, they were forced to collectivize their habits and work in the interest of *Angkar*.

The time it took to collectivize dining usually coincided with the amount of time it took for families to be separated in work and living arrangements. For Keo Lundi, it took about a year before he was forced to eat collectively. Lundi notes that in the beginning he and his family did not eat in a collective and the regime was still distributing rice. Only a year later, Lundi was sent away to work with his *kong chalat* and forced to eat in a collective. He attributes this to a "change in the policies of the revolution."⁴⁸ Typically, after a year, most collectives did begin to collectivize practices formerly overseen by the family unit.⁴⁹ By forcing individuals to work and eat within their work teams the regime also asserted its authority and increased individual dependence on the cooperative.

Most of the individuals interviewed complained about being forced to eat in cooperatives. Instead of working and eating with their families, individuals shared their labor as well as their food with their work teams. Their concerns about inadequate rations were subordinate even to complaints about not being able to eat with their families. Lach Vorleak Kalyann recounts her work and eating routine:

In the morning we lined up and we all went to work, at midday we lined up again to eat and then returned to work. Around five or six we came back to eat. We did not eat with our families. We ate in cooperatives and we each had a small dish of rice. One bowl of soup was shared by a large group of people.⁵⁰

As a member of *kong neary*, Kalyann was forced to work far away from the village. This meant that she could neither live nor eat with her family. Meas Sokhom describes collective dining: “Everyone ate in a different *kong*. Young women ate in *kong neary* and young men ate in *kong boroh*; younger brothers and sisters in *kong komar*, and parents and older people also ate separately.”⁵¹ According to Ebihara, “The imposition of communal dining halls was not simply a means whereby the state controlled distribution; it further demonstrated that the work team or cooperative had superseded the family as the basic social unit in Democratic Kampuchea” (Ebihara 1990:60).

Nonetheless, the following anecdotes prove that individuals and families did not accept this policy without resistance. Someth and his family planted potatoes around the house even though he was aware he was “stealing” and betraying the revolution:

In my house we secretly planted some potato plants at night. When the plant developed tubers, we had to steal the things that already belonged to us. If we dared dig up the potatoes in their presence, they would say we were betraying the revolution and bring us to be dealt with or punished. No, if we know that our potato plant has tubers, at night we would steal our own potatoes. We plant our own potatoes in our own place and at night we would have to steal our own potatoes again. If we don’t do this, we can’t survive. If we don’t do this we can’t eat the potatoes; we have to dig up the potatoes and take them to be shared by everyone in the collective.⁵²

The “crime” of having food and eating it outside the collective was so grave it was punished with imprisonment or death. As mentioned earlier, Nhet Teng’s five-year old son was placed in prison for two years because he was caught “stealing” a raw chicken. All property belonged to the regime. Yet, Someth and his family continued to commit the “capital crimes” and did not regret their actions. Confident in their duty to feed their own family, they resented and resisted the imposed policy of collective dining.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

Bitterness towards collective dining halls was triggered by the fact that families could not eat together; and much of the indignation resulted from the meager rations people were forced to endure. At first, most people were given rice. In the latter years, only thin rice porridge was ladled out. Sometimes the porridge was mixed with vegetables such as morning glory or banana stems. Someth testifies that “One pot of rice porridge was shared with 100 people and one person only received half a ladle. All we had was rice porridge with salt. There were no vegetables, nothing.” For Chey and her family, the hunger was more than they could bear.

We walked around looking for potatoes to cook, but they would not let us cook them. They made us throw them away because they wanted us to eat in a collective. If you did [cook them] and they discovered you, they would take you to be killed. But the food was not enough; we were still hungry. If we didn’t search for other food to eat, we would remain hungry. At night we would go out and try to find other things to eat.⁵³

These irrational policies prove that collective dining was enforced not because of a lack of food, but because the regime feared that allowing families to produce their own food would encourage family interests and distract loyalty from *Angkar*. As with other policies implemented by the regime, the purpose of collectivizing food and property was to eliminate individual dependency on the family and force individuals to project this dependency towards the organization.

Boua discusses the practice of hiding food to avoid sharing it with family members. She maintains that these actions “destroyed family confidence and solidarity” (1982: 60). In contrast, most stories refer to members of families planting, searching for, and concealing food for each other rather than only for themselves. At night Someth and his family risked their lives in order to feed each other. Chey, unable to let her children go hungry, searched for food for her children. The notion of family endured even during a difficult period that threatened the traditional sense of social connectivity.

Rights to Personal Property

The imposition of communal dining attacked family and individual rights to personal property. Families were prevented from producing their own food and denied the right to determine the use of the fruits of their labor. A common theme that weaves through the story of Neou Heang, a nun in the province of

Kompong Chhnang, was the deprivation of personal rights. Her testimony reveals the absolute tyranny of the regime and the anger and frustration she felt and continues to feel:

If we had anything, we hid it. If they saw us, they would kill us. We had no rights; only they had rights. They killed and got rid of us as if we were animals. Before, the people could eat their own rice and work their own fields and not have enough on our own. During the Pol Pot regime they herded us like cows. If they wanted to kill us they could kill us. That's why I am very disappointed. They could just drive us out of homes we worked so hard to build. When we returned to our homes, all of our fields were taken away from us. We had no more fields to work on. When we came back we had nothing. We had no pots and pans. We used leaves as our plates. That time was just insufferable just because we had no food to eat. If they gave us food, we had food, if not, we had nothing. How could we dare say anything to them? We had no rights. We did not even have the right to speak. That is why I say it was so difficult.⁵⁴

For Heang, the right to property was not limited to the home she and her family had worked so hard to build, the fields they toiled on, or the pots and pans they had owned. It included the right to express one's opinions and challenge one's leaders. It was easier when she suffered but remained free to do as she pleased. During the KR regime she was forced to slave under a regime that denied her agency.

