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Why Did You Kill?: The Cambodian Genocide and the Dark Side of Face and Honor

ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON

WHY DID YOU KILL? From the first day I arrived in Cambodia to conduct ethnographic research, I had wanted to pose this question to a Khmer Rouge who had executed people during the genocidal Democratic Kampuchea regime (April 1975 to January 1979). When the Khmer Rouge—a radical group of Maoist-inspired Communist rebels—came to power after a bloody civil war in which 600,000 people died, they transformed Cambodian society into what some survivors now call “the prison without walls” (*kuk et chonbcheang*).¹ The cities were evacuated; economic production and consumption were collectivized; books were confiscated and sometimes burned; Buddhism and other forms of religious worship were banned; freedom of speech, travel, residence, and occupational choice were dramatically curtailed; formal education largely disappeared; money, markets, and courts were abolished; and the family was subordinated to the Party Organization, *Ângkar*. Over one and a half million of Cambodia’s eight million inhabitants perished from disease, over-

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¹All transliterations are based on Franklin E. Huffman’s Franco-Khmer transcription system that is reproduced in Heder and Ledgerwood (1996, xvii). I use pseudonyms for all of the individuals quoted or mentioned in this essay, except for public figures and DK cadre and soldiers mentioned by my interviewees.

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work, starvation, and outright execution under this genocidal regime (Kiernan 1996).²

One of my fieldwork goals was to learn how perpetrators could participate in such mass violence. When I interviewed Khmer Rouge cadre and soldiers, however, they all denied killing people outside the context of the battlefield. Finally, in my last month in Cambodia, I arranged an interview with an ex-soldier who had worked at Tuol Sleng, the infamous Phnom Penh prison where at least 14,000 people were confined and then executed during Democratic Kampuchea (hereafter called "DK"), many after being tortured into giving a "confession." One person informed me that the man I was about to interview, whom I will call "Lohr," had once admitted to killing 400 people. Another individual, a surviving Tuol Sleng prisoner, told me that Lohr had in fact executed more than 2,000 men, women, and children. He said that Lohr "was savage like an animal in the forest. I didn't dare look at his face . . . we were terrified of him." Prior to the interview, I imagined that Lohr would exude evil from head to toe. Lohr was not what I had expected. He was a poor farmer, in his mid-to-late thirties, who greeted me with the broad smile and politeness that is characteristic of most Cambodians.

After we had exchanged pleasantries, I began asking him about his life as a Khmer Rouge soldier. Lohr denied being an interrogator or executioner at Tuol Sleng, but freely admitted to being a guard. In fact, he said he was later given responsibility for receiving new inmates and for transporting prisoners to a killing field located at Choeng Ek, a village just outside Phnom Penh. Lohr emphasized that he did not execute people; he simply transported the prisoners to Choeng Ek and checked off each person's name as he or she was taken away to be killed. The method of execution Lohr described was simple and brutal. One or two Khmer Rouge soldiers would lead a prisoner to a ditch in front of which he or she was ordered to kneel down. A guard would then strike the prisoner once on the back of the neck with an iron bar taken from the axle of an ox-cart. If the person did not die immediately, the soldier would hit him or her repeatedly until the victim fell into the mass grave, which later would be covered with dirt. Lohr said that while the terrified prisoners never tried to escape, they would often beg their executioner: "Please, don't kill me." Some prisoners screamed as they were killed; others went silently to their deaths.

As the interview continued, Lohr recounted how, in 1979, he was arrested and interrogated by district police of the new Vietnamese-backed government. Lohr thought he would surely be killed, so, when the police asked him how many people he had executed, he lied and said, "I am the killer, by myself, of 1,000 people." Lohr claimed he gave this false number in the hope that the police would kill him quickly. Surprisingly, the police just put Lohr in jail for a year and then released him. He

²Khmer Rouge animosity and military raids into Vietnam eventually led the Vietnamese to invade Cambodia in January 1979. The Vietnamese army routed the Khmer Rouge and set up the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which was opposed by guerrillas forces located on the Thai border. After the Vietnamese army withdrew in 1989, the PRK renamed itself the State of Cambodia (SOC) and initiated a series of reforms to improve its image both within and outside of the country. This government held power until the 1993 United Nations-sponsored elections when the new Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) was established. Sihanouk was crowned King and the government was jointly run by his son, First Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh, and the ex-leader of SOC, Second Prime Minister Hun Sen. Political considerations and the increasingly contentious relations between the Prime Ministers led Hun Sen to launch a coup on July 5, 1997. At the time of writing, Prince Ranariddh is in exile, forces loyal to Hun Sen and Ranariddh are fighting, and Hun Sen has promised to hold new elections in 1998.

returned to his native district in Southern Cambodia where he later married and had several children.

At this point I asked Lohr, "So, during the Pol Pot period you never killed anyone?" Lohr hesitated momentarily and then responded, "I did kill one or two people, but I did this so that others wouldn't accuse me of being unable to cut off my heart." While Lohr's comment that he had killed "one or two people" suggested to me that he had killed many others, I decided not to press him on the matter for fear he would stop giving detailed answers, a pattern I had encountered in other interviews. Instead, I asked Lohr to explain why he had killed the "one or two" prisoners. Lohr replied: "At the time, my boss was also present. . . . As we walked he asked me, 'Have you ever dared to kill one of them, Lohr?' I responded, 'I never have, elder brother.' So he said, 'Like your heart isn't cut off (*chett min dach khat*), go get that prisoner and try it once. Do it one time so I can see.'" Lohr told the soldier who was about to execute the prisoner to give him the iron bar and then "struck the prisoner so they could watch me. I hit him one time with the bar and he fell to the ground. Afterwards, I threw the bar aside and returned to the place where I marked off the names. When my boss asked me to do this, if I didn't do it {pause} . . . I couldn't refuse."

How do perpetrators like Lohr come to commit such genocidal acts? Surprisingly, anthropologists have had little response to this question about the origins of the large-scale genocides that took place in Turkey, Nazi Germany, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda (DeWaal 1994; Hinton 1997a; Kuper 1981; Lewin 1992; Shiloh 1975).³ Nevertheless, there are signs that the anthropological silence about large-scale genocide may soon end, since, in recent years, anthropologists have increasingly written about political violence.⁴ Such research illustrates that anthropology has the potential to make a distinct contribution to our understanding of mass violence by illustrating the important ways in which sociocultural factors generate large-scale

³Article II of the United Nations Genocide Convention defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such." Given the conceptual vagueness of this definition, there has been some debate about whether the violence which took place in Cambodia can be accurately classified as genocidal (see Kiernan 1993). I believe that it is appropriate to use this term with reference to Cambodia because ethnic groups (Muslim Chams and ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, and Thai) and religious groups (Buddhists and Christians) were subject to systematic elimination, both through outright execution and through extremely harsh living conditions (see also Fein 1994; Hawk 1988, 1990; Kiernan 1986, 1988; Stanton 1993). Moreover, people have noted that the original Genocide Convention definition excluded political groups and social classes because of pressure from countries like the Soviet Union that feared being indicted. To correct for this bias, many genocide scholars have redefined genocide in a more inclusive manner (e.g., Chalk and Jonassohn 1990; Charny 1994; Fein 1990). Thus, Fein defines genocide as: "sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim" (1990, 24). Given the purges, the attack on "new people," and the execution of members of the Lon Nol military and government, DK clearly classifies as a genocide within such a broad definition. See Andreopoulos (1994) for an examination of the historical and conceptual issues surrounding the use of the term genocide.

⁴Some important recent anthropological works on political violence include: Daniel 1996; Das 1990; Feldman 1991; Kapferer 1988; Nordstrom and Martin 1992; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Riches 1986; Suárez-Orozco 1990; Tambiah 1992, 1996; Taussig 1987; and Warren 1993. For a detailed review of the literature, see Nagengast 1994.

genocide. This essay, based on fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Cambodia,⁵ provides an example of how such anthropological insights may be applied to the study of large-scale genocide by illustrating how Cambodian cultural models related to face and honor, in combination with Communist Party ideology, came to serve as templates for genocide during DK.

To demonstrate this point, I employ a synthesis of cultural models theory and practice theory. Cultural models are largely tacit knowledge structures that are both widely shared by and mediate the understanding of the members of a social group (Casson 1983; D'Andrade 1995; D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Shore 1996). While individual variation clearly exists, some cultural models are highly salient within a society and may motivate the action of large numbers of individuals.⁶ Cultural models constitute an important part of what practice theorists have called "habitus" (Bourdieu 1977), "practical consciousness" (Giddens 1984), "hegemony" (Williams 1977), and "schemas" (Ortner 1989). Practice theorists have shown that because such social structures both constrain and constitute human action, they are frequently used to serve the interests of dominant political groups by legitimating their power, goals, and desired forms of social inequality. If the concept of cultural models adds substance to the notion of "structure" and provides practice theory with a previously missing psychological component that shows how human action is motivated, practice theory contributes an important political dimension to cultural models theory that it has traditionally lacked.

