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forested or mountainous areas, where wild foods make up a significant portion of their diet. Here the distinction between wild and domestic foods tends to be downplayed.

16 Ya was born in 1967 which would make him 3 years old when the Khmer Rouge first arrived. Like most of the adults and former soldiers remaining in Prei Phnom commune he would have spent his formative years under the Khmer Rouge. Those who became Khmer Rouge soldiers would also have spent the major part of their adult life under Khmer Rouge ideology.


18 By ‘direct’ I mean that they did not grow up practising Buddhism by attending wet events, celebrating Buddhist holy days, and or other outwardly Buddhist practices because of the Khmer Rouge’s negative stance towards Buddhism. This is not to say, however, that they were not implicitly exposed to Buddhist ideas through the Khmer Rouge ideology itself (see Hinton, 2005). Moreover, contact with older members, especially family members, who would have recalled the more explicit forms of Buddhist practices, would have had a significant impact when those people were available. However, this was not the case for Ya and many others like him who lost their parents to the Khmer Rouge in the early 1970s. It should, however, be added that some of those who did not convert to Christianity later made an effort to learn about the ways of their parents and ancestors.


20 It should, however, be noted that his living presence may provide a more immediate means of limiting the rupture since he provides the villagers with a scapegoat with which to contain the immorality of his generation. Nonetheless, he continues to be an uncomfortable reminder of that past.

21 It may be argued that Ta Kam’s religious activities are his way of trying to make amends. In my discussions and interviews with him he never gave any indication that he felt particularly guilty or ashamed of anything he may have done. Instead, when he described his life he presented himself as a passive subject rather than an active agent in his choices. The only indication he gave of pro-activity or responsibility on his part was that he was looking after his interests in this life by securing his property for his children and grandchildren and his securing his own future in the next life by becoming more religious. This is why I suggest that his religious activity is an attempt to make amends, his motive is more functional than sentimental.

CHAPTER 11

The Moral Geology of the Present: Structuring morality, menace and merit

Penny Edwards

‘All men of politics are deeply religious, but they kill. The more pious he is, the more ferocious’ (Soth Polin, 1980).1

Whoever harms with violence
Those who are gentle and innocent,
To one of these ten states
That person quickly descends:
He would beget
Severe suffering;
Deprivation and fracturing
Of the body; or grave illness, too;
Mental imbalance;
Trouble from the government;
Cruel slander;
Loss of relatives;
Or destruction of property.2

‘Cambodia is a society that has lost any sense of morality, riven by violence and injustice’ (Kong Boncheoun, 2000).3

INTRODUCTION

This essay is a preliminary exploration of the visions and expectations of moral behaviour displayed by state actors and entertained by the public in contemporary Cambodia. The past decade has seen a recurrent interest in the issue of Cambodian morality, both among the general population, particularly those in their mid-twenties and above, who fear its loss, and among the male leadership, whose public rhetoric is increasingly studded with strategically timed morality tirades. A primary focus of such tirades
is the female form. A secondary focus is injurious foreign influence. In this chapter, I link these notions of female propriety and sexual morality with a hierarchical social structure, and explore the gap between the moral high-ground invoked or projected by this recent wave of rhetoric and the reality of escalating and often sanctioned violent crime.

In the past decade, the pace of rapid economic change, the rapacious concentration of land and other material resources in the hands of a few key families in Cambodia, an escalation of ostentation and corruption, and a rise in youth crime and recreational drug-use, has led some Cambodians to evince nostalgia for aspects of the Democratic Kampuchea regime, whose leaders are now being brought to trial for crimes against humanity. Although this nostalgia is far from widespread, its existence even among a scattering of the educated urban population is worthy of analysis.

In this article, I attempt to link legacies and patterns of violence not so much with an active process of legitimation but to the broader absence of moral sanction. While Eve Zucker's essay for this volume explores the effects of the absence of elders on contemporary mores in two Cambodian villages in Kompong Speu, I shall reflect on the apparent moral disengagement of Cambodia's leadership with issues of social violence. That disengagement has varied from a laissez-faire approach to mob killings and acid-attacks, apparent from the mid-1990s onward, to the tacit endorsement of such communal or individual actions in the late 1990s. What interests me here is the contrast between this disengagement with issues of responsibility for personal and mob violence (notably mob violence directed against ethnic Vietnamese, perceived as prime suspects for crimes of property theft, and against females engaged in extra-marital affairs), and the country's increasingly active engagement in the policing of female corporeal, sexual and conjugal morality. In comparing these policies, I examine concepts of morality, the operation of kingship, and the current feminization of notions of immorality. In so doing, I also search for congruence between the emphasis placed by the government on issues of sexual morality and some perceptions held by. I also consider the role that the state accords the sangha in such affairs, and examine the resonance between the government's apparent prioritization of sexual morality over broader questions of social ethics, and some recent legislation vis-à-vis the sangha.

Cambodia is a multi-ethnic society, with most ethnic groups subscribing to overlapping and layered sets of beliefs, incorporating, in the Khmer population, Buddhism, animism and Brahmanism. In this chapter, my focus is on ethnic Khmer, but my setting is primarily Phnom Penh, within the outlying, broader framework of the nation-state. The city, in which many ethnic groups live, is the terrain for the formulation, performance, iteration of (but not necessarily adherence to) this moral code, as applied by the ruling secular and clerical elite, in their explicit or tacit approval, condoning acts that many societies would rank as worthy of particular condemnation in that they cause excruciating harm, pain, disfigurement or death to individuals.