The KR could never offer Cambodians their traditional rights. Such rights were dangerous since the KR leadership believed most would choose personal or family interests. Becker refers to an issue of *Tung Padevat* ("Revolutionary Flags"), the official journal of the Khmer Rouge, in which they made clear their goal of eliminating all forms of private property: "The specific traits of private property are the specific traits of the capitalist class. They are the essence or the vital part of capitalist class activities." These specific traits included individualism, vanity, rank, boastfulness, thinking of the family interests, sectionalism, organizationalism, bureaucratism, and authoritarianism (Becker 1986: 196). By abolishing private property, the KR believed they could destroy a competing loyalty that challenged the absolute authority of the revolution.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

Despite attempts made by the KR to abolish all rights and all forms of personal expression, individuals, even high-ranking KR officers, continued to feel loyalty for their families. On 25 December 1976, Thiounn Prasith, later Khmer Rouge Ambassador to the United Nations, was asked to write his autobiography, or confession. His activities and loyalty to the regime had been questioned and Prasith needed to offer compelling evidence he was working towards upholding the objectives of the revolution. In his autobiography, Prasith suggests the abolition of “personal property within individual thought” and the development of “collective property” as a priority for himself as well as the regime. He writes:

Another thing is the movement to abolish personal property within individual thought. This movement is the most profound and the most righteous for destroying the root of revisionism within the revolutionary ranks. This movement makes [me] very conscious of understanding that I who come from the exploiting class am the object of socialist revolution. That means that I strongly need to struggle within myself in order to destroy personal property completely, and to build up collective property. The class struggle inside me is very strong, too. The giving up of personal property is happening constantly. It makes me happy constantly. But this struggle is very long-lasting. I need to try harder (Thiounn 1999).

Thiounn views the abolition of “personal property within individual thought” as one of the key paths to revolutionary success. This reference can have two meanings: 1) any thoughts related to the preservation of personal property should be eradicated or 2) all personal property and rights should be destroyed. Either way this statement is interpreted, Thiounn is writing about the same rights of which Neou Heang also felt she was deprived. Thiounn constantly struggled with the desire to give up personal property: “Family property still plays a role, especially the emotions toward my children. But comparing [this feeling] to the beginning of the year, it is lighter and more stable than before” (Thiounn 1999). Thiounn was unable to divorce himself from his emotions, or the “personal property within individual thought” he felt toward his family and children. Even a high-ranking KR official, attempting to destroy thousands of families, could not sever ties with his own.

Even after evacuations, executions, and collectivization, the KR were unable to obliterate the family structure. Family members continued to express warmth and affection for each other and mourn the deaths of those who died. Although groups of people did not collectively assert their indignation, individuals and

families did resist the policies imposed upon them. If only in small ways, the actions of every individual and family facilitated the survival of the Cambodian family.

Attack on Cultural and Religious Institutions

The Khmer Rouge not only expressed their authority over families by depriving individuals of their social and economic support; they also sought to attack the cultural institutions that were fundamental to the Cambodian family. They assaulted the institution of marriage and transformed it into a ceremony devoid of family involvement and sentiments. The KR abolished all forms of religion and religious practices that displayed loyalty to the family and discouraged devotion and allegiance to parents and family by attempting to instill a new revolutionary ideology that encouraged obedience and loyalty to *Angkar*. The KR sought to replace the traditional family with a new family in *Angkar*.

Forced Marriages

For the Cambodian family, marriages before the KR period existed as a union between two families as well as between two people. Marriages were arranged in the interest of the family as well as the individual and involved the consultation and the permission of parents and the extended family. Parents usually offered crucial advice as to whom their children should marry.⁵⁵

During the KR period individuals were denied the right to choose their own mate, and parents and families were also forbidden involvement in the decision-making process. Instead, the state exercised control over the selection of mates and marriage ceremonies. Although there were instances where individuals could initiate marriages, they were still required to seek permission from village chiefs (Becker 1986: 13; Ebihara 1990: 29). Vickery argues that “similar restrictions were also part of traditional society. Young people did not normally marry without parental permission – in fact, most marriages were arranged by parents” (Vickery 1984: 175). Although it is true that marriages could not be initiated without the permission of parents and most marriages in the pre-KR period were arranged, Vickery does not recognize the significant

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

differences between the marriage policies of traditional society and the policies implemented during the KR regime. He fails to identify this policy as a method used to undermine the traditional family structure.

Unlike traditional arrangements, marriages during the KR period were forced upon people unfamiliar to each other. The marriages were arranged solely in the interest of a regime absorbed in augmenting production and reproduction. When Mom They was forced to marry, there were nine couples. At this time, she said the couples were still given opportunities to get to know each other. Later on, however, when 30-40 couples were forced to marry at a time, some couples knew each other while the unfortunate ones did not.⁵⁶ Marriages became a public and hasty affair that involved many couples instead of a private family or a village ceremony held in honor of one couple. This was the case for Thung Hour when she was forced to marry a Khmer Rouge cadre:

I did not even know anyone. And it was not just me. There were twenty couples. Like students lined up at school, couple after couple. They gave us one black *sampot*, one black shirt, one *krama*, a pair of slippers, and a box of tiger balm. And then they made us get married.⁵⁷

Families were usually not allowed to attend these events (Criddle and Mam 1987). The mass weddings were not supposed to represent the union of a couple or a family. Instead they drew attention away from the significance of the individual and the family and towards obligations to the revolution. The KR weddings also lacked the fanfare of traditional Cambodian weddings—Buddhist ceremonies, food, colorful clothing, dancing and festive music.⁵⁸ Couples were lined up, row after row, with females on one side and males on the other. Instead of a celebration, weddings were depicted as a duty similar to work on the rice fields or the irrigation canals with one's work team or at the war front.

After couples were married, they were not encouraged to establish a relationship. Like everyone else, newlyweds were also separated from each other and forced to labor in work teams that were always segregated by sex. Lach Vorleak Kalyann was forced into a marriage with a Khmer Rouge cadre.⁵⁹ She was only married for eight days before her husband left her and went to work far away. Within those eight days she became pregnant. He was gone most of the time and would only return once in a while and on the day the baby was born.⁶⁰

The regime hoped to decrease emotional attachment between couples and families while simultaneously controlling reproduction and increasing the population of the productive work force.⁶¹ Marriages were usually forced upon individuals for reproductive purposes only, since most couples who were married were soon after separated from each other and rarely met afterwards. After reproduction was achieved, it was not important for couples to remain together, since their time and energy were required on the work field.⁶² Although Ebihara and Becker recognize the policy of forced marriages as a method of weakening family ties and of increasing state control over sexuality and reproduction, they fail to acknowledge the responses as well as the resistance of women to these policies. Most individuals who were forced into marriage did not want to get married. “It was such a difficult time,” says Mom They, “that I did not have any desire to get married.”⁶³ Even so, during the five months in which they were married, although they rarely saw each other, she still viewed her husband as the head of the household. Despite being in a marriage she did not accept, she chose to maintain her traditional beliefs about marriage and family.