Together, these two theoretical perspectives provide an insightful way of examining large-scale genocide. In particular, this approach suggests that, in order to achieve their violent political aims, genocidal regimes will draw on preexisting cultural models to motivate their minions to kill (Hinton 1997a). This is precisely what happened during the Cambodian genocide, as the DK regime both initiated sociopolitical transformations that undermined traditional constraints on violence and incorporated preexisting cultural models into their genocidal ideology. Because these models were salient to many Cambodians, they came to serve as highly motivating behavioral templates for violence within this altered context. This essay deals with one such set of cultural models—those related to face and honor. As I have shown elsewhere (Hinton 1997a), cultural models of revenge, patronage, paranoia, and obedience were also invoked by Khmer Rouge ideology. Genocide is a complex phenomenon that is generated by a number of historical, sociopolitical, and cultural factors. By illustrating how cultural models related to face and honor contributed to

⁵My research is based upon data collected in Kompong Cham and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, during 1992 and from 1994 to 1995. In addition to gathering data through intensive participant observation, I also conducted over a 100 tape-recorded interviews on Cambodian ethno-psychology, socialization practices, violence, and the Khmer Rouge genocide (1975–79); spent several months observing and videotaping life in families and primary schools; and collected relevant research data from Cambodian school texts, books on Cambodian character and socialization practices, didactic poems, proverbs, newspapers, videos, and forced confessions, a study guide for interrogators, a cadre notebook, and other documentary material from the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes archive in Phnom Penh.

⁶Obviously, cultural models do not deterministically guide human behavior. Cultural models may be differentially internalized, vary in their social distribution and saliency across contexts, and have disparate degrees of motivational force for people (D'Andrade 1992, 1995; D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Nuckolls 1996; Shore 1996). Moreover, when an individual acts, he or she often has a range of available options. Such choices, however, are not made in a vacuum. Human behavior is both enabled and constrained by sociocultural structures—including cultural models.

the Cambodian genocide, I intend to demonstrate the importance of the cultural dimension, thus indicating one way anthropology can begin contributing to our understanding of large-scale genocide.

Drawing from an example of press criticism and repression in contemporary Cambodia, the first section of this essay describes cultural models related to face and honor. The second section then illustrates how these models not only remained operative in DK,⁷ but directly contributed to the genocidal acts perpetrators like Lohr committed—particularly when considered in light of Khmer Rouge sociocultural transformations and an ideology that glorified revolutionary violence, total commitment to the Party, moral detachment, and killing “the enemy.” In the conclusion, I reconsider, in light of the preceding analysis, how a cultural approach can shed light on the large-scale genocides that have occurred in countries like Cambodia.

Face and Honor in Cambodian Society

“Country of Thieves”

Since the period before the elections, all of Cambodia has been a country of thieves. At that time, his Excellency (*sâmtech*) Hun Sen worked as the chief of the thieves. Countless numbers of his Excellency’s subordinates, from top to bottom, knew how to skillfully steal every sort of thing. . . . After the elections, both the head of thieves and his subordinates throughout the country watched in silence, waiting to see if Prince Ranariddh (*sâmtech krom preah*) might try to suppress them in some manner. Was there a problem? . . . No, the Prince came and asked if he could please work as a chief of thieves, too. Victory! Both of the Prime Ministers united together and worked as the chiefs of the thieves, rising up to become number one in the world in this capacity.

(The New Liberty News, February 6, 1995)

On May 20, 1995, Judge Ya Sokorn fined the editor of *The New Liberty News*, Hen Vipheak, five million riels (roughly \$2,000), sentenced him to one year in jail, and ordered that his newspaper be shut down for publishing the above article, entitled “Cambodia: Country of Thieves,” and a cartoon showing Second Prime Minister Hun

⁷My perspective, which runs somewhat counter to the notion that Cambodia underwent a “total” social revolution during DK, holds that during times of radical change actors will often draw upon and adapt preexisting cultural knowledge to the new situation. I would maintain that significant cultural models may be historically enduring and that it is thus legitimate to use an analysis of cultural models in contemporary Cambodia to analyze what transpired during the DK period. Both cultural models researchers (e.g., D’Andrade 1995; D’Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987; Shore 1996) and scholars with other theoretical orientations (Geertz 1980; Sahlins 1981; Ortner 1989) have demonstrated that cultural models often persevere despite historical and structural change. Thus, Ortner (1989) has shown how a Sherpa “cultural schema” of temple founding (following the sequence of: rivalry and competition, departure of the hero and acquisition of a protector, defeating a rival and acquiring his subjects, the loser leaving the area and settling elsewhere, and the hero founding a temple) recurred over hundreds of years. Likewise, I would argue that, despite enormous sociopolitical change, certain Cambodian cultural models related to face and honor existed prior to, during, and after the DK period. To confirm this hypothesis, I consulted Cambodian ethnographies (e.g., Delvert 1961; Ebihara 1968; Kalab 1968; Martel 1975), texts (e.g., *charet khmaer, chbap bros, chbap srey*), and traditional stories (e.g., *Tum Teav* and the *Reamker*, the Cambodian version of the *Ramayana*) written prior to DK to confirm that the cultural models I delineate are historically enduring.

Sen holding a gun to First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh's head. Vipheak was charged with "misinformation." A day earlier, Thun Bun Ly, editor of *The Khmer Ideal*, had been fined five million riels and ordered to cease operations for printing a letter from a cyclo driver that headlined: "Don't Bark Again, Prime Ministers." Thun Bun Ly was found guilty of "defamation."

Some Cambodians viewed Hen Vipheak and Thun Bun Ly as lucky—they were, at least for the moment, alive.⁸ During the previous year a controversial editor and a journalist were gunned down as they rode on their mopeds. These killings have taken place in an increasingly repressive political atmosphere in which journalists and politicians who criticize the Cambodian government are routinely followed, harassed, given death threats, and sometimes attacked by grenades or mobs. As one journalist from an opposition newspaper told me, "I feel terrified to the point that sometimes I can't sleep at night. Wherever I go, I worry that I won't live to an old age." While there are several reasons behind the government's crackdown on the press, one of the key factors—often unrecognized by western politicians, media, and human rights groups—concerns cultural models related to honor and face.

Hierarchy

Like other Southeast Asian cultures, Cambodian society is extremely hierarchical (Ledgerwood 1990; Martin 1994; see also Kapferer 1988).⁹ Relationships in Cambodia tend to be structured vertically in terms of power, status, and patronage. A person's place in the hierarchy is determined by a number of factors, including: age, sex, familial background, birth order, occupation, political position, influence, education, personal character, and financial benevolence. The notion that it is natural for people to be differentiated in the social hierarchy—what I will hereafter refer to as a cultural model of "natural inequality"—has an interesting twofold historical origin. On the one hand, Wolters has suggested that the early inhabitants of Southeast Asia were often led by "big men" or "men of prowess" who were "attributed with an abnormal

⁸Sadly, Thun Bun Ly was shot and killed on May 18, 1996. Hen Vipheak was more fortunate: he received a royal pardon after being imprisoned for only one week.

⁹In all cultures there exist abstract, yet highly salient, "foundational schemas" (Shore 1996) that serve as templates for the metaphorical mapping of more context-specific cultural models. A foundational schema functions as "a common underlying form that links superficially diverse cultural models and contributes to the sometimes ineffable sense of 'style' or 'ethos' characteristic of a culture. In more technical language, we can say that the foundation schema provides a 'source domain' for the creation of a family of related cultural models" (Shore 1996, 117). Many of these foundational schemas arise from our bodily experience in relation to the environment. All people, for example, have the basic perceptual and motor experience of an up-down orientation, or what Johnson (1987) has called the VERTICALITY schema. "We grasp this structure of verticality repeatedly in thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright, the activity of climbing [upward], forming a mental image of a flagpole, measuring our children's heights, and experiencing the level of water rising" (Johnson 1987, xiv). While all human beings share such basic embodied experiences, each society elaborates them—i.e., uses the highly generalized schema as a template for more specific cultural models—in culturally determined ways and to different extents (Fiske 1991). When a schema is highly elaborated in a given society, it becomes a "foundational schema" that is part of the local cultural ethos. In Cambodia, the "up-down" or "vertical" orientation constitutes just such a foundational schema that serves as a template for Cambodian cultural models related to hierarchy (e.g., natural inequality, hierarchical mobility, the "shield," honor competition) that will be described in detail below.

amount of personal and innate ‘soul stuff,’ which explained and distinguished their performance from that of others in their generation and especially among their own kinsmen” (1982, 6). This conception was then intensified by Hindu notions of potency, power, and hierarchical incorporation. On the other hand, the later introduction of Buddhism reinforced this notion of natural inequality since the Buddhist conception of merit and karma held that an individual’s social status reflected the consequences of his or her past actions—hierarchical differences between people were thereby given a legitimizing moral basis (Kirsch 1981).

A consequence of this Cambodian moral order is that one must respect, honor, and obey one’s social superiors, a cultural model reflected by the terms *korop* (“to respect, obey, honor,” Headley 1977, 132) and, to a slightly lesser extent, *stap* (“to listen [to], to obey,” Headley 1977, 1216).¹⁰ Children must thus *korop* and *stap* a parent, younger siblings an older sibling, a wife her husband, students their teachers, younger people an elder, little people a “big person” (*neak thum*), the “have nots” those who have (*neak mean*), prisoners a guard, subordinates their boss or patron, a private his or her officer, party members their political leader, and the populace the government. By extension, we can see that a journalist or editor is expected to respect a high-ranking politician who is his or her social superior (particularly in the case of Prince Ranariddh, who is of royal blood), a point to which I will later return.