MORAL ECONOMY, PATERNAL RULE AND SEXUAL POLITICAL

Writing of pre-industrial England, E. P. Thompson described late eighteenth century food riots as the 'last desperate effort by the people to reimpose the older moral economy as against the economy of the free market' (Thompson 1968: 73). Thompson's scholarship is perhaps best known to scholars of Southeast Asia via James Scott's seminal work The Moral Economy of the Peasant (1978) in which Scott applied Thompson's interpretive framework to rural actors in colonized Vietnam. Thompson's definition of the moral economy as the 'consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations' with respect to the 'proper economic function of several parties within the community' (Thompson 1971) at the 'level of royal policymaking, genteel philosophizing, and in the popular consciousness' (Hill 1971) can also be usefully applied to Cambodia at the cusp of the new millennium when many Cambodians in the older generation, while glad to be free from war, are also seeking interpretive frameworks as they adjust to the rapid dislocation of an accelerated adaptation to an unbridled free market. For the purposes of this chapter, Thompson's reading of the moral economy provides a useful point of departure for the understanding of the apparent disparity between the vestiges of material modernization in Cambodia and the veiled or explicit desire for a reversion to feudal policies of paternalism.

Paternalism was used to greatest bombast and effect by Norodom Sihanouk in his Sangkum Reastr Niyum regime (1955–1970), which promoted the nuclear family in film and popular culture, while airing debates on polygamy in parliament. Its antithesis was the faceless but omnipresent and omnipotent angkar (organization) of the Democratic Kampuchea Regime, which sought to destroy the family unit and make the Cambodian Communist Party the only authority to whom all must answer, but simultaneously campaigned for a puritanical sexual morality and promoted mass weddings. The notion of the state as father figure and
the nation as a motherland was renewed again under the Socialist People's Republic of Kampuchea, whose attempts to continue the DK's ban on prostitution failed (Evans 2003). From 1993 to 2006, the notion of paternal rule and the emphasis on singular male authority was complicated by the fact that Cambodia was ruled as a double act with two male co-premiers. In 2004, King Sihanouk abdicated the throne in favour of his son, King Sihamoni, who is younger than First Prime Minister Hun Sen.

This same period, from 1993 to 2006, has seen a rapid reversion to pre-socialist norms, notably in the resurgence and unprecedented expansion and commercialization of the sex trade. The influx of new wealth through outside investment, speculation and corruption has also financed the resurgence of the practice of taking mistresses. During this same period, in 2004, UNESCO added Khmer classical dance to its global register of intangible cultural heritage worthy of protection. By contrast, the government has failed to adequately invest in or protect the performance of Cambodian culture on stage. In 2005 and 2006, two landmark, capital cultural institutions – the National Theatre and the Royal School of Performing Arts – were sold off to investors for profit as real-estate developments (for more on this, see Turnbull 2006). In what follows, I attempt to make sense of these apparently contradictory developments by focusing on the ways in which morality is performed and articulated in the public sphere in Cambodia today.

CULTURAL RUBRICS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

If, in contemporary Western human rights discourse, rights come with responsibility, then, in Cambodian culture, wealth and power come with responsibility. It was perhaps this underlying expectation as much as communist propaganda that fuelled much of the outrage against the opulent excess of the wealthy urban elite in the 1970s. Today, it underlies simmering tensions in Phnom Penh between a vulnerable urban poor and the financially secure, landed minority who comprise a minute fraction of the capital's population but concentrate most of the capital's property title in a small and close-knit cluster of families.

Role models of 'good governance' exist in such Khmer literary texts as 'Dav Ek' (also known as 'Dum Dav'), where a just sovereign displays virtuosity in what is for the most part a top-down display of beneficence and protection. Listening to the plea of the minstrel Ek that the king not take his betrothed, Dav, as his royal consort, the king honours this wish and later intervenes to try and prevent the marriage of Dav to the son of the governor of Tboung Khmun. When his wish is thwarted, he wreaks a terrible and deadly vengeance on the governor, his wives, and children (Khing 2006a). Elsewhere, in the Buddhist tale 'Bhogolukmar', a man of great wealth (setthi) who loses all of it to virtuous deeds and dies penitent is reborn in glory as King Indra, and the resplendent lineage of his orphaned son is assured through his fathering of a Bodhisattva (Khing 2006b). But wealth alone is not enough to purchase status and the wealthy and powerful can also be open to ridicule and contempt when they fail to display generosity and reciprocity. This ambiguity of wealth per se as a hold on social status is evident in the folkloric lampooning of the figure of the setthi in, for example, the tales of the trickster 'Thmin Chey'.

In cultural terms, the notions of responsibility and reciprocity are hinged in the concept of kun, which refers specifically to acts of kindness and to the onus that such acts place on the recipient to repay the donor. The concept of giving and of investment – of the intersection between material investment or practical action and spiritual returns – are also deeply ingrained in Buddhist discourse, not only in the gift-giving notion of dana, but also in the underlying notions of kamma (past actions and their accumulation, as either negative or positive moral residue that determines one's future rebirth) and phalla (fruits or results, usually of good deeds). Thus, when the virtuous setthi in 'Bhogolukmar' dies penniless, his son is happy, knowing that his beloved father has accumulated enough phalla to ensure him a glorious rebirth. Similarly, in the story of 'Dav Ek', the narrator blames Ek's kamma and his ensuing hotheadedness for the chain of events leading to the annihilation and enslavement of his rival's clan by his protector, a righteous king (Khing 2006a).

The enduring popularity of Dav Ek demonstrates some degree of cultural consensus among Cambodians that even excessive violence is justified when exercised in the fulfilment of the moral responsibility to protect and as retribution for insubordination (Hinton, forthcoming). In the 1900 manuscript version of 'Dav Ek' recently brought to light by Khing Hoc Dy, the king justifies his punishment in light of the failure of the mandarin to honour and obey a royal decree. Despite or perhaps because of this excessive punishment, 'Dav Ek' offers an oddly reassuring moral parable to the less powerful members of society in its audience. The tale underscores not the immorality of excessive violence but rather the inherent morality in the sovereign's display of the protection of politically and financially powerless members of his constituency, in this case a minstrel (Ek) who served the
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Refraining from both political intrigue, and with the purity of his heart and the beauty of his music.