Hour, on the other hand, expressed her fidelity to her family and tradition by refusing to marry.⁶⁴ She voiced her abhorrence and refusal to marry, and was able to resist marriage to a KR cadre:

I told them to ask me to do anything they wanted me to do and I will do it, but I will not take a husband. I said now beat me until I die but I will not answer. I told them I already had a betrothed. I will not get married. How can I get married when my parents are not even present? Because I refused, they took me and beat me again. I told him I refused and they put me in prison and had leeches placed on me. From then on they treated me very badly and made me dig dirt.⁶⁵

Unable to give up the traditions she was accustomed to, Hour asserted herself in the face of severe punishment. She remained faithful to her betrothed as well as her parents and refused to be married without their presence. The KR met her stubbornness with cruel punishment. Despite the punishment she knew she would be faced with, Hour continued to resist. She even stated she preferred death before she would ever enter a forced marriage. Hour’s story testifies to the oppressive nature of the marriage policies that were enacted at that time.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

The forced marriages of the KR period differed greatly from marriages before that time. Not only was the policy oppressive towards individuals and especially women, it was aimed at destroying the nature of the Cambodian family. Despite these oppressive policies, some women still tried to maintain a traditional family structure within the marriages they were forced into while others actively refused to get married in order to maintain their family traditions.

Religion

Religion, a crucial support of pre-KR family, was another cultural institution the KR attacked. Although other religions are also practiced within the country, the official national religion of Cambodia is Buddhism. For the Khmer people, religion is a way of life embedded in tradition and culture. In Cambodia, Buddhism co-exists with a folk religion that emphasizes a belief in ancestry, spirits, and the supernatural. Within the family, the Buddhist tradition reminds children to respect their elders as well as their ancestors and to offer obedience and loyalty to their parents. Buddhism also plays a significant role in the major ceremonies that affect the family, such as religious holidays, weddings, and funerals.

In the Cambodian family, one of the most significant religious events is the funeral ceremony. It is an opportunity for family members to mourn and to express devotion to the deceased member of the family. For the Khmer, the most important duties a child must fulfill are to respect and honor his/her parents, to take care of them in their old age, and to mourn and perform the correct ceremonies for them when they die. If children are unable to carry out these specific obligations, tremendous feelings of guilt may result. Without the ritual ceremonies and without the Buddhist chants, it is believed the spirit will continue to wander and will never be at peace.⁶⁶

When the KR took power, one of the religious customs banned was the burial ceremony and the mourning of the dead. Many family members were lost during the KR period. The death of a family member had a significant impact on families. The inability to mourn their loss and to perform the most important and sacred ceremony left a scarring impression. Yet, even in the face of prohibition, families continued to secretly mourn the dead and even performed small funeral ceremonies.

After the death of their father, Phalkun and his siblings had to be careful how they reacted to his death since any signs of mourning were also punishable with death. Despite this threat, Phalkun and his siblings still cried and even attempted to honor their father:

We went to try to find the body but we could not find his body. If they knew we were searching for his body they would also kill us. At that time, if after they killed your father and you were mourning after your father they would also kill the child. Even if they saw the mother crying, they would kill the entire family. So we cried in secret and when they came to us, we would wipe our tears away so they would not find out... At that time, in other families, if they killed the father they also killed the children. We were lucky nothing happened to us. We were all afraid they would kill us so we dared not cry and scream. But we tried to walk somewhere far away so we could perform a small ceremony for my father...After they took my father away I just kept working, because after they take your father away they watch you.⁶⁷

Once a family member was found guilty or was considered an “enemy” of the revolution, it was not difficult to implicate the rest of the family.⁶⁸ One had to be careful about how one reacted to the death of a family member, since mourning for an “enemy” was considered a crime. The man executed was now an enemy and could no longer be considered Phalkun’s father. His death could not be a loss. Nevertheless, Phalkun and his siblings cried in secret, mourned the death of their father, and even performed a small ceremony in honor of his death. By performing these ceremonies at the risk of their own lives and the lives of their family, they displayed their loyalty to religion and culture, expressing their enduring loyalty to their family.

When Teng’s parents passed away she was unable to fulfill her duties as a daughter and offer them a proper burial:

After four months my father became sick and died. When he died, I did not even know where they took him. They just bundled him up in a mat and took him away. I was very hurt. I did not have a chance to bury him properly. My mother also died after that because of serious diarrhea. I was not able to bury her properly either. My husband had to take her away.⁶⁹

Until today Teng regrets not having had the opportunity to bury her parents properly. The passage above reveals the tremendous respect and loyalty she felt for her parents. Even in the midst of a period of upheaval and tragedy, Teng continued to cling to her traditions and the religious customs she had been taught by her family.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

As evident from Teng's testimony, during the Khmer Rouge period cremation was banned and bodies were simply disposed of. Ear Sophal lost her father in 1977 due to illness and lack of food. She was unable to cremate her father's body:

In the beginning when people died, they allowed people to cremate and keep the bones of their loved ones in a rightful way. But after 1976, 1977, and 1978 they would not allow you to cremate the body. They just buried the bodies and even wild dogs could dig as they pleased.⁷⁰

Such policies showed tremendous disrespect for the deceased and would not allow families to express their loyalty. According to Sophal, this policy was not enacted until a year after the KR took power. This was also the time in which most executions took place, more families were separated in work and living arrangements, and the policy of cooperative dining was implemented in all areas. As the years passed, the KR became increasingly paranoid about their position and even more oppressive.

Nonetheless, mourning and funeral ceremonies signified that loyalty still remained with the family and not the revolution. Even after the policies were implemented, individuals continued to mourn and perform funeral ceremonies for deceased members.

Indoctrination of Revolutionary Ideology

With family ties remaining strong, the Khmer Rouge regime sought to find new ways to force obedience from the people and to suppress their fierce competitor: the family. They attempted to accomplish this through the indoctrination of children with revolutionary ideology and by creating a new family in *Angkar*. Although these policies were impressed upon all individuals, the population most significantly affected by these policies were the children since they were malleable and still impressionable. Close to 60% of the testimonials refer to indoctrination of children. Children were taught that parents had no *kun* or merit, that parents were the enemies of the regime and therefore enemies of the children, and finally that *Angkar* was the one with *kun* and therefore their rightful parents.⁷¹

Keo Lundi describes the ideology the KR hoped to impress upon children in the following statement: "In the *kong komar* they disciplined children to hate their parents. They said the parents had no *kun*; it is *Angkar* that gives them food and clothing to wear. It is *Angkar* that did good things for them."⁷² The KR

appropriated the vocabulary of Buddhism, particularly that of words used in a familial relationship of parent and child. In doing so, the KR substituted itself as the surrogate parent. It was thus able to usurp the authority of parents, effectively indoctrinate children with a familiar relationship of terms that were re-contextualized, and undermine the authority of parents and religion by reconstructing a familial vocabulary as a national one.