Enculturation for this cultural model of obedience and respect begins at an early age. Parents often start teaching their children to greet politely (*sampeah, chumreap suor*) a visitor or elderly family member before the children can walk. Likewise, children are taught to call people by the appropriate pronoun. In contrast to English, the Khmer language is replete with hierarchical terms that differentiate people. When talking to monks or members of the royal family, for example, a speaker must employ a series of unique words that denotes their status. Cambodians thus use different terms when inviting the king, a monk, a guest or social superior, a peasant, a close friend, or a young child to “come eat” (i.e., *saoy, chhan, pisa, houp, nham, si*). Likewise, when Lohr, who was socially subordinate to me from a Cambodian perspective (since I was a “rich foreigner”), came to visit me, he called me “Sir” (*lok*) to acknowledge my status, while I called him “older brother” (*bâng*) to denote his older age. Moreover, in the above newspaper article, the writer, despite his scathing criticism, still refers to the Prime Ministers by their appropriate titles (*sâmtech* and *sâmtech krom preah*). Because children are taught these terms at a young age, the conception of hierarchical difference implicit in these registers becomes natural to them.

Status inequality is also embodied in a variety of nonverbal behaviors, one of the most common of which is “bending down” (*aon*) before a social superior. During my fieldwork, I spent a great deal of time observing primary and secondary school classroom interactions. One hour of each school week was designated for instruction about “moral discipline” (*seylâthoa*). Over and over again, I watched primary school

¹⁰Neither of these terms can be precisely glossed in English. *Korop* is defined by the Khmer Buddhist Institute dictionary as “bowing before someone, behaving in a humble and polite manner, bowing to show respect, a bearing that shows respect in accordance with one’s awe of someone else, a bearing that trusts” (*Khmer Dictionary* 1967, 169). *Korop* implies a reverence, sometimes tinged with awe and fear, that leads a subordinate to respect, honor, and obey an esteemed person or institution. *Stap*, in turn, is defined as “to prepare the ear to receive, listen, and remember [something] . . . receiving instruction . . . taking in words, taking in speech, to receive [an order] and obey” (*Khmer Dictionary* 1967, 1466). Thus, while *stap* can be loosely translated as “to listen to,” it has an extremely passive connotation and may also mean “to listen to and obey” a superior’s commands.

teachers tell students that when greeting or passing by a teacher, headmaster, visitor, or other superior, they must bend down slightly in order to show proper respect to him or her. During the class, the teachers often instructed pairs of students to practice bending down, with one student taking the role of the subordinate who would bend down before his or her “superior” classmate. In addition, prior to each class period, students would “line-up” (*tâmruang chuor*) in a straight line in front of their classroom before entering. As they walked in, they would have to bend down before their teacher standing by the entrance.

When I asked a school principal why students did this, she replied without hesitation: “Their bending down signifies that they are putting their bodies lower than us because we are bigger than they are.” Like many people I questioned about such nonverbal behaviors, the principal then invoked an extremely popular proverb to illustrate her point: “an upright rice stalk is barren, while one that bends down gives grain” (*ngoeuy skât aon dak kroap*; see also Fisher-Nguyen 1994, 93). She explained, “If you know how to bend down, this bending means that you know how to humble your body for a big person. It means that you have value, honor, and that big people will like you . . . because you know how to respect (*korop*) them.”

One can see people *aon* in numerous contexts in Cambodia, from the classroom to the Royal Palace. Thus, when I greeted Lohr at my apartment before the interview, as he walked past me he bent down slightly, giving me the respect that he thought was due to someone of my status. As we will see below, both of us gained face by his doing so. The cultural model of a social subordinate giving honor, respect, and obedience to his or her social superior is reflected in a number of other nonverbal behaviors: a subordinate sits lower than a superior, a subordinate must not stare at a superior’s face, a host rolls out a mat which allows a guest to sit in a slightly raised position, a subordinate allows his or her superior to walk first, a subordinate should not touch superiors and should get out of their way when they pass, and so on. Like linguistic registers, such hierarchical behaviors are internalized by Cambodians at an early age and are later performed regularly and often without much conscious reflection.

If a Cambodian’s place in the social hierarchy is morally legitimized and determined by the factors I have mentioned, his or her position is not absolutely fixed. Though it is often difficult to do, one can enhance one’s status in a variety of ways, such as by increasing one’s wealth, knowledge, occupational level, political position, influence, and merit. Interestingly, this cultural model of “hierarchical mobility” has historical roots that are similar to those associated with the cultural model of natural inequality. Thus, while a “man of prowess” is regarded as naturally superior to his followers, anyone can potentially be invested with the large amount of “soul stuff” it takes to become such a leader. Likewise, although Buddhist doctrine holds that one’s hierarchical position in life is largely determined by one’s past actions, this status is not set at birth as it is, for example, in the Indian caste system (Cambodian royalty being the one exception).¹¹ The merit that a person has accumulated in the past may suddenly result in a rise in status (Hanks 1962).

¹¹While he does not use my terminology, Kirsch (1981) has provided an interesting example of how the cultural models of natural inequality and hierarchical mobility manifest in Buddhism doctrine are transmitted to the lay population through ritual. On the one hand, lay people must show a great deal of respect to monks who, as “mana-filled objects,” are their natural superiors. On the other hand, when a young male enters the monastery he undergoes an elaborate ritual which signifies his transition from a common lay person to venerated novice.

Thus, a peasant's child who is skilled at learning or manipulating patronage relations is sometimes able to climb high in the ranks of the government, as was the case with one person from the rural village (henceforth referred to as "Banyan") where I conducted much of my fieldwork. As a result of this potential for social mobility and the extreme cultural valuation of high social status, the desire for honor and power is one of the strongest motivating forces for many Cambodians.¹² Since all beings are ranked, in most social interactions one person is respected and another is "looked down upon" (*moel ngeay*), a term that metaphorically reflects hierarchical nonverbal behaviors like "bending down." If another person "looks down upon you," it means you are inferior, of lesser social value. Because Cambodians want to be respected and obeyed, they vigilantly protect and try to enhance their honor.

Maintaining Face and the Shield

The concept of Cambodian "face" (*mukh, mukh moat*) can be roughly defined as a sociocentric self-image that is based on the evaluations of others and shifts along an axis of honor and shame.¹³ The word *mukh* literally means "face, front" but has among its many connotations the notions of "place, position, rank, title" (Headley 1977, 748). Face therefore reflects one's place in the social order, a position that is predicated on the extent to which others respect, honor, and obey you.

Several key aspects of Cambodian face deserve emphasis. First, face is predicated on the evaluations of others. One often hears Cambodians discussing their assessment of the "value" (*veay/aoy tâmlei*) of different people. Moreover, Cambodians are constantly concerned with how others evaluate them and thus will often carefully consider the social implications of an action before proceeding. Second, face is performative. Because each Cambodian holds a certain position in the social order that is constantly subject to social evaluation, he or she feels pressure to perform requisite duties and roles in accordance with the level of ability others expect him or her to have. Lurking in the background of any public interaction is thus the fear of exposure and shame.

For example, one of my research assistants told me that he was very worried because many people thought he was fluent in English. While he did speak some English, I had hired him with the understanding that we would work and speak only

After the ceremony, the young man's parents, whom he has always honored and obeyed, act extremely respectfully toward him at the pagoda. In addition to illustrating how Buddhist doctrine embodies dual models of natural inequality and hierarchical mobility, the ordination ceremony provides an example of how cultural models are transmitted from the cultural to the personal level—what Shore (1996) has referred to as the "two births" of cultural knowledge.

¹²This motivation varies to an extent depending on gender. As Ledgerwood (1990) points out, male status is derived from honor, power, and authority. Female status, in contrast, is often discussed in terms of the evaluation of a woman's comportment, activity, and sexuality against an idealized image of the "perfectly virtuous woman" (*srey kruap leakkh*). I would add that women sometimes do strive for power and authority, often exerting a great influence over their husbands and attempting to increase the overall honor of their families. Women also at times engage in the type of honor competitions I will describe below. Finally, during DK, communist doctrine encouraged women to engage in activities (e.g., political administration, mobile labor, and even executing people) that had traditionally been performed primarily by men. Female cadre tended to adopt male gender roles in such contexts.

¹³Surprisingly, almost nothing has been written on "face" in mainland Southeast Asia (but see parts of Mulder 1994; Phillips 1965; and Spiro 1996). The concept has been studied in more detail in countries like China (Ho 1976; Hu 1944; Hwang 1987; Kipnis 1995; Schoenhals 1993) and Japan (Benedict 1946; Doi 1986; Lebra 1976). See also Goffman (1967).

in Khmer. My assistant said he felt extremely anxious that his nonfluency in English would be revealed and he would lose face (*amas mukh, ap mukh*). As a result, he began studying English on his own both before and after our work hours. In Cambodia, a variety of words can be used to express the notion of losing face and honor (*ap ketteyos, bombat ketteyos*) and of being shamed before others (*khmas ke*).

Children begin to develop this sensitivity toward face and shame at an early age. During my fieldwork, I lived with a family that included several children, the youngest of whom had just entered the local preschool. One evening while we were eating dinner, the four-year old, whom I will call Sopheap, came and sat down in an empty chair. Her mother looked at the girl and then at me and said, "Sopheap has stopped going to school." The girl followed her mother's eyes and then got up and ran out of the room. A similar sequence of events took place several other times, with different family members attempting to shame Sopheap by criticizing her in front of me.

Sopheap was learning a rudimentary form of a cultural model that holds that if you do not live up to social expectations, others will evaluate you negatively. As a result, you will lose face and be shamed in front of others. Similarly, parents commonly tell their children to be concerned with their social standing and not to do things that will shame them and/or the family. This cultural model of face and shame is also learned in schools. If, for example, a student misbehaves or hasn't studied his or her lesson, teachers will often publicly shame the student by making him or her stand in front of the class, reprimanding him or her, and/or even striking the student. As students get older, the frequency of these punishments decreases because they have internalized face norms and more often act in accordance with what is expected of them.