In Cambodia today, the moral climate is affected by the 'impact of genocide, poverty, fragmented institutions, the stress of post-war reconstruction, an armed society and a weak "rule of law"' (Broadhurst 2002: 1–2). This potent combination of historical legacy and contemporary inefficacy has produced, as criminologist Roderic Broadhurst has noted, 'more acts of mayhem, extra-judicial homicide and murder-robbery in Cambodia than in its neighbours' (ibid.). In his analysis of the causes and contemporary patterns of violence, Broadhurst entertains the hypothesis that 'war (and revolutionary) violence legitimated by the state carried into higher peacetime homicide', and sees a particular causal link between this process of violence legitimation and the high rate of 'suspect/offender' death, such as the communal lynchings of suspects of consumer theft (ibid.). Elsewhere, exploring the rupture between traditional cosmologies and adaptation to host country mores that have occurred among Cambodian refugees, Maurice Eisenbruch traces this 'violent stem' of cultural bereavement to the Pol Pot regime (Eisenbruch 1997).

Broadhurst notes the relative size of 'high risk groups', notably young unemployed males (Broadhurst 2002: 5). As Alex Hinton notes in his recent article on the anti-Thai riots of 2003, this group was a prime force behind the attacks (Hinton 2006). A census of the monastic population of Cambodia would also reveal a preponderance of monks in the age-range described by Broadhurst as 'high risk'. Noting the role of the sangha and karma in protecting against crime, Broadhurst also argues that the re-establishment of Buddhism in Cambodia has been 'significant in the regeneration of indigenous moral order' but that the sangha's revival, and that of a moral order, 'is challenged by modernity, materialism and new forms of crime'. Refuting criticisms of Buddhism as a doctrine whose fatalism is conducive to carelessness about death, Broadhurst argues that the Buddhist emphasis on avoidance of suffering and the accumulation of merit constitute powerful traditional sources of 'natural or internalized forms of social control against violence'. Thus, a recognisable basis for the establishment of clearly defined laws is embedded into the culture (Broadhurst 2002: 8–9).

SELETHOR: DEFINING 'MORALITY' IN CAMBODIA

The Khmer term most popularly used to refer to moral behaviour is selethor, which literally means precepts-dhamma. In a series of interviews with laity and monks in Phnom Penh and Kratie conducted as background for this paper, Hel Rithy, a researcher at the Buddhist Institute, found that Cambodians commonly locate selethor in bodily deportment: in the way people meet and greet each other, in the respect that youth pay elders, and in manners of speech. In a brief history of the Cambodian term morality, Hel Rithy describes the notion of sel (sila) as 'the interaction of individuals', and emphasises the resonance between sila and panna, or wisdom: 'when conducting sila, one must use panna. Or alternatively panna is the medium for sila and vice versa'. In contemporary society, Rithy finds, the term education (abrum) has come to replace panna in definitions and evaluations of morality. This finding indicates that in contemporary Cambodian society, knowledge has become superordinate to wisdom, and the secular to the religious. Interestingly, this interpretation endorses the evaluation of some of the reasons for the rise of the Khmer Rouge made by François Ponchaud in the 1970s, in which he noted how the impact of colonialism and the modernization programmes of the Sangkum had led to the devaluation of wisdom in favour of secular knowledge, with a corresponding weakening of veneration for the 'cahtum' (literally: old and ripe, meaning village elders) by Cambodian youth, and a dilution of the traditional moral values that had held society, at least partially, together (Ponchaud 1989).

While novices and ordained monks and nuns can take eight or ten precepts, Buddhist laity in Cambodia are expected to adhere to the five main precepts (panca sila), and it is these, Hel Rithy explains, that form the 'pillars of social morality' in Cambodia against which behavioural standards are judged. These precepts are not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to use intoxicants. Another significant standard of moral conduct in Khmer culture is delineated not by Buddhist ethics but by past practice, through animist beliefs, most notably ancestor worship. A moral genealogy links current generations to the standard of ancestral behaviour; here, ancestors become moral arbitrators, and represent a mythical standard of morality against which contemporary generations can be judged by current elders. Animist beliefs also serve to curb excesses of human behaviour through fear of punishment by particular neak ta spirits. Here also, punishable offences tend to involve general bodily deportment and social interaction, such as speaking ill of others under a tree spirit, or lying at court. Neak ta, and not the Buddha, figure as the arbiters of truth and justice in Cambodian courts, where defendants are
called to swear to tell the truth not to some abstract moral standard against Buddhist scriptures, but before the very real fear of retribution by neak ta that they will not lie—a custom iconized most recently in the commission and erection of a statue of a prominent neak ta, Lokka Dambon-daek (Iron Rod) outside the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in 2006.

The Khmer term for morality, selethor, and the associated concepts of righteous precepts and literally, 'carrying' those precepts (kan selethor), are not directly congruent with the Judeo-Christian concepts embedded within the Western term morality. However, inasmuch as Buddhism, in its thor, imposes an individual onus on disciples of Buddha not to take human or animal life, I think it appropriate to use the notion of a moral code to describe the set and spectrum of values that determine human behaviour in Cambodian society, specifically with relation to violence and morally-loaded or encoded sanctions and justifications for such violence. This loose moral code, and its degrees of porosity, flexibility, and the manner in which it is applied, necessarily have a bearing on all those living in Cambodia, as to whether they and their actions are deemed moral or immoral according to this code.