Not only did the KR teach children that their parents lacked *kun* and that they ought to be hated; according to Srey Mony, they also “taught children to obey because parents were not *pouk-mé*. Their *pouk-mé* was *Angkar*.”⁷³ *Pouk-mé* literally translates into “dad-mom,” but is used to denote “parents” and is equivalent to the English “mom and dad.” According to François Ponchaud,⁷⁴ the KR also adopted a moral code that mirrored a similar code used to direct respect towards parents. Instead of using the phrase “*deaung kun apouk-maday*” (recognize the merit of your parents), the KR substituted the phrase with “*deaung kun*” (recognize the merit of *Angkar*) (Ponchaud 1989:165). By designating themselves as the *pouk-mé*, they hoped to win the absolute loyalty and devotion of the children.⁷⁵

To achieve their objectives, the KR placed all children under the age of fourteen in *kong komar*, separate from their parents and older siblings. In the mornings, the children were given an hour of “schooling” before they continued with their daily chores. The *komar* groups and the “schools” gave the KR opportunities to indoctrinate children with revolutionary ideas that would help separate children even further from their parents. In Rattana’s *komar* group there were 200 children and they were all placed under the lead of one woman who disciplined them. Rattana remembers she was very “mean” and that she would not allow them even five minutes rest.

She taught the children to be bad and not love their parents... and to find out secrets about them so they could take the parents to be punished. Some children told on their parents. They told them their mother stole some rice to cook and they would take their parents away to beat or punish. It happened in my village; I saw it all with my own eyes.⁷⁶

Children were not only taught to hate their parents and to consider *Angkar* as their parents, they were also encouraged to spy on them.⁷⁷ The act of spying increased the divide between children and parents since it forced children to view their parents as enemies and guilty culprits. Someth recalls one child, about 12 or 13 years old, who spied on his father and hit him for digging up some potatoes. The father could not hit back and defend himself.⁷⁸ By allowing

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

children to judge, to hit, and spy on their parents, the KR elevated children to positions above their parents, offered them additional incentives to mistreat their parents, and co-opted their loyalty.⁷⁹

Even before the liberation of the cities in 1975, Lach Kalyann recalls being taught to sing revolutionary songs and being a part of a spy group: “They already created *kong chlop* or spy groups,” she says. “They made us study how to be spies. Girls studied in the daytime while guys studied at night. I didn’t like the songs but my brothers and sisters enjoyed them.”⁸⁰ These *kong* or spy groups were trained to spy on others and to catch people in the act of committing crimes against the regime. The KR also hoped to instill a sense of pride in children, encouraging them to fight for the revolution.

Although Phalkun was not influenced by the teachings of the revolution, he recalls there were other children who were affected. He remembers the children being told to call their parents over and to line them up in rows before they left for work. The children were then asked whether their parents did anything wrong. Children were given permission to hit their parents if their parents had committed a “crime.” He recalls one incident in particular: “The children can really hate their parents. They point blame at them as if they were just neighbors. A mother said something to her child and the child said to the mother, ‘I’m not your child and you’re not my mother.’”⁸¹ The KR pitted children against their parents and offered them legitimate reasons to hate and punish their parents: parents stole from *Angkar*; they were disloyal to the regime and deserved to be punished. Like the revolutionary songs, these exercises of punishment ensured the children’s loyalty to *Angkar*.

The KR encouraged children to grow distant from their parents and to believe that their parents had abandoned them. Children became resentful of their parents and developed loyalties within other groups. Phan Phalla claims: “Even if children were not taught directly to despise their parents, it was as if they were because they were never allowed to miss their parents.”⁸²

Although some children were impressed by the teachings of the revolution, there were others who resisted the indoctrination. As he watched other children hitting their mothers, Phalkun cried with hurt and frustration and recalls thinking to himself: “At that time, everything was just mixed up. There were no proper rules and customs.”⁸³ Unlike most children, Rattana was very fortunate. Although she was placed in *kong komar*, Rattana was still allowed to return home and maintained a bond with her mother:

I did not take the Khmer Rouge teachings to heart, because I realized that my parents worked hard to raise me. I could not believe the KR. I needed to be compassionate to my parents. They had lost all of their rights over their children. My parents no longer had any control, but my mother continued to teach me to be good so the KR could not blame or punish me. My mother still had feelings for me. She told me to just do whatever they asked me to do.⁸⁴

In this passage, Rattana reveals her Buddhist upbringing and the importance of being compassionate to her parents in spite of their degraded situation. Despite her mother's loss of public authority, Rattana continued to respect her mother's advice privately. In fact, her mother taught her another method of resistance and survival by utilizing the traditional Buddhist precepts the KR had forced them to abandon. She advised her daughter to offer the KR the same kind of respect she would bestow on her own parents. Rattana's mother continued to assume her position as mother and was able, after a fashion, to discipline her daughter.

It was more difficult for Prath Sorn to resist the revolutionary indoctrination. Sorn was only four or five years old at the time and was taught to hate his parents and to view them as his enemies. He admits he yielded a little, even though he did manage in the end to resist believing what the KR taught him:

At that time of course I believed them a little because that was what they taught us. I believed them along with the other children. But when I saw my parents I did not view them as my enemy but some of the other children did. It was possible at that time for children to betray their parents. But it's normal, with parents, no matter what they tried to teach us, anybody would love them. When you see your parents you want to run to them. I still loved them like normal.⁸⁵

It was natural for Sorn to believe what he was taught and to follow other children in their beliefs. Yet, on seeing his parents, it suddenly became "normal" for him to love his parents and to "want to run to them." Even children aged four and five, the most impressionable group of children, were difficult to indoctrinate. The bonds between children and parents remained strong.