A third key aspect of face concerns contextual variation: the extent to which face is at stake differs according to the social situation. In any given interaction, the extent to which one fears exposure and shame will depend upon a consideration of who is present, the degree of familiarity and social distance between them, and the type of social situation involved.¹⁴ The stereotype of Cambodians as "gentle" people is one that has most likely come from foreigners who interact with Cambodians in more formal situations in which politeness and smiles are the expected norm. Obviously, Cambodians, like people throughout the world, can be mean and violent in certain contexts, as the DK period and the murder of journalists illustrate. Thus, Lohr, who committed savage and murderous acts as a Khmer Rouge soldier, acted extremely politely during an interview twenty years later, as is expected when one is meeting with a high-status individual whom one does not know well. Finally, individual variation in face-sensitivity also exists. While most people act in accordance with social expectations, some lack sensitivity to issues of honor and shame and therefore are said to have a "thick face" (*mukh kras*).

Given the strong cultural emphasis on avoiding shame, however, almost all Cambodians are extremely concerned with maintaining face. In fact, social interactions are structured in such a manner so as to buffer people from losing face. I will refer to

¹⁴In fact, I would argue that the "loose-structure" debate in Thailand (i.e., those who assert that Thai behavior is highly or only loosely constrained; see Embree 1950 and Potter 1976) should not be argued on an "either-or" basis, but rather in terms of contextual variation in the degree of social formality demanded of social actors in a given situation.

this set of face-protecting norms and values as the cultural model of “the shield.” One of the primary components of “the shield” is the expectation that people will act in accordance with preexisting rules of etiquette and respect. Therefore, as mentioned above, when two non-intimates interact in a formal situation (e.g., my meeting with Lohr), the subordinate person is expected to honor his or her social superior by employing the appropriate linguistic registers, assuming the proper body position and mannerisms, and generally acting in a polite and reverent manner. The subordinate person, in turn, receives honor by acting this way and by his or her superior’s response.

When two people interact in this orderly manner, social relations remain smooth and friendly, and no one loses face. Cambodians emphasize and value “order” (*sântap tbnoap, riep roj, mean robiep*) in many aspects of their lives. A wife who keeps her household in proper order (e.g., by keeping her home clean, taking care of the familial wealth, not arguing with her husband, properly receiving guests) gains honor. Likewise, a political leader who runs the government in an orderly manner receives respect from the populace. Thus, one journalist explained that when *The New Liberty News* accused the Prime Ministers of being the corrupt chiefs of a “country of thieves,” they lost face since the article was saying their government was “falling into a state of insecurity and disorder.”

By enabling interactions to flow in a smooth and harmonious manner, the orderly performance of social roles and norms of etiquette helps Cambodians observe a fundamental social rule in Cambodia: mutual face-saving (see Schoenhals 1993 for a Chinese analog). People protect the face of others who, in turn, protect their own. Since one can lose face both by one’s own performance and by one’s treatment by others, this dimension of the shield adds predictability to social encounters—the knowledge that others will usually avoid any actions or words that might make one lose face.

In addition to being respectful and polite, Cambodian interactions are also often characterized by indirect speech, circumlocution, and the avoidance of conflict and/or sensitive topics. A person who wants to express displeasure (such feelings are frequently just kept to oneself) usually does so through slight changes in posture, facial expression, manner of eye contact, gestures, and tone of voice—shifts that are often almost imperceptible to a foreigner. Moreover, if a potentially discordant topic must be broached, Cambodians will sometimes use an intermediary or address a third party (see also Ebihara 1968).¹⁵ The gradual internalization of this norm of mutual face-saving is clearly reflected in the classroom. Whereas primary school teachers routinely reprimand and shame students in class, high school teachers do this much less frequently to protect their adolescent students’ increasing sensitivity about face.

This expectation of mutual face-saving created a problem when I interviewed former Khmer Rouge soldiers and cadre. To ask a person directly if he or she had

¹⁵One of Khieu Samphan’s brothers (Khieu Samphan was one of Pol Pot’s most trusted associates), for example, told me that after Samphan had returned from Paris and started a newspaper, people began to swear at their mother, saying that her son was the editor of the Khmer Rouge newspaper. She didn’t know much about politics and thus asked Khieu Samphan, “Who are the Khmer Rouge?” He told her not to listen to such people. That night at dinner, however, he began telling his younger brother about the Khmer Rouge and their political views. According to his brother, Khieu Samphan addressed his mother in this indirect manner because he wanted to show her respect to protect her from losing face as would have occurred if her lack of knowledge had been directly exposed.

executed people during the Khmer Rouge period would be rude, since the question would put the person in a situation in which he or she could lose a great deal of face. As a foreigner, I had a certain degree of latitude in this regard because of my assumed cultural ignorance. If I was able to slip in such a question, the interviewee would often engage in his or her own face-saving behavior by lying, shifting the topic, and/or withdrawing from the conversation. I generally found it more productive to ask ex-Khmer Rouge if they could guess why people executed others during DK. This type of indirection was culturally appropriate. During my interview with Lohr, we both observed the principle of mutual face-saving until the point at which I asked him if he had killed people. Since he was widely thought to have executed numerous people from Tuol Sleng, Lohr still attempted to avoid a loss of face by asserting he had given a false number to the police under duress and had actually only killed “one or two” people.

As Kipnis (1995) has pointed out, we should not assume that face is just an artificial “mask” used to hide a person’s true feelings. I have intentionally employed the term “shield” to emphasize that face is part of the social “equipment” that contributes to a Cambodian’s sense of self. The way a person is evaluated by others directly influences his or her self-image, an image that is therefore sociocentric. Being polite and giving respect to one’s superior is not done just because it is necessary and expected, but also because such face norms have been internalized and constitute a key element of a person’s selfhood. Yet, Cambodians often do hide negative feelings in order to avoid losing face or making someone else lose face. If, for example, a person becomes angry at another individual, he or she will sometimes not let the other person know. As one informant told me: “Cambodians put their anger in their head and don’t let it out.” Another Cambodian has written of how his father advised him: “Keep your emotions under control, so they will not show on your face” (Ngor 1987, 252). Moreover, many people express the sentiment that “one can’t know the heart of another clearly.” Thus, while face-work may reflect a person’s true feelings, Cambodians often remain uncertain about the motives of the people with whom they are interacting. In politics, such uncertainty contributes to distrust and paranoia.

Two further dimensions of face should be mentioned. I will discuss one of them, which occurs when a person must respond to a challenge to his or her honor in order to save face, in the section below. The other concerns situations in which a person interacts with others but does not feel constrained by face norms. Such “anomie behavior” (Lebra 1976) sometimes exists when a person ventures outside his or her known community and feels uninhibited. Anyone who has ever traveled along Cambodia’s roads will be familiar with the reckless driving style that often results in the loss of life due to the implicit rule that whoever is bigger and more daring has the right-of-way. One newspaper reported how, after hitting a man with their armored personnel carrier, a group of soldiers simply moved his body over to the side of the road and continued onward (Moeun 1995, 17). Not coincidentally, this type of “heartless” behavior (Goffman 1967, 11) is also characteristic of situations in which a person acts as an anonymous member of a larger group. War is an obvious example, as soldiers are fighting against a generic sociopolitical enemy whom they are expected to kill without hesitation. Finally, if another person acts in a disrespectful manner that makes one lose face (and thus violates the principle of mutual face-saving), one will be more likely to disregard face norms when interacting with that person in the future.

The Search for Honor

Earlier, I noted that one of the primary motivations for Cambodians—particularly men—is the desire to increase their “honor” (*ketteyos*).¹⁶ While each person is ranked in a hierarchical order that has a moral basis, his or her place is not fixed. Cambodians often desire to be “higher” than others, to be the “big person” who is respected and “looking down” rather than the little person who is “looked down upon.” Since prestige is relative, Cambodians frequently evaluate, compare themselves to, and compete with other people for honor. One gains honor by being given proper respect, by acting in an honorable manner (e.g., dressing well, acting politely, fulfilling one’s duty), and by raising one’s social status (e.g., increasing one’s education, occupation, wealth).

The motivation for achieving honor is rooted in a variety of socialization practices. Like the Thais (Piker 1975), Cambodians give infants an extraordinary amount of indulgence and affection (see also Ebihara 1968, 450f.). The youngest child receives a great deal of attention from family members (particularly the mother) and visitors who attempt to satisfy almost all of his or her whims. Once, when I was traveling on a boat down the Mekong river from Kompong Cham to Phnom Penh, I sat next to a mother and her baby boy. When the child started crying, the mother attempted to distract the child with soothing words, breast-feeding, gentle caresses, and penis stroking. People in nearby seats tried to help by passing forward objects and sweets. The child soon quieted down in the midst of the attention.

When such a child is weaned and/or the next baby is born, however, the situation changes dramatically. The child finds him- or herself severed from the world of warmth, centrality, and privilege and placed in a much more anonymous position. Cries and pleas may be ignored, responded to with teasing, soothed, laughed at, or met with a verbal scolding from the caretaker.