This moral structure is calibrated by a strict socio-economic hierarchy: the crime of a petty thief caught trying to steal from a monk, or of a young teenage singer trying to ‘steal’ a husband from a woman of wealth and status, or of a Thai actress trying to ‘steal’ glory and Khmer ownership from Angkor Wat, fuel an outpouring of rage and hate which are not only accommodated within, but also apparently justified by, the hierarchical ordering of things. That hierarchy is, in turn, continually represented and rehearsed through an intricate choreography which mixes morality tales with power plays, in the form of widely-taped and highly personalized visitations by usually well-rounded and well-heeled members of government or by Oknyas to rural districts, and the donations of kramas, sampots (skirts) and money by such icons of power to their most impoverished rural constituents. The theatrics of such secular alms-giving offers a public role-reversal of an equally broadly televised scenario, that of leaders and important figures making donations to monks. In this chain of merit and menace the practice of political patronage, whereby government becomes a protection racket, is packaged as a merit-worthy, selfless and personal display of material support, and hovering above it all is the menacing possibility of its disappearance should the recipient not continue their political support. Here, the government is cast as a quasi-divine figure, a latter-day, secular mimic of the divine ruler or devaraja whose duty it was, in an earlier and more deeply rooted moral schema, to uphold the spiritual welfare of the realm through the sponsorship of Buddhism. This contrivance is replicated in princely titles, such as the title of Samdech (Prince) Hun Sen, a title conferred upon Hun Sen by King Sihanouk, whose own blend of statecraft and stagecraft had seen him temporarily shed his king status for the title of Prince when he abdicated the throne in March 1955 and became the President of Sangkum Reastr Niyum.

Today, the spectrum of moral values is deployed in such a way that the murder or mutilation of a subverter of the desired status quo, whether it be a petty thief or a teenage adulterer, becomes not only justified but condoned by key stakeholders, ranging from government leaders to senior members of the sangha. Condonement can range from silence (a lack of statements about the perpetrator of the murders or mutilation), to the displacement of responsibility (a focus on the immorality of the petty criminal or adulterer), to attempts to exonerate and explain away the violent act itself, and thereby to redeem the perpetrators. In other words, there is not simply a culture of impunity, so much as a culture of abstention from passing or voicing moral judgement.

Shades of this moral hierarchy were seen in 1970, when senior figures in the sangha tacitly condoned the killing of communists by monks as a justifiable defence of their religion (Yin Sambo et al. 2006//7). Often, such exhortations exonerate group action, as in a spate of mob killings of petty thieves in the late 1990s and in lynchings of Vietnamese on the streets. The lack of sanction of such acts, or the absence of outright condemnation, creates a climate in which individual responsibility can be easily handed over to the crowd, and the crime of attempting to subvert a preferred order (such as by making spurious statements about the origins of Khmer monuments, which was the trigger of the Thai riots), becomes far greater than that of attempts to restore it (by violent mass riots whose aim is, ultimately, to force a retraction of such a statement and so to revert to the status quo ante).

DEVARAJA POLITICS AND THE THEATRICALITY OF MORALITY

In Khmer culture, the notion of the devaraja involves upholding the spiritual welfare of the realm through the sponsorship of Buddhism. King Ang Duong, who led a resurgence of Buddhist literature, King Sisowath, under whose reign the reformist monks Chuon Nath and Huot Tath
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gained sway, and King Norodom Sihanouk with his active sponsorship of Buddhist higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, all performed to some extent to this ideal. However, as mentioned earlier, the bearer of the title of righteous ruler must also display justness towards his subjects. In addition, the sponsoring of material edifices, notably wats has been an important function of monarchs in the past.

In his analysis of the cultural history of political power in Bali, Clifford Geertz posits the notion that statecraft was nothing more or less than stagecraft, that the expressive nature of the Balinese state was geared towards 'the public dramatization of the ruling obsessions' of the Balinese culture, notably 'social inequality and status pride', and that the audience was somehow part of the spectacle (Geertz 1980: 13, 102, 120–123). In her work on kingship in past and present Cambodia, Ashley Thompson has emphasised the deep-seated cultural attachment to kingship and the ways in which kingship, and notions of a righteous ruler (cakkavattin) and the saviour figure of a Buddha-to-come (Maitreya) are ingrained into popular consciousness through their symbolic encoding in Khmer visual and monumental culture (Thompson 2004).

'When it's a matter of making gifts, it's a gift from the head of State, but when it's the matter of executing some chap, that's a tribunal decision,' writes Soth Polin in his semi-autobiographical novel L'Anarchiste, referring to the violence of the Sihanouk era and the double standards of a regime that combined elaborate public displays of beneficence with brutal repression (Soth 1980: 18). The role of gifts in cultivating images of good governance also figures in a nineteenth-century verse chronicle studied by literary scholar Khin Sok. As a sign of his virtue, the king appointed a palace minister to put an end to crime in Cambodia. Returning to Cambodia from Siam, the king called together officials of all ranks and instructed them to return to their provinces and infiltrate bandit groups, and to operate undercover until they had enough information to give him a clear picture of criminal activities (Khin 2004: 206). Once identified, the bandit chiefs were showered with gifts of jewels and titles, and offered a banquet, at which they were all greeted, arrested and put to death. The people composed a song: 'In our Kingdom, nobody is afraid of banditry anymore, thanks to our merit.' The people then worked day and night, under a royal decree, to erect salas, or shelters along the roadside, while 'the King organized different theatrical spectacles and music to entertain the people'. As a result of the King's virtue, all badness disappeared from Cambodia and commerce

recommended 'Thefts, pillage, extortions ceased, people no longer were afraid. Calm and happiness reigned across the Kingdom' (ibid.: 209).

Despite popular imaging of the Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum regime as a golden era, state violence was common. As Ponchaud recalls, Khmer Rouge captured by Sihanouk's security forces were thrown from Bokor, and left to die slowly. Elsewhere, rebels were tied to trees and left to die, bellies split open, and in 1965, 'each macabre detail of the execution of Chau Bory was projected before each cinema showing' (Ponchaud 2001: 288). Ponchaud juxtaposes these displays of violence with the impact of a materialist conception of merit acting in itself' independent of personal behaviour, which allowed police commissioners and notoriously corrupt high-ranking officials to 'buy back their bribes by organizing votive festivals' (ibid.: 286). Indirectly comparing Sihanouk to Machiavelli, Mao Zedong, Hitler, Stalin and Sukarno, Cambodian author Soth Polin reflects that politicians can lie, steal, cheat, break their promises, as long as their 'flesh and blood industry' ('l'industrie de chair et de sang') keeps running (Soth 1980: 18).