Although most of the revolutionary education was focused on the indoctrination of children, all members of the regime were forced to view *Angkar* as the *pouk-mé* and to discount any relationships they had with their own family members. Many of the individuals interviewed mentioned having to

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

attend daily village meetings. These meetings were usually held in the evenings after work was completed and sometimes lasted into the late night. According to Chey, the meetings gave the leaders an opportunity to inform everyone of their duties to the revolution:

At the meetings they said that no one could love each other. If lovers dared to love each other, they would be taken to be killed.⁸⁶ Everyone was scared. Even parents and children and brothers and sisters and relatives could not recognize or know each other. They could not talk to each other.⁸⁷

The KR wished to destroy all relationships in general. It was essential for the KR to abolish any form of relationships that competed with allegiance to the revolution. Through the strategic use of language and policy of indoctrination, *Angkar* came to characterize the new family individuals had to sacrifice their lives for. Yet in the face of this barbarous challenge, Cambodians continued to defy KR policies and assert their fidelity to the family.

Conclusion

The policies implemented by the Khmer Rouge regime sought to destroy traditional family structure and substitute *Angkar* for it. When Mam Soksann and his family wished to move to another village in order to be closer to his relatives he was told that “According to the rules of *Angkar*, people “new” and “old” are not allowed to move freely from place to place in order to live closely with their relatives, unless *Angkar* allows them to do so. All people living in the country are our relatives” (Mam n.d.). For the KR, loyalty to one’s family was unnecessary since one’s true family was in *Angkar*, the organization.

Vickery argues that only the extended family was threatened during the Khmer Rouge period.

DK policy was immeasurably stricter than the pre-revolutionary norms it mirrored, and it served to modify, not destroy, the family through transferring parental authority over adults to the state and breaking down the extended family into nuclear units (1984:175).

Yet even the survival of the nuclear family was not guaranteed as the KR began to physically separate family members and attack the material, cultural, and religious institutions that supported the family. By destroying the traditional family and creating a new family, the KR hoped to be rid of a competing loyalty and to transfer this loyalty to their own organization. Family members were executed or forced to work, live and eat separately so that all bonds between family members would be severed. The rights and

property of family members were seized and even the rights of families to participate in ceremonies that expressed familial sentiments were denied. Instead, family members were forced to accept revolutionary teachings that chastised the family.⁸⁸

The revolution aimed at creating a new family that would only share the fruits of their labor with the cooperative, that would only voice emotion and sentiment for the regime, and was solely interested in the welfare of the state. However, the KR could not break the century-old bonds of family traditions. Cambodians continued to cling to the prevailing notion of family, learned to adapt to policies that threatened this notion, and strove to protect and preserve the family structure even at risk of punishment and death.

They did this in a number of ways: some worked within the regime, some broke out of it, some maintained a public semblance of cooperation and fidelity while working passionately to resist the imposed public policies. All clung to family as a traditional structure of interdependence and as a social unit set up as the antithesis of the KR regime's policy. KR policies separated families and threatened the institutions that supported families, but did not weaken the enduring sense of kinship.

Why did families resist? Why were families so intent on maintaining their loyalties to their personal family and so reluctant to contribute to the process of collectivization? Would things have been different if people did not have to suffer under such oppressive conditions? The KR stubbornly flew in the face of all that the Khmer people believed in. The idea of the collective ran contrary to the traditional Cambodian view where the idea of family was paramount.

In seeking to destroy all sentiments and relationships between individuals, the KR were unable to replace the strong emotional bonds that existed between families. The regime desired to create a new family and considered themselves the *pouk-mé* or parents of the people, but failed to fulfill the duties of parents. The KR took on the language of family but could not prove their merit. Physically and emotionally, the KR fell far short of the responsibilities they assumed.

Instead of allowing families to control their own means of production and consumption, the KR forced individuals to work for an abstract entity with no traditional or familiar place in Khmer society. Ieng Thirith, who was Minister of Culture and Social affairs during Democratic Kampuchea,⁸⁹ proudly voiced her views of the cooperatives:

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

It is easier for the workers. They have no need to cook. They just do the work and then they come back and eat...[The poor people] had never been served before, now they were served. Before the women had to work, come home and search for the fish, the rice, to cook it, care for the children. This was terrible. In communal living they only have to come home from work and eat.⁹⁰

Ieng Thirith and the other KR leaders failed to recognize how important and fulfilling each one of those “terrible” activities are for families. It frustrated Neou Heang when she was forced to have others care for her own children. Her commentary on deprivation of personal rights is significant and revealing: “Before the people could eat their own rice and work their own fields and not have enough on their own. During the Khmer Rouge regime they herded us like cows.”⁹¹ It is true, as Vickery points out, that the work people were forced to do was not very different from the work they were accustomed to before. However, during the KR regime people were deprived of free will and the standard of living collectively declined.

The second reason why families resisted the KR policies was because the regime was unable to provide for the people. After the food was produced, it was uncertain where all the rice went.⁹² The KR denied the people’s rights and failed to provide for their basic needs.

The ability of families to resist Khmer Rouge policies contributed to the downfall of the regime. The KR failed in their objective to increase agricultural production and in their efforts to mobilize against outside forces. When Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia in 1979, the KR enjoyed little popular support and were easily pushed toward the Thai border. Bereft of popular allegiance, the KR could not draw on the strength of the population they had worked like slaves in the fields. The Khmer Rouge regime did not last long enough for the policies to take hold, but the will of individuals and families to resist the policies proved they were bound to fail. The Khmer Rouge example teaches us that when the interests of a revolution run so radically counter to a people’s traditions and culture, that revolution is doomed to failure.

The millennial story told by the Buddhist monk to Mam Soksann did come true. The 500 Thieves did come to town. They attempted to rob the people of Cambodia of everything they possessed – their families, their children, their property, and even their lives. Yet in the end, the thieves neglected the treasure they won in 1975. Even in the face of extreme duress, individuals preserved themselves and their families. They refused to accept the millennial story of

disempowerment. Instead, they constructed their own narrative and regained agency over their possessions, their lives, and especially their families.