This pattern of extreme indulgence followed by sudden withdrawal likely creates a yearning for lost attention in the young child. When the child enters school, he or she quickly finds an alternative means of satisfying this desire—gaining praise and honor in the classroom. Cambodians often say that the teacher is like another parent. The teacher’s praise therefore provides a strong motivating force for the children. One preschool teacher told me how she got her students to behave and answer questions through the use of flattery and praise. Students who do well are complimented by the teacher and rewarded by the entire class clapping in unison. Thus, whenever the teacher asked a question, many of the students in her class would raise their hands

¹⁶Although the word *ketteyos* can be roughly translated as “honor” (Headley 1977, 36), the term carries a strong sociocentric connotation that the English word does not fully capture. Thus, the Khmer Buddhist Institute Dictionary defines *ketteyos* as “glory and fame that is well-known, splendid reputation” (*Khmer Dictionary* 1967, 63). While the English word honor is similarly defined as “High respect, esteem, or reverence accorded to exalted worth or rank . . . glory, renown, fame,” it carries the connotation of an “elevation of character, ‘nobleness of mind[’] . . . a fine sense of and strict allegiance to what is due or right” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1971, 367). This latter sense of honor as a characteristic of the self that leads one to act in a moral manner is much less emphasized by the Khmer term. *Ketteyos* may be gained through proper moral behavior, but it is primarily focused on the external recognition of one’s glory, prestige, and splendid reputation. Because of the similarities between honor and *ketteyos*, English speakers may find that some of my discussion of Cambodian “honor” resonates with their own experience. It is therefore crucial for readers to keep in mind that *ketteyos* does not have all the moral implications of, and has a stronger sociocentric emphasis than, the English word honor.

and say “me, me” in order to get an opportunity to respond. If a student answered correctly, the teacher would tell the other children to “clap your hands to praise our friend.” It is important to recognize the sociocentric basis of Cambodian honor that is being enculturated here. Students learn that to gain honor they must act in a manner that is recognized and praised by others. One informant said that if a person acts in a good manner but no one else knows, he or she will not have honor. The positive evaluation of others remains paramount to attaining prestige.

When students enter primary school, teachers continue to use praise as a motivation to improve student performance. I observed one fifth-grade class in which the teacher spent the entire moral discipline period discussing honor. He told the children that a student who does well and receives compliments from others is just like a soldier who defeats the enemy. When I later asked the teacher about this comment, he explained: “If a student learns well, he or she will have honor and a famous reputation. The honor of soldiers is comparable. When an officer orders them to go find the enemy, if they do so and are victorious, when they come back their officer will praise them and may raise their rank.” Another teacher told me that she teaches the students that “honor is whatever you do that is good and others recognize. . . . A person has value and honor because he or she receives the praise of others. Praise raises his or her honor.”

This desire for praise continues through adulthood and is structured into much of social life. Official receptions are renowned for the sugary compliments lavished upon attending dignitaries. Many people told me that Cambodians like to be praised by others because it is a sign of respect and honor. This fact is recognized by subordinates who will often attempt to flatter a superior (who, in turn, expects such praise from his or her subordinates) in the hope that he or she will like them more and perhaps advance their rank and thus their honor. Even my research assistants sometimes attempted “to gain my good graces” (*aep âp*) in this manner, telling me things like: “You’re so smart” or “You will have so much fame and honor when you write your book about Cambodia.”

Because the Cambodian social order is divided into hierarchical dyads of “big” and “little” people (*neak thum*, *neak tauch*), praise is difficult to attain. Teachers explicitly recognize this situation and begin to encourage students to compete for honor in several ways. (At home, parents also emphasize to children that they must gain honor and rise “higher” than others.) In elementary school, for example, each class has an “honor roll” (*târang ketteyos*). The teacher lists the name and rank of the top five students on the wall or on the chalkboard in front of the class. Students aggressively compete to rise to the top of their class. One teacher told me that sometimes if a student makes a mistake and ends up ranked second, “he or she will become so angry in his or her heart that he or she may cry. The student will be mad at him or herself for doing something wrong and will try harder to defeat the number one student.”

The honor roll, however, pales in comparison with major examinations. As in other East Asian countries, exams in Cambodia, particularly the college entrance examinations, are high anxiety events that can produce a great deal of honor or shame for a student. The exam system is a direct means of social differentiation. A student who fails a major exam may feel intense shame. In the extreme, failing leads a few students to commit suicide. Many others, however, simply withdraw. One person told me a story of a young man who, after failing his nursing exam, locked himself inside his room in order to study for the next exam which was to be given several months

later. He refused to return to his home district because of how shamed he would feel before his family, peers, and neighbors.

Students are often extremely competitive with their classmates about the exams. A student who passes the college entrance exam, for example, is said to have “defeated” (*chneab*) one who fails and thus “loses” (*chanh*). In fact, this discourse of “winning” and “losing” is common in Cambodia when people speak of honor competition (*brâñang, brâlang, brâkuot ketteyos*) in general. Since the performance of a student reflects on his or her family, parents may also compete over how well their children perform. During the early 1990s, an extremely corrupt period, this competition took an almost absurd form as parents paid huge bribes to school officials so that their children would pass the entrance exams. One informant explained to me that, besides the future prospects opened up for their child by being admitted to college, parents paid the bribes because: “If their child passed the exam they would defeat the parents of students who failed. Parents want to raise both their own honor and that of their children.” I will refer to this type of formal competition within a system as a cultural model of “structured honor competition.”

Structured honor competition is characteristic of a situation in which peers are competing against one another for honor within more formal contexts, such as a school, office, merit-making activity, battlefield, court of law, or election. In these situations, Cambodians attempt to defeat another person indirectly by the evaluations of others about their own superior performance or ability. I have already illustrated how this takes place in schools. Another example comes from the workplace, where subordinates will often compete to outperform one another in the eyes of their superior. I directly observed such a competition taking place between two of my research assistants, here called “Proh” and “Rel,” who were unmarried males in their mid-twenties (see Spiro 1996 for a Burmese analog).

Proh and Rel were polite to each other and seemed to get along well enough. Both had a strong desire to get ahead in life and no doubt viewed me as a connection that might help them to achieve this goal. As they worked with me, however, I observed them competing in small ways, such as one trying to work harder than the other, attempting to provide better explanations, and, as noted above, sometimes lavishing a bit of praise upon me to gain my good graces. In the end, the competition between them was decisively determined when I discovered that Rel had been faking answers on a psychological questionnaire I had trained him to administer. In addition to losing my trust, Rel lost a great deal of face before Proh and before the Banyan villagers when word spread about what he had done. At this point, Proh had clearly “defeated” Rel and, within this work-context, was the superior person who could look down upon the other. While Proh, who was extremely polite, would never admit this to me directly, one day he told me: “If I had a heart that was competitive with Rel, I would be competitive to gain honor. I would try to do good work so that you would like me more. At such a time, I would be able to defeat Rel.” Like the school exams, the structured honor competition between Proh and Rel resulted in a winner and a loser, a superior and an inferior, one who had honor and one who was shamed.

A second cultural model of honor competition involves situations in which another person directly challenges one’s honor; to avoid losing prestige, one must attempt to save face. Such “defensive honor competition” is behind some cases of domestic abuse. In Cambodian society, women are generally regarded as inferior to men.¹⁷ Wives are thus expected to respect and honor their husbands. In addition to

¹⁷I am here referring to a general tendency, rooted in Buddhist norms of gender inequality,

learning these norms from their own domestic domain observations, children are taught traditional male and female “codes of conduct” (*chhapol bros, chhapol srey*; see Jacobs 1996), which emphasize that a virtuous wife must subordinate herself to her husband. If a wife acts in a disrespectful manner toward her husband, particularly if others are present, he is in danger of being defeated by her and thus losing face. The head of a women’s rights organization explained to me: “A man feels he must not lose to a woman, he must not be inferior to her. He is the one who governs in the house so his wife must respect him.” Another woman told me how her ex-husband would hit her if she reprimanded him for something like bragging excessively or wouldn’t give him drinking money when he asked for it. She said, “He thought that he was the one who ruled the family and that I, as the wife, was much lower than he and therefore shouldn’t violate his honor. If a wife doesn’t listen to and obey her husband, he will lose face.” In order to put down this challenge to his honor, the husband would “defeat” her through the use of violence. The woman explained that by beating her, her ex-husband tried to prove that he had greater power and status and thus that she should respect and fear him. While many Cambodian men do not resort to using violence in such situations, domestic abuse is a prevalent problem in Cambodia.¹⁸

This cultural model of defensive honor competition that underlies domestic violence also informs the response of politicians to press criticisms. Government leaders stand at the top of the Cambodian social hierarchy. Just as a husband expects his wife to honor and obey him, so too does a high-ranking political official think that he or she is “higher” than members of the general populace and expect that they will show him or her proper respect. From a leader’s perspective, the press should praise rather than criticize his or her actions, which is what journalists for the most part did during the post-DK Communist period. When a newspaper publishes an article like “Country of Thieves,” it is therefore directly attacking the political leader’s face (in this case by stating that the Prime Ministers are corrupt and run a disorderly state). Cambodians speak of such criticism as “violating” (*pah pool*), “going against” (*brâchhang*), or attempting to “break” (*kach*) another person’s honor. If that person does not respond to such a strong challenge, his or her prestige will most likely decline. One informant explained to me: “Cambodians don’t want others to go against them because if this enemy succeeds in breaking them, they will lose face and authority. Others may dare to go against them in the future, too, so [their authority] will become weaker and weaker.”

In politics, a ruined reputation may quickly lead to the end of one’s political life. Thus we find Hun Sen telling people that he “can not stand to be despised by the press every day . . . I have already sued five newspapers, and my lawyer is currently preparing to file a lawsuit against another . . . I will not forgive those who humiliated me” (Peters 1995, 6). In order to defend against attacks on their honor, political leaders must find a way to “defeat” their foes. Sometimes the papers are sued and/or shut down, sometimes journalists are harassed and threatened, and sometimes members of the media are even attacked or killed. By “defeating” those who would

for people to consider men superior to women. Clearly there are exceptions. In most contexts, an older woman of high status would be considered superior to a young, poor peasant male. However, the poor man would likely regard his wife as his inferior.