Today, the political power base of new King Sihanouk and his father King Sihanouk has been seriously eroded. The latter's moral authority was particularly tainted by his coalition with the Khmer Rouge in the 1970–1975, and now economic, police and military power are firmly concentrated around Samdech Hun Sen

Since receiving the title of Samdech in the mid-1990s – a title previously almost exclusively reserved for royalty and supreme patriarchs in the Buddhist sangha, and therefore carrying connotations of divinity or moral authority – Hun Sen has increased his rhetoric about the need for public morality. With the exception of public remarks by King Sihanouk in the 1990s condemning mob killings as not 'humanitarian,' equivalent sermons from the traditional (royal) protectors of the sangha and state have been largely absent. A climate of impunity for serious crimes, notably contract killings and premeditated violence protecting the interests or avenging the emotions of key stakeholders in the power structure, has continued to prevail.

At the same time, the government's interaction with its subjects has taken on an increasingly Sihanoukian demeanour, down to the widely-televised and highly personalised visitations by members of government to rural districts, and the donations of kramas, sampots and money by such icons of power to their most impoverished rural constituents.
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(Ledgerwood, forthcoming). In such outings, figures of government might be shown solo speaking from a podium, but such footage is enveloped with pictures of senior figures walking abroad at the centre of large coteries of followers and retainers. The moral economy of this particular crowd has cultural underpinnings in an equation of the proliferation of merit with a proliferation of retainers. Thus, in one mid-nineteenth-century text, the narrator describes an Oknya and his Chumteav (the title used for the wife of an Oknya or minister of higher rank) living ‘happily and in a state of prosperity,’ surrounded by kin, valets and servants, while a ‘virtuous king’ is surrounded by ministers and high functionaries, Brahmins, poets, etc. (Khin 2004: 204, 331).

In her recent analysis on the politics of state Buddhist ceremony in contemporary Myanmar, Juliane Schober describes the ‘elaborate and expensive ritual theatre that the government has undertaken’ and stresses the unitary, monolithic nature of the government and the multiplicity of audience (Schober 2004). In contemporary Cambodia, as in the Myanmar analysed by Juliane Schober, the projection of political power and the ceremonial life of the polity is endlessly reiterated in the public choreography of heads of state in state television and print media. Such spectacle can be read as simply a cynical exercise in legitimacy-building. It can also be interpreted as the performance of an expectation, of the public demonstration of the government’s instantiations of good governance, however isolated and however unrepresentative of the larger picture of exploitation and dispossession. In the choreography of such secular alms-giving, the peasants are seen approaching the donors in a line-up and gratefully receiving, their body language reinforcing the economic and political hierarchy which keeps them on the receiving end (Hughes 2006).

As Caroline Hughes has shown, the figure of the material and therefore meritorious but not necessarily moral benefactor – the sabarosjum – has gained saliency in Cambodia’s political landscape in recent years, and is most commonly seen in media images beaming beatifically while strolling along newly-bulldozed roads, surrounded by a cortege of supporters and/or body-guards. This figure is invariably male. As Hughes shows to great effect, Premier Hun Sen plays to this figure with great skill and merges the symbolic and spiritually-enlightened figure of the sabarosjum with that of the bang thom, or strong man, who ‘protects his followers and is ruthless towards his enemies’; this character-play, Hughes notes, combines both the promise of patronage and protection with the threat of menace (Hughes 2006: 479).

The spiritual genealogy of the sabarosjum weaves far back in Buddhist texts and readings of appropriate behaviour. The Pali word, sappurisa, from which sabarosjum is derived, means ‘good, true, superior or excellent person’ (Wallis 2004: 123). The following definition of the sabarosjum, from the Buddhist text ‘Samyuttanikaya’, emphasises at the outset the burden of care for elders and the importance of appropriate comportment:

When a person supports his parents,
And respects the family elders;
When his speech is gentle and courteous;
And he refrains from divisive words;
When he strives to remove meanness,
Is truthful, and vanquishes anger.
The radiant one calls him
Truly a superior [an excellent] person. 8

In this text, we see the same equation of morality and bodily deportment that Hel Rithy found in contemporary popular definitions of morality. A sabarosjum would appear to be an exclusively masculine role. In the televised theatre of power and patronage, high profile female figures act the role of wealthy benefactress and spiritual healer, by touching the stumps of carefully assembled mine victims, who have apparently been requested to remove their prosthetics for such occasions so that they might better represent the kammic rubble of war, incarnations of Cambodia’s violent past and of previous negative kamma (French 1994).

PERCEIVED ROLE OF THE SANGHA VIS-A-VIS MORAL AND SOCIAL ORDER

Although the state emerged as a major sponsor of Buddhism in post-colonial Cambodia, high-ranking monks, most famously Ven. Chuo Nath, retained an independence of moral outlook, as reflected in his reported coolness towards head of state Prince Norodom Sihanouk (Meyer 1971). Nouth Narang has called this era the ‘Samay Chuo Nath’, when there existed a personal embodiment of both selathor and panna, when Chuo Nath matched an austere lifestyle with a steadfast commitment to learning and an investment in the propagation of Buddhist-based moral education, as in Ven. Chuo Nath’s verses for youth (personal communication, HE Nouth Narang, October 2004). Although Cambodian monastic leaders have
in the past encouraged Cambodians to take up arms, it is hard to imagine Ven. Chhou Nath or any of his contemporaries from the 1960s voicing the approval that senior clerical leader Ven. Bou Kry is alleged to have voiced for the killing, in the Vat Botum Vaddey monastery compound, of a suspected motorbike thief. It is possible, however, that the monastic leadership in the Sangkum was not encouraged to speak out – the political repression and media control of the 1960s would have presumably encouraged some degree of self-censorship by the sangha.