Appendix

Data Collected from Interviews

Total number of interviews: 46

Gender:

Female: 30 or 65%
Male: 16 or 35%

Ages:

21-30 07 or 15%
31-40 12 or 26%
41-50 14 or 30%
over 50 13 or 28%

Geographical Distribution: 30% from Phnom Penh and
70% from other provinces

Phnom Penh 14
Pursat 1
Takeo 2
Kg Chhnang 9
Svay Rieng 1
Kampot 6
Kg Cham 8
Koh Paan 4
Pailin 1

Class Background (pre-Khmer Rouge):

Class 1: Total 12 or 26%

government official 1
doctor 2
veterinarian 2
professor 1
teacher 5

Class 2: Total 8 or 17%

police officer 3
soldier 4
palace musician 1

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

Class 3: Total 26 or 57%	
merchant	2
peasant	14
farmer	2
laborer	4
servant	1
seamstress	1
barber	1
cook	1
Policies⁹³:	
Policy #1: Evacuation	43 answered YES or 93%
Separated upon evacuation	15 answered YES or 33%
Policy #2: Execution	22 answered YES or 48%
Death by other means	11 answered YES or 24%
Policy #3: Lived Separately	37 answered YES or 80%
Worked Separately	41 answered YES or 89%
Policy #4: Communal Dining	33 answered YES or 72%
Policy #5: Personal Property	46 answered YES or 100%
Policy #6: Forced Marriages	4 instances reported
Policy #7: Revolutionary Political Ideology	25 answered YES or 56%

References

Thiounn Prasith. 1999. "Autobiography of Thiounn Prasith, Former Khmer Rouge Ambassador to the United Nations" (Circa 25 December 1976). www.yale.edu/cgp.

Mam, Peter Soksann. [n.d.] *My Life Story During the Khmer Rouge Regime*, unpublished personal account.

Author's Interviews with:

1. Tom Rattana (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 8 June 1998.
2. Mom They (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.
3. Phan Phalla (female, born 1957), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.
4. Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.
5. Srey Mony (female, born 1940), Phnom Penh, 10 June 1998.
6. Son Chundara, Phnom Penh (female, born 1963), 10 June 1998.

-
7. Tep Davary, Phnom Penh (female, born 1950), 10 June 1998.
 8. Meas Sokhom (female, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 15 June 1998.
 9. Men Savich, (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 15 June 1998.
 10. Yuk Kalyann (female, born 1948), Phnom Penh, 16 June 1998.
 11. Keo Lundi (male, born 1960), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.
 12. Liv Phrum (male, born 1970), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.
 13. Thongphotana Phalkun (male, born 1970), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.
 14. Vongchan Someth (male, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.
 15. Oul Norom (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.
 16. Eim Sophat (male, born 1955), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.
 17. Ear Sopal (female, 1955), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.
 18. Heng Niem (male, born 1963), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.
 19. Neou Heang (female, born 1926), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.
 20. Nhet Teng (female, born 1951), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.
 21. Yek Kamann (female, born 1965), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.
 22. Mann (female, born 1966), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.
 23. My Low (female, born 1920), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.
 24. My Sok, (male, born 1918), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.
 25. Thung Hour (female, born 1954), Kompong Speu, 27 June 1998.
 26. Thea Vatha (male, born 1952), Kompong Speu, 27 June 1998.
 27. Chan Youn (male, born 1934), Kampot, 29 June 1998.
 28. Chey (female, born 1935), Kampot, 29 June 1998.
 29. San Ang Saream (female, born 1942), Kampot, 29 June 1998.
 30. Prath Sorn (male, born 1972), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

31. K Phally (female, born 1945 29 June 1998).
32. Ly Huh (male, born 1968), Kampot, 30 June 1998.
33. Mok Ny (female, born 1972), Kampot, 30 June 1998.
34. Eim Saram (female, born 1967), Kampot, 29 June 1998.
35. Huy Samnang (male, born 1929), Kampong Cham, 6 July 1998.
36. Sann Sokha (female, born 1971), Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998.
37. Nuon Srey Thuoch (female, born 1976), Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998.
38. Neang Vanna (female, born 1954), Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998.
39. U Eng (female, born 1918), Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998.
40. Koh Chook (male, born 1943) Kompong Cham, 7 July 1998.
41. Ein Sokhon (female, born 1960) Kampong Cham, 7 July 1998.
42. Hong Tylean (female, born 1958) Koh Paan, 7 July 1998.
43. Not Saveoun (female, born 1950), Koh Paan, 7 July 1998.
44. Thoun Cheoun (male, born 1916), Koh Paan, 7 July 1998.
45. Heng Ty (male, born 1961), Koh Paan, 7 July 1998.

Becker, E. 1986. *When the War Was Over: Cambodia's Revolution and the Voices of its People*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Boua, Chantou. 1994. *Cambodia's Country Report: Women In Development*. First draft for The Second Asia and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Jakarta, June 7-14, Phnom Penh: Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, 1994.

— — — 1983. "Observations of the Heng Samrin Government 1980-1982" in *Revolution and Its Aftermath In Kampuchea: Eight Essays*. Chandler, D. and B. Kiernan (eds.) New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph Series.

— — — 1982. "Women in Today's Cambodia," *New Left Review* 131 (1982): 44-61.

-
- Chandler, D., B. Kiernan and C. Boua. 1988. *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents From Democratic Kampuchea 1976-1977*. New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies.
- Clapham, C. 1985. *Third World Politics*. London and Sydney: Croom Helm.
- Criddle, JoAn D. and Teeda Butt Mam. 1987. *To Destroy You is No Loss: The Odyssey of a Cambodian Family*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987.
- Ebihara, M. 1993. "A Cambodian Village under the Khmer Rouge" in B. Kiernan, ed. *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia: The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community*. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies Monograph series.
- — — "Return to a Khmer Village." *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. 14:3: 67-70.
- — — 1974. "Khmer Village Women in Cambodia." in *Many Sisters: Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, C. Matthiasson, ed. New York: Free Press, pp. 305-347.
- — — 1990. "Revolution and Reformation of Cambodian Village Culture" in *The Cambodian Agony*, D.A. Ablin and M. Hood, eds. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- — — 1968. *Svay: A Khmer Village in Cambodia*. Ph.D. Diss. Columbia University, Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Information Service.
- Jackson, K. ed. 1989. *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Kiernan, B. and C. Boua. 1982. *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942-1981*. London: Zed Press.
- Kiernan, B. 1996. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power and Genocide In Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ledgerwood, Judy. 1990. *Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender: Women, Stories, and the Social Order*. Ph.D. Diss. Cornell University.
- — — *Analysis of the Situation of Women in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: UNICEF, 1993.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

Ponchaud, F. 1989. "Social Change in the Vortex of Revolution," in *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Karl Jackson, ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

The Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs. 1995. *Cambodia's Country Report, Women: Key to National Reconstruction*. Kingdom of Cambodia: Secretariat of State for Women's Affairs, 1995.