¹⁸Domestic abuse in Cambodia is a complex problem that has many other causes including: alcohol abuse, poverty, lack of education, jealousy, gambling, bigamy, and unemployment. While I do not have space to address this important issue in further detail here, an overview of the issue in Cambodia can be found in Zimmerman (1994).

challenge their honor, political leaders are able to save face and make a statement to all that they should be properly respected, honored, and obeyed.

The final cultural model of honor competition I will discuss involves situations in which a person or group attempts to seize authority, and the prestige that goes with it, from another individual. This type of “offensive honor competition” is particularly characteristic of factional maneuvering and politics.¹⁹ Thus, several Cambodians told me that honor competition was one of the reasons behind the fallout between two Funcinpec party leaders—outspoken government critic Sam Rainsy and his factional boss, Prince Ranariddh. Rainsy was openly critical of some of the political deals Prince Ranariddh made with his co-Prime Minister, Hun Sen, and was rapidly gaining popular support in his crusade against corruption. Because Rainsy was “going against” Prince Ranariddh’s coalition government, Prince Ranariddh was losing face—he was not able to command and did not receive proper respect from one of his subordinates. Realizing that Rainsy was effectively challenging him for the leadership of the party, Prince Ranariddh responded to this challenge to his honor and power by throwing Rainsy out of the government. This move was accompanied by the general harassment of, indirect threats against, and public criticisms of Rainsy, as well as a crackdown on newspapers supporting him (*The New Liberty News* being one of these).²⁰

Having delineated these Cambodian cultural models related to face and honor, I will now demonstrate how they were operative during DK. I will argue that, while revolutionary changes altered the contexts in which these cultural models were employed, they nevertheless continued to inform people’s behavior. Consequently, an understanding of these models and Khmer Rouge ideology can help us understand why people like Lohr committed genocidal atrocities during this period.

DK and the Dark Side of Face and Honor

DK Ideology and Hierarchical Transformation

As I noted in the introduction, Cambodian society was radically transformed during DK: Buddhism was banned, the family unit undermined, socioeconomic activity communalized, and the political and administrative structure revamped (Chandler 1991; Jackson 1989; Ebihara 1990). Traditional forms of hierarchy were broken down during this process of radical change. In keeping with their goal of creating a peasant-based communist country, the Khmer Rouge claimed that DK was to be an egalitarian society and enacted a number of policies to achieve this end.

First, the Party attempted to suppress linguistic registers which connoted class, kinship, and status differences (Carney 1977; Marston 1985; Marston and Duong 1988; Ponchaud 1978). While some of the old terms of address remained in use to differing extents in disparate areas, people most frequently called each other by the

¹⁹Offensive honor competition almost inevitably also involves a varying degree of competition for power. In Cambodian society, power, honor, and wealth are all highly interrelated. Thus, people with wealth and power are generally honored and respected by others. Many Cambodians told me that they saw the attainment of wealth and power as a means of increasing their prestige.

²⁰Rainsy eventually formed his own political party and made a partial reconciliation with Prince Ranariddh.

title “comrade friend” (*mitt*). Children were supposed to refer to their parents as “comrade” or “comrade mother/father.” No one was permitted to use the word “Sir” (*lok*) anymore, as one man found when he used this appellation with a Khmer Rouge soldier: “‘Don’t call me sir, call me comrade,’ said the fierce leader. ‘No one is called sir after the revolution. We have been fighting to get rid of these words’” (May 1986, 111). Another soldier told the man that such words could not be used anywhere “as long as the High Revolutionary Committee exists” (May 1986, 121). Within this process of linguistic transformation, several terms associated with the urban areas — now regarded as the vile centers of capitalism, corruption, and class oppression—dropped out of usage. Thus, people most commonly used the rural (and, sometimes, urban colloquial) words for such activities as eating and sleeping (*boup* and *sâmrak* versus *nham* and *keng*).

The DK attack on the old hierarchy took place on several other fronts besides language. Many nonverbal behaviors connoting hierarchical difference, such as bending down and politely greeting others, were strongly discouraged during DK. By banning Buddhism, the Khmer Rouge also directly undermined the moral underpinnings of the belief system in “natural inequality.” Status differences between men and woman (and the young and the old) were to be eliminated in the new egalitarian ethos. As one informant explained, “Previously women had been the heads of the household and had taken care of the children. During the Pol Pot period, however, this changed. Pol Pot taught that women had rights equal to those of men and thus should do the same work as men.” To emphasize this gender equality, women were supposed to cut their hair short, perform strenuous labor on work teams, and dress in the same black garb as men. Finally, in order to do away with capitalism and eliminate the socioeconomic advantages of the wealthy, the Khmer Rouge evacuated the urban population into the countryside, eliminated currency, and communalized work, property, and dining.

Despite such steps to create an egalitarian society, DK nevertheless came to be dominated by new hierarchical elites (Chandler 1991; Kiernan 1996; Thion 1993): Khmer Rouge cadre and soldiers, the rural poor, and the young. Like Maoist China, DK favored peasants and the young because they were regarded as the groups that could most readily be molded into citizens of the new Communist society in which loyalty and obedience were to be given to the Party Organization. “In Maoist terms, these men and women were ‘poor and blank’ pages on which a revolution could be inscribed” (Chandler 1991, 243).

Because they were impressionable and in the process of developing their identity (thus making them particularly sensitive about issues of face and honor), children, in particular, received a great deal of indoctrination aimed at socializing them into this Communist ethos. In Southwestern Cambodia, for example, teenagers returning from two-to-three week political training sessions supposedly “were fierce in their condemnation of ‘old ways’; rejected parental authority; were passionate in their loyalty to the state and party; were critical and contemptuous of customs; and had a militant attitude” (Quinn 1976, 13). To foster the attainment of such a revolutionary consciousness, the Khmer Rouge attempted to undermine the bonds between parents and children by: linguistic changes, forced separations, difficult work schedules, children’s groups, communalization, and antifamily propaganda. Lohr, who was just a teenager when he was indoctrinated into the army, remembers being told over and over: “Don’t think about your mother and father, don’t be attached to your siblings, just work hard to serve the state.”

Like young people, the rural poor who had lived under Khmer Rouge rule during the civil war, often referred to as “old people” (*brâcheachon chas*) or “base people” (*brâcheachon moulâdthan*), were a favored group during DK. Given their traditional disempowerment and class grievances against the urban rich, many of these peasants strongly supported the Khmer Rouge, particularly in 1975 and 1976. By placing such people in positions of advantage and power, the Party received their loyalty and obedience in return. Rural life was idealized in the new, peasant-based, communist society. The cities were emptied; capitalist enterprises were forbidden; and everyone was expected to work, eat, sleep, and speak like a peasant. Because of their “pure” class background, “old people” were the first to be selected to positions of authority and generally enjoyed greater rights than the group at the bottom of the DK hierarchy—the urban evacuees (which included both city dwellers and peasants who had fled to the cities during the civil war), who were called “new people” (*brâcheachon tmey*) or “April 17 people” (*pouk dap brambel mesa*).

Given their suspect urban origins and their support for the Lon Nol regime during the civil war, “new people” were devalued by the Khmer Rouge. While both “old” and “new people” experienced great difficulty during DK, “new people” typically received less food, were allocated worse housing, were subject to more difficult relocation demands, and, perhaps most importantly, were given harsher punishments. With luck, an “old person” might get off with a warning if caught for a crime like stealing potatoes; a “new person” would almost always be killed for doing so. One DK village head told me that he was instructed by his immediate superior, Rom, that “if someone doesn’t work hard, breaks a plow or harrow, or steals, he or she may be considered an enemy . . . in such cases, the guilt of an old person is low, but that of a new person heavy enough for them to be killed.” Such comments reflected the Khmer Rouge attitude of distrust and scorn toward “new people.” As one city evacuee explained, “To them . . . we weren’t quite people. We were lower forms of life, because we were enemies. Killing us was like swatting flies, a way to get rid of undesirables” (Ngor 1987, 230).

Thus, even though the Khmer Rouge destroyed much of the old hierarchical system, status differences continued to be structured vertically in the Communist regime. A new hierarchy emerged in which the Party leadership was superior to cadre, cadre to “old people,” and “old people” to “new people.” Differences among the populace were morally legitimized by class as opposed to by merit and karma. The cultural model in which social subordinates gave honor, respect, and obedience (*korop* and *stap*) to their superiors remained operative at this time—the groups occupying the dominant position simply changed. Whereas the wealthy had previously been “bigger than” and “looked down upon” the poor, the situation was reversed in DK. A person’s place in the hierarchy was now determined by such factors as his or her class background, political position, revolutionary activity, and loyalty to the Party.

Face in Democratic Kampuchea

Like hierarchy, cultural models associated with face continued to exist in DK. While Cambodian society had always been very public, life in DK was even more extreme in this regard. People were rarely alone due to long work hours in cooperative teams, communal dining, frequent public meetings, and spies who eavesdropped underneath houses at night. Parents even had to be careful about what they whispered to family members, since their children were exposed to Khmer Rouge propaganda that encouraged them to report on “traitors” of the revolution. Within this highly

public atmosphere, people were constantly evaluated. The stakes in DK, however, were much higher than before. If a person failed to perform according to expectations, he or she would not just lose face, but would also quite possibly be put in prison or even executed. Positive evaluations, in turn, could result in procuring a better position, additional food, and/or some other advantage for one's family.