Today, while politicians earn merit from building pagodas and sponsoring religious ceremonies in their homes, temples and offices, monks can earn power and assurance of promotion within the state-sponsored Mahanikay sect by supporting selected politicians (Nissen, 2005). This support takes the form of publicized appearances and engagements, sermons and blessings, rather than electoral support in the form of votes. A particularly broadly televised scenario is that of leaders and important figures (or their personal assistants) making donations to monks, and photographed in positions embodying respect as they make their generous, detailed and widely advertised donations (x tons of rice, x crates of Fanta, x umbrellas). At the same time, the possibilities that monks enjoy for social action and political engagement are acutely circumscribed (Heng Sreang, this volume). Although monks are eligible to vote under the 1993 Cambodian constitution, their highest authority Tep Vong has ordered them to abstain from voting.

At the National Buddhist Congress in September 2005, the Supreme Patriarch of the Mahanikay Tep Vong ruled that monks may no longer seek alms at markets, a subject of recent debate among urban laity and the sangha, concerning strictures on the raising of alms at business premises. The Congress also ruled that monks could (and should) display their reverence for the state by rising to the National Anthem. The rationale for the former revision was that monks must be protected from the earthly temptations present in market settings, notably women, and that such commercial milieu were a place of moral danger. The rationale for the latter change appears to have been in keeping with a more subtle and continuous erosion of what were once distinctions between the royal, spiritual and secular realms and roles of sdic (king), sangha and srok (district, but which here we can read as country, as in srok-khmae, or Cambodia).

FEMINIZATION OF THE MORAL ORDER

The promotion of the female body as a locus for the sins of the fathers, mothers, brothers and others within national as well as religious communities, is not unique to Cambodia. Elsewhere in Asia, when foreign others 'violate' the sovereign territory of a national female subject, the full machinery of state may move to protect or defend the victim. Recent such cases involve the South Korean government's support for compensation claims against a Japan that refuses to acknowledge the existence of comfort women; the case of Sarah Balagbah, a domestic servant from the Philippines who was sentenced to death in Singapore, and a 12-year-old girl in Japan who was gang-raped by American soldiers in 1995. Balagbah became a national hero; Korean comfort women have made a tentative step from historical oblivion to war heroine status; the Japanese schoolgirl's innocence is invoked as an incarnation of the purity of the Japanese nation under assault by Western culture. But when, as Melani Budianta writes, 'national pride is not so precariously confronted, the exploitation of women's bodies is sanctioned, regardless of the cost to women' (Budianta 2001). One way of legitimating state-sanctioned violations of the female subject is to delegitimize a particular female, or particular group of females, by depicting them as a betrayal of the national ideal. The fall from this state of hyperbolic grace to disgrace comes at a high cost. Once the female subject loses her claim to embody or represent 'national sovereignty' by failing to maintain its conceptual counterpart – namely, national morality – she is represented as deserving of dispassion, physical violence, rape and, in extreme cases, death.

Since the 1940s, when nationalist writers began to pen articles about the role of women in the nation, sexual morality has been associated with the health and strength of the Khmer nation. In her analysis of writings in the 1940s by Khmer women for Khmer news media, political scientist Kate Frieson has identified several articles that criticised 'single women and prostitutes' for 'breaking the family circle and destroying the racial lineage of Khmers', and that accused prostitutes of 'dishonour[ing] the Khmer race' (Frieson 2001:5). More recently, in her doctoral dissertation for Australian National University, anthropologist Larissa Sandy (2006) has highlighted the complex linkages between legislation and the state's evaluation of prostitution across diverse regimes.

Since the early 1990s, increasing numbers of men in Cambodia have begun or resumed the practice of taking second wives or mistresses.
This practice had been suppressed by close to twenty years of enforced puritanical socialist morality, which reached its peak under the draconian policies of Democratic Kampuchea. Following its (re-)emergence, voices began to be heard, as early as 1993, among women, lamenting the loss of morals and imputing a superior morality to the Khmer Rouge period, when ‘men could only have one wife’. By 2004, a minority of contemporary urban intellectuals ranging from their 20s to their 40s, shocked by the rapid sliding of Cambodia into what some see as a state of economic, moral and cultural anarchy, are nursing a form of nostalgia for structure, namely the structure and strictures of an authoritarian state whose rigorous moral policing of sexuality and marriage compares favourably to today’s climate of impunity and promiscuity. In this moral schema, where a principal barometer of morality is a female’s sexual constraint and conduct, violent acts which destroy lives and livelihoods attract less censure than such morality crimes as sleeping with a married minister or wearing short skirts to a temple.

The moral zeal of the government has surfaced and resurfaced over the past decade in a series of political sermons, rising in frequency and pitch around key religious ceremonies, and often focused on the moral duty of women to watch their skirt-lengths when visiting wats. This latter topic has also been a popular talking point for members of the sangha and Cambodian cultural experts, in national media coverage involving issues of tradition and morality.

Since Cambodia’s elections in 1993 and 1998, women have been increasingly active in political and social life. A parallel trend has seen the escalation of public acts of violence against women. The two most significant such attacks of the last decade were the contract killing of Cambodia’s most popular actress, Piseth Pilika in July 1998, and the acid-attack on the seventeen year old entertainer Tat Marina in December 1999. Shot repeatedly at point-blank range, Pilika died within a week. Marina was hideously disfigured, doused in 4.7 litres of sulphuric acid. Both attacks were carried out in broad daylight. The failure of the judicial process in both cases has seen no pursuit of justice and no attempts to bring the cases to legal closure. It has been speculated that the first attack was orchestrated by Hun Sen’s wife, Madame Bun Rany; Pilika’s diary, as subsequently publicized in French media, strongly implied that she had been having an affair with Hun Sen. The second attack was reportedly carried out by two bodyguards together with their employer, Madame Khourn Sophal, the wife of Marina’s then lover, a senior government minister named Svy Sitha. Eyewitness accounts, public wrath, and physical evidence abandoned at the scene of the crime – including a landcruiser and a mobile phone – led to the filing of charges against Khourn Sophal and the issue of an arrest warrant, but the warrant was never executed.