Sonnois, Brigitte. 1990. *Women in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Redd-Barna (Norwegian Save the Children).

Vickery, Michael. 1984 *Cambodia: 1975-1982*. Boston: South End Press.

Endnotes

¹ Peter Soksann Mam, My Life Story During the Khmer Rouge Regime, unpublished personal account.

² The Khmer Rouge (KR) overthrew the Lon Nol regime on 17 April 1975 and established Democratic Kampuchea (DK). This is the official name for the Khmer Rouge regime which was headed by Pol Pot.

³ Angkar is Khmer for "organization." Angkar is used to refer to the Khmer Rouge regime.

⁴ In his book, *Third World Politics* (1985), Christopher Clapham defines a revolution as "a rapid, violent, and irreversible change in the political organization of a society. It involves the destruction of the existing political order...[and the establishment and maintenance of] some kind of new social, political and economic order."

⁵ All 45 interviews were conducted in Khmer, tape-recorded and later transcribed into English. The object of the interviews was to collect a body of data from a diverse group of people on their individual experiences during the KR regime with regards to the family. Subjects of the interviews came from 9 different geographic areas. 30% of the respondents were originally from the capital city of Phnom Penh, while 70% came from the provinces. 26% of

respondents belonged to the educated or government class, 17% were from the military, while 57% belonged to the peasant or merchant classes. Respondents were between 22 and 82 years old, with 84% of respondents over the age of 30. 65% of the subjects interviewed were female while 35% were male. The decision to interview more female subjects than male subjects was made keeping in mind that of the population that survived the KR regime, half to two-thirds were female.

⁶ James Scott refers to the power of individual resistance: “Multiplied many thousandfold, such petty acts of resistance by peasants may in the end make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors” (Scott 1985:35).

⁷ For summary of data collected on deportation and other policies, see Appendix on Quantitative Data.

⁸ Author’s interview with Meas Sokhom, Phnom Penh, 15 June 1998.

⁹ Author’s interview with Son Chundara, Phnom Penh, 10 June 1998. Chundara had already lost her father during a KR attack on Phnom Penh in 1973.

¹⁰ This estimate does not account for other major urban areas like Battambang City

¹¹ Lon Nol was in power between 1970-75 and was deposed by the Khmer Rouge on 17 April 1975.

¹² Author’s interview with Oul Norom (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

¹³ Author’s interview with Srey Mony (female, born 1940), Phnom Penh, 10 June 1998.

¹⁴ These were the forced labor camps people were sent to work in.

¹⁵ People were mostly tortured and killed if they were considered a threat to the regime because of their occupations during the pre-KR period. Some were killed because they were high-ranking government officials, teachers, students, capitalists, or even because they wore glasses. Most of those men executed were fathers and/or husbands, men who had held “threatening” occupations in the previous regime.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

¹⁶ Author's interview with Tom Rattana (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 8 June 1998.

¹⁷ Author's interview with Phan Phalla (female, born 1957), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998

¹⁸ A *krama* is a traditional Khmer scarf worn usually around the neck. It can also be used as a cloth, a skirt for men, a sling to wrap babies, and for many other purposes.

¹⁹ Author's interview with Nhet Teng (female, born 1951), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

²⁰ According to May Ebihara, "The solidarity of the family as a primary social unit of economic cooperation and emotional bonds was shattered by communal organization into labor teams segregated on the basis of age and gender, dispersal of family members and kinfolk into different work groups and communes, and suppression of familial sentiments." (Ebihara 1993: 55)

²¹ Unless otherwise cited, the following information are all gathered from the author's interviews, Summer 1998.

²² *Senah chun* was the name used by Peter Soksann Mam in his autobiography to describe persons in this age group. It is uncertain whether this term was actually used throughout the Khmer Rouge period and regime.

²³ The Khmer word *boroh* denotes male and the word *neary* denotes female.

²⁴ Thongphotana Phalkun's father was already so old he pulled grass around the collective dining hall and in the morning they made him clean up the place. Later, his father was also placed in charge of collecting Chee Lek Mui. My Sok, who was already 57 years old at the time, had to gather wood.

²⁵ At the age of 55, My Low was assigned the job of binding palm leaves, which were used for thatching roofs. Thung Hour's mother, who was also over 55 years old at the time, had to look after young children and sew clothes for the "old" people.

²⁶ Author's interview with Neou Heang (female, born 1926), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

²⁷ It was sometimes referred to as the hot-warm group because individuals in this group were considered the strongest. Members of the *kong chalat* were also referred to as *samaraphum chdah* or hard worker.

²⁸ Author's interview with Srey Mony (female, born 1940), Phnom Penh, 10 June 1998.

²⁹ Author's interview with Vongchan Someth (male, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

³⁰ Author's interview with Ly Huh (male, born 1968), Kampot, 30 June 1998.

³¹ Becker argues this did not occur until the second year of the revolution: "The party never outlawed families as such and in the first year the revolution allowed the basic family unit to survive. But by the second year new orders were issued to break up that most powerful of institutions" (1986: 240). Although Becker's assertion is correct for most families, families also recalled being separated early on in the regime, both with regards to work and living arrangements.

³² Author's interview with Ear Sophal (female, 1955), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

³³ Author's interview with Yek Kamann (female, born 1965), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.

³⁴ Author's interview with Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

³⁵ Author's interview with Mom They (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

³⁶ Author's interview with Vongchan Someth (male, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

³⁷ Author's interview with My Low (female, born 1920), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.

³⁸ Author's interview with Chan Youn (male, born 1934), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

³⁹ Author's interview with Vongchan Someth (male, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

⁴⁰ Author's interview with Keo Lundi (male, born 1960), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁴² "Coining the air" or *cos kyall* is a traditional medicinal practice used to relieve back pains, headaches, colds, dizziness, and nausea. Oil is applied to the skin, then a coin is rubbed on the skin until the skin turns bright red.

⁴² Author's interview with Chey (female, born 1935), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁴³ Author's interview with Mann (female, born 1966), Kompong Chhnang, 26 June 1998.

⁴⁴ Author's interview with Ly Huh (male, born 1968), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁴⁵ Author's interview with Eim Saram (female, born 1967), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁴⁶ Author's interview with Sann Sokha (female, born 1971), Kompong Cham, 6 July 1998.

⁴⁷ Author's interview with Thung Hour (female, born 1954), Kompong Speu, 27 June 1998.