Given these dangers, it was imperative for people to keep up "the shield" at all times. Public meetings, for example, constituted a form of ideological face promotion in which people were expected to praise the revolution in an unqualified manner. In addition to singing revolutionary songs and reciting slogans, one "old person" told me that the assembly would listen to cadre "praise the kindness and power of the Revolutionary Organization through whose victory and leadership the construction of the country was progressing rapidly." People were expected to applaud enthusiastically and respond affirmatively to all that was said. If not, the Party and its officials would lose face and the offending person might be accused of being one of the "enemies" (*khmang, sâtrauw*) against whom the speakers spent a great deal of time haranguing. In general, both "new" and "old people" lived in constant fear of insulting their superiors and thus had to vigilantly maintain their "shield." One Banyan villager told me that when people encountered Phat, the head of the local subdistrict office, "We were really frightened, too scared to speak with her. We were afraid that if we said something wrong, she would notice and take us to be killed. She was really mean." Another threat to maintaining one's shield came from the newly instituted criticism sessions in which people would have to criticize themselves and/or endure being criticized by others without putting themselves in danger. Giving offense to a cadre like Phat or being singled out as an enemy in such meetings could mean a quick death.

While face work and the shield remained operative in many situations during DK, there was one context in which they did not—anomic interactions with a sociopolitical enemy. Previously, one encountered enemies in certain specified contexts such as war, law enforcement, and politics. In DK, this cultural model of violence against a sociopolitical enemy, which I have elsewhere called the "violent ethic" (Hinton 1996), was legitimized in everyday communal interactions by Khmer Rouge ideology focused around the metaphor of society being like an army at war (Marston 1994, 110).

Drawing in part on the ideology of Mao's Great Leap Forward, Khmer Rouge radio broadcasts, speeches, slogans, and revolutionary songs frequently referred to the "combative struggle" (*brâyut*) to "build and defend" (*kâsang neung karpear*) the country using military terminology (Carney 1989; Chandler 1991; Ponchaud 1978). This war was to be fought on two battlefields, the first of which was the economic "front lines" (*sâmârâphoum mukh*) on which the people, like soldiers, "launched offensives" (*veay sâmrok*). "The nation was still at war. We didn't just work, we 'struggled,' or else 'launched offensives.' We were to 'struggle to cultivate rice fields vigorously,' 'struggle to dig canals with great courage,' 'struggle to clear the forests' . . . to 'launch an offensive to plant strategic crops,' and 'launch an offensive to perform duty with revolutionary zeal'" (Ngor 1987, 197). Productive activity reflected this military metaphor, as "squads," "platoons," "companies," "battalions," and "divisions" of workers were sent to "struggle heroically" (*tâsou*) on the economic war front.

The second battlefield was national security. While the army fought against external enemies like Vietnam, the people were supposed to defend the country against internal foes who could sabotage the revolution. Party officials likened such enemies to a hidden "sickness" that still needed to be located and destroyed (Chandler,

Kiernan, and Boua 1988; Ponchaud 1978). One cadre who underwent political training for three days at the district office recounted being repeatedly told to be on guard against agents of the CIA, KGB, and the Vietnamese who had infiltrated the country: "They asked us, 'Comrade, if your mother or father was such a traitor, would you dare to kill them? Could you cut off your feeling toward them?' None of us could say no. We had to answer that we would dare to do so without hesitation."

Lohr remembers receiving similar indoctrination. He said, "When I was in the army, they taught us to cut off our feeling from the enemy, even if it was our parents. At Tuol Sleng, they reinforced this training even more, telling us that we had to become detached and kill whoever had fault. Even if someone had been our friend before, we couldn't recognize them once they had become an enemy." Both local cadre and members of the general populace I interviewed frequently spoke about how they were told to defend the revolution against internal enemies. As one ex-Tuol Sleng prisoner explained, "That one word, 'enemy,' had great power. It could make a child stop recognizing his or her mother, father, and siblings. Upon hearing the word 'enemy,' everyone became nervous."

As a result of such Khmer Rouge ideology, the "violent ethic" became operative at the local level (Hinton 1996). People were supposed to be constantly on guard against enemies who might be working or eating beside them during the day. The Khmer Rouge used indoctrination to reinforce a cultural model of detachment, "cutting off one's feelings/heart" (*dach chett, dach khat, leng monosânbchetâna*), toward an enemy who, moments earlier, might have been a friend or family member. Once such a person was labeled an enemy, not only was it no longer necessary to feel constrained by face norms when interacting with him or her, but one was expected to treat this enemy in an anomic fashion.

This insight can help us understand the psychology of Khmer Rouge killers like Lohr. When Lohr told his superior that he had never killed anyone, the man questioned whether Lohr could "cut his heart off" from the enemy. Within the paranoid and distrustful atmosphere that pervaded DK, any questions about a person's loyalty to the Party could result in accusations that he or she was an enemy. If Lohr did not kill in this situation, he could have been accused of being a traitor—thus his statement that "I couldn't refuse." As Lohr explained, "I was afraid they would suspect me until they saw me kill with their own eyes, until they saw that I could cut off my heart [and kill]."

The Khmer Rouge attempted to manipulate this cultural model of legitimized, anomic violence against a sociopolitical enemy. Like the Nazis, they set up a bureaucratic system for executing people. Former village heads told me that they were required to maintain two ledgers that listed the names, ages, and former occupations of the people in their village. One was kept in the village; the other was given to the subdistrict office. In many parts of Cambodia, orders were passed down the Khmer Rouge line of command instructing village and district officials to round up those people on the lists who had suspect backgrounds (e.g., intellectuals, "new people," capitalists, former Lon Nol soldiers, police, and officials) and inform them they were to be "taken to a new village." These victims were then transported to extermination centers where they were killed *en masse* by Khmer Rouge who had been told they were killing the enemy. As one "old person" explained, "The executioners would be told, 'today you will destroy enemies that the Party has captured.' When they saw their victims arrive, they didn't think, 'oh, this person is gentle and honest' because the Party had told them that he or she was an enemy. Therefore, the person had to be killed."

Such anomic behavior against “the enemy” was also characteristic of local level executions. While there are certainly exceptions to the rule, life in areas run by cadre with local roots seems to have been generally much better than in places that were governed by strangers, particularly for “old people.” In Region 41 of the Central Zone (part of what is now western Kompong Cham province), for example, the frequency of killings dramatically increased when cadre from Southwestern Cambodia replaced officials who had ties to the area. The Khmer Rouge seem to have recognized this pattern and, to prevent internal enemies from escaping, tended to place cadre and soldiers without local links in positions of power. Even if some of the cadre were locals, the ones who did the killings might come from the district office and be rotated periodically. One former cadre who worked with Rom told me that the executioners “killed in the area for fifteen days at most. They changed them for fear that if they worked in one place too long, they would develop attachments there. They executed people like we kill fish. Sometimes they would return laughing and happy. When they looked at their victims, they didn’t think they were killing a fellow Khmer, just an enemy.” Interestingly, such executions usually occurred at night and in the jungle, a place that is associated with the amoral, uncivilized, and disordered in Cambodian culture (Chandler 1982). In addition to providing secrecy, this “wild” anonymous setting was appropriate for the anomic behaviors that took place as people like Lohr executed enemies to whom face norms no longer applied.

Honor in Democratic Kampuchea

While most people were focused primarily on getting enough food and avoiding execution, the desire to achieve praise and honor nevertheless remained an important motivation during DK. As noted earlier, one’s place and ability to rise within the new hierarchy depended upon such factors as: class background, youth, political connections and position, fulfillment of duty, loyalty to the Party, and revolutionary zeal. People continued to evaluate and compare themselves to others, but they did so on the basis of this new criteria of honor which favored the poor, rural “old people,” and the young, as opposed to the rich, urbanites, and elders. In addition to giving one respect and authority, being “higher” than others could make the difference between life and death because “big people” had greater access to food and more security (assuming they were not purged and/or did not lose an offensive honor competition). Honor thus remained a scarce resource that was actively pursued by many people.

Perhaps the primary way of attaining honor during DK was to rise in political rank. Cadre like Boan, who arrested a Banyan villager named Vong for stealing potatoes, were viewed as having great honor. Vong said Boan “had honor since he was the village head and the people were scared of him. No one dared make trouble around him for fear he would have them taken away to be killed. Boan could order us around as he pleased. We went hungry, while he ate his fill.” Another Banyan villager stated that such Khmer Rouge cadre had honor “because we had to do whatever they said. They were the law and held total power over the populace. Everyone feared and honored them. The people didn’t have much honor, we just thought about work and death.” Thus, while circumstances had changed somewhat, people could still gain honor by rising in rank and being given the respect that was due to them. At meetings, people were supposed to praise the Party and therefore, by implication, its local representatives.

Given the advantages of elevating one's position in the DK hierarchy, it is not surprising that people continued to compete for honor. Within structured situations, one could gain praise and perhaps even be promoted for fulfilling one's duty and demonstrating loyalty to the Party. Khmer Rouge ideology, for example, glorified violence done in the name of the revolution (Chandler 1991; Jackson 1989). Blood sacrifice was a frequent theme in political speeches, revolutionary songs and slogans, and even the national anthem, which began with the following lines: "Blood red blood that covers towns and plains / Of Kampuchea, our motherland, / Sublime blood of workers and peasants, / Sublime blood of revolutionary men and women fighters! / The blood, changing into unrelenting hatred / And resolute struggle . . ." The Khmer Rouge exhorted people to defend the country by seeking out and destroying internal enemies, even if the traitor was a parent, spouse, or relative. One person told me a story about a female cadre who arrested her husband after discovering he had been stealing extra food. When the man asked his wife how she could execute her own husband, she replied, "I'm not killing my husband, I'm killing the enemy." My informant explained, "She had been brainwashed to love and be loyal to only the Party."