The widespread identification with and empathy for these victims by the Cambodian public sparked a massive public outpouring of rage and grief. More than ten thousand people traveled through and to Phnom Penh to attend Pilika’s funeral in a spirit of what was described as ‘nearly national mourning’.26 No public statements of censure of condemnation of the perpetrators were issued at the time by heads of state or religious leaders. Where statements were made, they tended to focus on the behaviour of women who, by becoming the mistresses of married men, invited retribution.

Thus, one government spokesman described the acid attack on Tat Marina as a ‘personal matter’ for ‘the first and second wife to resolve’.11 Within months, the suspected perpetrator had reportedly resumed life as normal, and was back in the family home in Tuol Kork.12 This paralysis of mechanisms of justice provoked the writer Kong Bunchoeu to write a fictionalized account of the attack and its aftermath, in his The Destiny of Tat Marina (Viesena Nieng Marina). The target audience of his self-described ‘morality tale’ included both girls who Bunchouen aims to educate ‘not to become involved with married men’, and ‘second wives’.13 Despite Kong’s efforts, no condemnations of the act were made by any single figure of government. The subtext of this silence was that Tat Marina had brought this on herself through her own ‘immoral’ behaviour: her adultery had transformed her from a young, srey sroh (fresh girl), into a gruesome incarnation of the srey-katleak (unvirtuous woman), her moral failings and her sexual appetite tokenized in her semi-atomized body.

The lack of legal or public moral sanction spurred copy-cat crimes, and a ‘horrific surge’ of acid attacks in Cambodia, most of them perpetrated by wives against their husband’s lovers.14 In 1999, the municipal court in Kompong Cham brought charges against the wife of a senior military officer for an acid attack against her husband’s mistress, but refused on appeal to upgrade them to charges of attempted manslaughter, arguing that the perpetrator had intended only to ‘damage’ the victim’s ‘beauty’ out of ‘jealousy’.15 In 2002, another acid attack in Kompong Cham carried out by a wife, with the help of her teenage son and daughter, blinded her husband’s pregnant lover in both eyes. At the time, ‘nobody dared help’, and
the victim was still seeking justice four years later. Sentenced to a year in prison, her assailants were released after paying a 5 million riel fine, none of which was ever seen by the victim.\textsuperscript{16}

In 2004, Prime Minister Prince Hun Sen issued a directive to various ministries, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs to consider provisions for the improvement of national morality. A focal message of these morality tirades is that women should not only transmit notions of morality, as mothers, but more significantly, it seems, in policing moral boundaries through their own abstention from particular sites, professions, and dress. The conflation of dress, national culture and morality were seen recently in dress restrictions for the 'Fresh Girl Handsome Boy' (srey srok prikh sa'at) contest sponsored by Cambodian Television Network, a hugely popular commercial TV beauty contest, where female contestants had to wear long sampots and modest blouses completely out of sync with the figure-hugging, flesh-revealing tank-tops and tight jeans now de rigueur for urban women from their teens to their fifties.

From December 2005 to September 2006, three related items graced the front pages and stages of Khmer and foreign language news media in Cambodia. First was the appearance of the popular singer Chea Sovanna, in a low-back dress for a December 25\textsuperscript{th} television show on the popular channel Cambodia Television Network (CTN). Sovanna was subsequently banned from CTN and was forced to issue a televised public apology to Hun Sen and Bun Rany. In her statement, which was also reported in the mainstream newspapers, Koh Santhepheap and Raksmeay Kampuchea, Sovanna stated her culpability for damaging Khmer culture and the Khmer nation, by dressing and dancing inappropriately. Hun Sen accepted her apology, and Sovanna was subsequently allowed back on CTN on condition that she wore 'proper, traditional clothes'.\textsuperscript{17} A month later, Hun Sen once again raised the spectre on national immorality, this time specifically in relation to 'elderly gangsters' and 'evil wolves' (by which he was referring to officials from the Royalist FUNCINPENC party) and their 'mistresses', whom he also referred to as 'prostitutes'. Speaking at a ground-breaking ceremony in Kompong Cham, Hun Sen proposed a law against mistresses which would have a legal basis in Article 45 of the constitution, which defines marriage as 'an arrangement of mutual consent between husband and wife'.\textsuperscript{18}

Second, in May and June 2006, was the controversy surrounding Hun Sen's announcement, on 26 May 2006, of a ten-year ban on 3G technology. Citing stances against debauchery on the internet in the Philippines, Vietnam and Singapore, Hun Sen stated that Cambodia needed to wait another ten years for this technology, 'until we strengthen social morality’ as otherwise, even ‘Buddhist monks’ would ‘fall down; here he was referring to the potential of 3G technology for the rapid transfer of pornographic film media.\textsuperscript{19} Rumours soon linked his announcement to a petition organized by Lok Chumneav, the first wives of Cambodian ministers.\textsuperscript{20}

Third, in September 2006, was Hun Sen’s televised announcement, during a long speech while he was filmed helping villagers plant rice in Savy Rieng, that he had ordered the Ministry of Culture to ban a planned Miss Cambodia contest. His first rationale was that Cambodians were still in poverty, and that the financial burden of such a show would ultimately fall on them. Pre-empting criticism that his decision would prevent Cambodia from displaying its culture at the Miss World forum, Hun Sen declared that if people wanted to show off Cambodian culture, they could publicize Angkor Wat or Cambodian or classical dance. Cambodia has no shortage of culture, Hun Sen continued, but no-one could claim to demonstrate national identity by show-casing girls in their underpants.