⁴⁸ Author's interview with Keo Lundi (male, born 1960), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁴⁹ According to Ebihara, Democratic Kampuchea instituted communal dining halls after 1976-1977. DK also forbade individuals from collecting and preparing their own food (1993: 56). Becker also agrees with this assertion (1986: 240).

⁵⁰ Author's interview with Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁵¹ Author's interview with Meas Sokhom (female, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 15 June 1998.

⁵² Author's interview with Vongchan Someth (male, born 1954), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁵³ Author's interview with Chey (female, born 1935), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁵⁴ Author's interview with Neou Heang (female, born 1926), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

⁵⁵ According to Ebihara's study of a Cambodian village in the 1960s, "It is actually the parents who make the major decision about the marriage partner, and the child acquiesces because of a sense of obedience or because she/he has no strong feelings about marrying a particular person" (Ebihara 1968: 468.)

⁵⁶ Author's interview with Mom They (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁵⁷ Author's interview with Thung Hour (female, born 1954), Kompong Speu, 27 June 1998.

⁵⁸ Weddings during the pre-KR period were very important religious and cultural affairs. The weddings lasted about one and a half days and consisted of ceremonies and rituals conducted by the *achar* or Buddhist priest, followed by an elaborate feast on the evening of the last day.

⁵⁹ Lach Vorleak's husband was also handicapped and lacked a limb. She was told that if she married him they would release her father from the torture camp and allow him to live with her. She agreed, hoping to have her father back: "So I got married to a Khmer Rouge handicapped person without a leg. But when I got married they still didn't let my father get away; only I got away. They lied. After I got married, they took everyone away." [Author's interview with Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998]

⁶⁰ Author's interview with Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁶¹ Ebihara states that the policy was used to exercise control over sexuality, to sustain reproduction, and to weaken emotional commitment between couples, so that they would redirect their loyalties to the revolution (1990: 30.)

⁶² According to Becker, the Khmer Rouge believed sex should be restricted only for production "because it took up too much time and detracted from the chores at hand, overnight industrialization and glorification of the motherland" (1986: 235).

⁶³ Author's interview with Mom They (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁶⁴ Thung Hour is the same woman quoted above. She had already refused to marry before but they forced her into the ceremony anyway. At the ceremony she refused once again to marry.

⁶⁵ Author's interview with Thung Hour (female, born 1954), Kompong Speu, 27 June 1998.

⁶⁶ Even before a person dies, Buddhist monks and the *achar* or Buddhist priest comes to the home to chant and recite Buddhist prayers. After a person dies the chanting continues, ritual ceremonies are performed and the body is customarily cremated.

⁶⁷ Author's interview with Thongphotana Phalkun (male, born 1970), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁶⁸ According to Ponchaud, "The revolutionaries were aware of the extent to which people were tied to family obligations. They therefore did not hesitate, in certain sectors, to execute the wives and children of the condemned." (1989: 165.)

⁶⁹ Author's interview with Nhet Teng (female, born 1951), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

⁷⁰ Author's interview with Ear Sophal (female, born 1955), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

⁷¹ Buddhism works on a system of merit (*kun*) and demerit (*bap*). *Kun* is the merit one achieves when one has fulfilled religious duties. *Bap* is the merit one loses when one has failed to fulfill religious obligations. Within the Cambodian household, these terms are translated to a domestic relationship as judgments of whether children have fulfilled their duties and obligations towards their parents or elders. These terms, however, are never used by children to judge the actions of parents or elders. By using these terms, the KR were not giving in to religious beliefs; they were only demonstrating that parents had not fulfilled their obligations to their children. Angkar took care of the children. Therefore it was Angkar that deserves the *kun*.

⁷² Author's interview with Keo Lundi (male, born 1960), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁷³ Author's interview with Srey Mony (female, born 1940), Phnom Penh, 10 June 1998.

⁷⁴ As a member of the Society of Foreign Missions, Ponchaud spent ten years in Cambodia as a priest until he was forced to leave in 1975 (Jackson, ed., *Cambodia 1975-1978*, p. 325)

⁷⁵ Under the KR regime, according to Becker (1986), "One of the first steps was to abolish the use of the family name. Throughout the revolution people used one name only, usually a shortened version of the given rather than the family name." Names not only signified what family one belonged to, but certain names could also reveal one's class and status. Therefore it was important to control how individuals were addressed in order to gain control over their status within society as well as their position within the family.

⁷⁶ Author's interview with Tom Rattana (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 8 June 1998.

⁷⁷ According to Becker, "The Khmer Rouge established a spy system through their national police service and within the cooperatives. Children were made to inform on parents, comrades on comrades, neighbor on neighbor to save themselves" (1986: 221).

⁷⁸ According to Ponchaud, "Parents did not have the right to admonish them, let alone beat them and could be punished for doing so. Since 1977, in the communal mess halls, children were served first, before workers" (1989: 166).

⁷⁹ Judy Ledgerwood also discusses the Democratic Kampuchea period in terms of reversals in the social order (1990).

⁸⁰ Author's interview with Lach Vorleak Kalyann (female, born 1955), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁸¹ Author's interview with Thongphotana Phalkun (male, born 1970), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

⁸² Author's interview with Phan Phalla (female, born 1957), Phnom Penh, 9 June 1998.

⁸³ Author's interview with Thongphotana Phalkun (male, born 1970), Phnom Penh, 17 June 1998.

The Endurance of the Cambodian Family

⁸⁴ Author's interview with Tom Rattana (female, born 1963), Phnom Penh, 8 June 1998.

⁸⁵ Author's interview with Prath Sorn (male, born 1972), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁸⁶ She is more than likely referring to pre-marital sex here.

⁸⁷ Author's interview with Chey (female, born 1935), Kampot, 29 June 1998.

⁸⁸ Author's interview with Heng Niem (male, born 1963), Kompong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

⁸⁹ Ieng Thirith is also the wife of Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister of Democratic Kampuchea.

⁹⁰ (Becker 1986: 186)

⁹¹ Author's interview with Neou Heang (female, born 1926), Kampong Chhnang, 25 June 1998.

⁹² Srey Mony recalls: "All the rice we harvested they hauled to who knows where. They said they were transporting it to be traded. They even hauled fabrics and needles" (Srey Mony, 10 June 1998).

⁹³ The data is based on testimonies provided by the interviewees. For each of these policies, the instances may be higher. Some individuals were too young to recall whether these policies were implemented. There may also be other cases that the interviewees failed to recall.