Influenced by doctrine asserting that violence against the enemy was a virtue, such Khmer Rouge cadre undoubtedly felt that they were fulfilling their duty to the revolution and gaining honor by killing people. Thus, one "new person" who lived in a harsh region of Battambang during DK explained that his cooperative leader, Chev, "killed to feel good about himself. If he purged enough enemies, he satisfied his conscience. He had done his duty to Angka . . . to the ever-smiling Chev, the act of killing was routine. Just part of the job. Not even worth a second thought" (Ngor 1987, 229). Similarly, while Lohr claimed to have had reservations about executing people, he admitted that he did so because it was his duty and "to demonstrate my loyalty to the Party."

Cambodia had always been a culture in which individuals were heavily invested in their roles, since maintaining and elevating one's status depended on performative competence. During DK, such "role commitment" (Lebra 1976, 85) was exaggerated through Khmer Rouge ideology, which encouraged the total renunciation of individualistic ties, behaviors, and ways of thinking (Ponchaud 1978, 114). Everything was to be subordinated to the collective good as defined by the Party. The metaphor of "building" (*kâsang*) this new mentality was prevalent in DK, as illustrated by slogans such as "Destroy the garden of the individual; build a united garden" (Marston 1994, 114). Those who thought too much about the past or persisted in holding counterrevolutionary attitudes were said to suffer from a "sick consciousness" (*chheu sâtearum*) and were often executed. In DK, people were supposed to love and be loyal only to the Party. The best way of demonstrating that one possessed this mentality was to perform one's duty in an enthusiastic, wholehearted, and unquestioning manner. Writing about the Japanese, DeVos (1973) has called this type of extreme commitment to and identification with one's duty "role narcissism." When we consider how Khmer Rouge doctrine glorified violence and "role narcissism," we can better understand how people like Lohr, Chev, Phat, Boan, and other cadre might have felt they were gaining honor and pleasing their superiors by killing people whom they regarded as the enemy.

It is also crucial to note that executions usually took place in front of a perpetrator's peers and/or superiors. Within this structured setting, the killers attempted to gain honor through the positive evaluations of others in a manner analogous to student exam competition and to Proh and Rel's work competition.

Earlier I noted that during indoctrination sessions and political meetings, Khmer Rouge were repeatedly asked if they would “dare” (*bean*) to kill an enemy, even if the person was a parent, sibling, spouse, or relative. Such propaganda played upon a traditional cultural model of bravery (*klahan*) that is an important part of “Cambodian machismo”—the brave who dare gain face, cowards who do not dare are shamed. The Khmer Rouge used this ideology of bravery to facilitate killing. Those who killed were considered to have “defeated” and to be superior to those who did not dare. Proh explained that at extermination centers like Tuol Sleng, the executioners had to “act bravely like everyone else in the group. If just one person was not daring, he or she would be considered a coward, the most inferior person in the group, the one who had lost to the others and was looked down upon. Such people would lose face and honor, and their superior would stop trusting and giving power to them.” Similarly, local level cadre like Phat, Chev, and Boan would compete to prove their loyalty to the party by daring to kill people. If they discovered and executed enough enemies, they would gain honor and perhaps even “defeat” their peers by being promoted.

While Lohr no doubt engaged in this type of structured honor competition in some contexts, the incident mentioned at the beginning of this essay is an example of defensive honor competition. By asking Lohr if he had “ever dared to kill” and questioning whether he could “cut off his heart,” Lohr’s superior was effectively challenging Lohr’s honor and loyalty to the Party. If Lohr had tried to avoid killing the person, he would have lost face and perhaps even been subsequently labeled a traitor himself and put to death. Influenced by Khmer Rouge ideology that glorified violence, daring, and role narcissism, Lohr picked up the iron bar and killed “one or two” people. In doing so, Lohr defended his honor and demonstrated his loyalty, daring, and detachment from the enemy. Considering the paranoid ethos of DK, it seems likely that, like Lohr, Khmer Rouge cadre and soldiers throughout Cambodia were at times forced to defend their honor by killing people.

DK was also characterized by frequent attempts to seize power and authority (and thus honor) from others, or offensive honor competitions. For example, when the Southwest cadre arrived in Region 41, they immediately began to purge old cadre and replace their patronage networks with people loyal to themselves.²¹ One cadre who survived the purge told me, “The old and the new cadre were competing for authority. The Southwest faction wanted to seize total power so they would have the old cadre followed and carefully watched. If we said something wrong or made even a little mistake, the Southwest cadre would accuse us of being a traitor and have us arrested.” A great deal of tension also existed between the Southwest faction and local soldiers. One officer named Reap attempted to start a rebellion in Kompong Cham city after members of his faction had been jailed, and he realized that his power in the area was being usurped by the Southwest cadre. Reap was arrested and sent to Tuol Sleng. This tension continued with Reap’s successor, Chuon. A leading Southwest cadre, Grandmother Yit, reported to the head of the Central Zone that Chuon had helped some “new people” escape and was “going against” him. Chuon denied the accusation and, unlike many Khmer Rouge against whom charges of treason were made, was believed by his superior. In fact, reporting on one’s rivals was a common strategy in offensive honor competitions; it was encouraged by the DK regime and constitutes one of the reasons purges and paranoia were so rampant. As

²¹Clearly, such DK purges can be analyzed on a variety of levels. In addition to examining the purges in terms of honor competition, for example, we can view them as part of the macrolevel political struggle between various DK factions.

Proh explained, Khmer Rouge like “the Southwestern cadre would report to *Angkar* that their rivals were traitors in the hope that *Angkar* would drop or kill the accused individual. The Southwestern cadre would gain honor and be praised by *Angkar* who might even raise their rank.” When cadre won such honor competitions, they became even more powerful.

Conclusion: Culture and the Study of Genocide

Culture alone does not “cause” genocide; neither do historical events, sociopolitical transformations, or ideology. A complete understanding of genocide requires a nuanced analysis of how all of these factors interact to generate genocidal behaviors. Because of the lack of anthropological research on large-scale genocide, I have focused on the cultural dimension. Therefore, in the first part of this essay, I delineated a number of Cambodian cultural models related to face and honor. The second section pointed out how these models influenced the genocidal actions of Khmer Rouge cadre and soldiers like Lohr.

As illustrated by the fact that these cultural models have not caused genocide in other historical periods, we must recognize that Cambodian culture is not “inherently” genocidal. In fact, culturally distinct models of face and honor exist in most societies, including the United States (Goffman 1967), though face and honor are particularly salient and highly elaborated in Cambodia. Such cultural knowledge only comes to serve as a template for mass violence within a certain context of historical and sociopolitical change. Thus, I noted how the Khmer Rouge initiated a number of sociopolitical transformations that revamped the structure of society. In addition to removing traditional constraints on violence, such changes had the effect of creating a new system of inequality in which certain groups (e.g., “new” people, rich “capitalists,” the “enemy,” old elites, and “traitors”) were disempowered, devalued, and persecuted.

Sociopolitical transformations alone, however, do not necessarily entail genocide. Thus, despite radically transforming society, the Vietnamese Communist revolution did not lead to large-scale genocide (Newman 1978). To generate genocidal behaviors, sociopolitical changes must be accompanied by a violent ideology. In the case of DK, Khmer Rouge ideology glorified violence against the “enemy,” promoted the persecution of “new people” and the continued waging of war on the local level, encouraged role narcissism, and invoked the doctrine of “cutting oneself off” from and daring to kill the enemy. Such ideology, in turn, was effective in motivating people to kill precisely because it drew upon preexisting cultural models that were highly salient to many Cambodians. A comprehensive explanation of genocide must therefore take account of how, within a given historical context, sociopolitical changes set up an environment in which mass murder may occur. For genocide to take place, though, these changes must be accompanied by a violent ideology that adapts traditional cultural knowledge to its lethal purposes. This is exactly what happened in Cambodia and, based on my preliminary investigations, in other countries such as Turkey, Rwanda, and Nazi Germany.

Before concluding, I would like briefly to reconsider Lohr’s actions. Some people might wonder if Lohr, a soldier, was merely obeying the orders of his superior. As I have illustrated elsewhere (Hinton 1997a, 1997b), there is no doubt that Cambodian cultural models of obedience at times facilitated murderous acts. To reduce all killing

to obedience, however, is a dramatic oversimplification of the situation. On the one hand, perpetrators often have a degree of choice about whether or not to participate in killings (Goldhagen 1996). On the other hand, human motivation is multiply determined. If Lohr had refused his superior's order, he might very well have been labeled a traitor and arrested. As I have demonstrated above, however, Lohr had other motives related to face and honor. Like many DK perpetrators, Lohr may also have believed Khmer Rouge propaganda that glorified the violent acts he carried out against "enemies" of the Revolution. As opposed to viewing the actions of such people in a unidimensional manner, we should see perpetrators as negotiating their actions within fields of constraints and inducements that are operative under a violent regime. Individuals who commit murderous acts are usually not just coerced into doing so; they are often motivated by preexisting cultural models that are ideologically or individually adapted to the genocidal situation. The combination of cultural models theory and practice theory that I have used in this essay has made this insight possible and provides one framework for anthropologists to begin addressing the difficult issue of large-scale genocide.

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