Hun Sen’s appeal to national and moral decorum also alluded to the potential of such activities to anger the spirit world. Referring to the conflagration of Phnom Penh’s National Theatre in 1994, Hun Sen traced the genesis of this catastrophe to Cambodia’s staging of the first Miss World contest. It was at the National Theatre, he continued, that people had tested the virginity (purity, phliephorsiso) of the participants. This heinous episode had hexed the theatre, a chain of events he neatly encapsulated in the word changrae (inauspicious, evil) claiming that ‘the (changrae) [that led to] the burning of the national theatre came from Miss World and that’s all there is to it.’ Hun Sen then stressed that the National Theatre had survived war and Pol Pot and had remained intact from 1979 onward, implying that the failure of Cambodian women to maintain due decorum was more dangerous to the Khmer nation (as embodied in the theatre) than civil war and genocide, while also underscoring the duty of the state to keep women in their proper place.\textsuperscript{21}

Evoking doom and bad portent, the term changrae is used to describe animals, birds and humans in particular contexts. As one Cambodian civil servant in his forties explained the term to me, he would not give a prostitute a lift in his car because she is changrae and could bring him bad luck, in much the same way as owls are believed to be doomsayers in Cambodian
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CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored some patterns framing the perception of morality in Cambodian culture and contemporary society. One way of analysing the trends noted above is to consider the potential interplay between cultural understandings of morality and political expectations, on the part of both ruling and ruled, that morality is in and of itself a performance art. Like the move to protect Khmer culture at the quasi-ethereal level of United Nations resolutions, through UNESCO’s inscription of Khmer dance as intangible cultural heritage, the focusing of heated debates on sexual morality in the public sphere may reflect more than mere strategizing and legitimacy-building.

The Cambodian leadership’s public posturing about morality rarely tackles the deeper veins of antisocial human behaviour. Indeed, the stock responses to such crimes, rather than alienating the perpetrator, can socialize him or her by locating the victim within the lower end of the moral spectrum. In this inverse moral logic, perpetrators are not simply absolved of responsibility for their crime: they emerge as responsible citizens whose acts have helped to uphold a desired status quo. This desired status quo is, in turn, a fiction; a microcosm in negative of the actual state of the economy and of crime at large. Government and civic relations are commonly run on a ‘10% rule’, meaning the constant milking of individual commissions earned by one’s very presence in a chain of khsae (strings of relationships) linking the supplier to the supplied through a commercialization of kun. National assets, from historic sites such as the Choeung Ek killing fields, to rubber plantations and rainforest, are mortgaged to the highest bidder. Large-scale crime, from police rings running motorbike thefts to cross-border human trafficking and narcotics, goes largely unpunished.

In contemporary Cambodia, notions of stability (political, economic, or familial) and attachment to, or the search for, structure, can have a distorting function. In this schema, attachment to the ‘moral order’ of the past can enhance the desire for the perpetuation of aspects of a moral economy associated with the duty of rulers not only to deliver some form of protection to the ruled but also to perform the part. Attachment to structure can also serve to legitimise acts of premeditated and sometimes murderous violence. On the other hand, an apparent loss of structure in daily life can encourage such phenomena as nostalgia for aspects of the Khmer Rouge era, particularly as related to the regime’s draconian policing of sexual morality.
People of Virtue

Resistance to the tumultuous effects of modernization can take many forms. In this chapter, I have focused not on popular protest, much of which is couched in such 'traditional' forms as landless citizens journeying to the capital and staging sit-ins near Samdech Hun Sen’s residence and outside the palace in search of social justice. Rather, I have examined the apparent attachment of those at the lower end of society who are excluded from the more lucrative benefits of Cambodia's rapid socio-economic transition, to explanatory frameworks focused on the need to preserve sexual morality. I have also explored the apparent need among the ruling elite for legitimating narratives. Indeed, the implicit emphasis of the free market economy on the survival of those most able to meet its challenges, notably the most skilled and highly educated, also represents a threat to the socio-economic longevity of those who owe their current wealth and status principally to familial ties. In addition to free market influences, Cambodia is now also home to numerous institutions committed to developing a civil society, whose shared vision for a society based on horizontal linkages and skills-based (as opposed to contacts-based) allocation of employment and remuneration, as well as equitable sharing and taxing of national wealth and resources, represents a clear and ever-present threat to the vested interests of Cambodia's ruling elite. Faced with these challenges, one response of the Cambodian leadership has been to focus attention on the issue of female national and sexual morality. This focus on the female form and deportment can to some extent be interpreted as the search for the recuperation of a 'traditional' order whose unstated flipside is a feudal system based on rewards and patronage, similarly out of sync with the transition to a free market economy.

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15 Rajesh Kumar 'Women's minister pushes acid victim's cause.' Phnom Penh Post March 30–April 12, 2001, p. 3. FUNCINPEC Minister of Women's and Veterans' Affairs Mu Sochua, who later joined the Sam Rainsy Party, publicly took up this case.
21 'Niyuk roatmentrei prachhang nine kar prolong bovar kann.' (Prime Minister opposes Miss World contests) Rasmie KAMPUCHEA Daily, 6 September, pp. 1–2.
22 Sek Barioth (2006) 'Social Morality law is sorely misguided and a sad indicator.' Cambodia Daily 7 September, p. 19.
24 Female sexuality, voracity and the will to violence are also conflated in beliefs about the spirits of women who die in pregnancy or childbirth, and in the clustering, greedy figure of the mdaay-daom — the original mother of a reincarnated child who will return to earth to claim them — the title and subject of a recent Khmer ghost story that screened in Phnom Penh.