

An Oral History of Cham Muslim Women in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (KR)
Regime

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This thesis titled
An Oral History of Cham Muslim Women in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (KR)
Regime

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ABSTRACT

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An Oral History of Cham Muslim Women in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (KR) Regime (134 pp.)

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This thesis examines Cham Muslim women's experiences and narratives under the Democratic Kampuchea regime, better known as the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), from a gendered perspective. This perspective is grounded in the belief that Muslim women underwent different experiences from men due to the special suffering they endured as women on account of their gender roles and ethnic and religious backgrounds. The focus of the thesis is two-fold: to study the nature of women's narratives and interpretations and to examine the thematic empirical facts. While the former examines the way women narrate their stories and act to remember the past, the latter focuses on the DK treatment of women and women's responses to the DK policies. Both of these parts are interwoven within each thematic discussion – evacuation, family and motherhood, and religion and identity. My argument is that analyzing the memories and narratives of Cham Muslim women leads to a better comprehension of the DK systematic policies on Cham Muslims, which caused separation, loss, and painful experience. Women suffered from this unprecedented change due to the KR's attempts to transform the country into a socialist agrarian society, in which collectivization was the domain of this newly formed communist state. However, women responded to the KR policies and

everyday violence by embarking on both “compliance” and “resistance” strategies.

Women’s narratives reveal that the responses they made were not only for the sake of survival, but also to preserve the concepts of Cham traditional family, motherhood, and Islamic religion and identity. This study is based on forty in-depth interviews with Cham Muslim women from 2004 through 2009. An oral history editing method and ethnographic coding were used to analyze interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. This combined approach seeks to enrich historical scholarship with human experiences.

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Abbreviations and Other Terms

CPK	Communist Party of Kampuchea
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DK	Democratic Kampuchea
ECCC	Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia
<i>Haj</i>	Pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Haji</i>	Male pilgrim to Mecca
<i>Hajaj</i>	Female pilgrim to Mecca
<i>Hakem</i>	Islamic community leader
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti or Committee for State Security
<i>Kru</i> Khmer	Khmer traditional healer
KUFNS	Kampuchean United Front of National Salvation
<i>Mekang</i>	Chief of group or squad
<i>Mukana</i>	Female prayer dress
Mufti	Highest Council for Islamic Religious Affairs in Cambodia
<i>Muqqadam</i>	Introductory Islamic religious book
Qur'an	Holy Book of Islam revealed to Prophet Muhammad (<i>Pbuh</i>) in the sixth century A.D
Ramadan	Fasting month
<i>Sawm</i>	Fasting
<i>Shahadah</i>	Profession of Islamic faith, the first pillar in Islam
<i>Solat</i>	Prayer

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

By the time I was seven, my parents, particularly my mother, had told me many kinds of stories. They included personal stories, community legends, and family histories, of life under the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime.¹ Each story expressed deep emotions such as joy, sadness, and horror. Of the stories that were told to me, one of the most memorable is that of my mother's experience under the KR regime.

My mother, born to the Malay parents in Kampong Luong commune, a community of predominantly Malay descendents,² was still a young woman when the Khmer Rouge soldiers forcibly evacuated her from her factory, located along the Kilometer 6 road in Phnom Penh, only a few days after the KR soldiers occupied the city.³ She had to leave with her family in a mass exodus to her hometown because she did not know where else to go. When reaching her birth place, her family, including my grandmother, my aunt, and her children, decided to go to the northeast part of the

¹ This term was first used by Norodom Sihanouk in the 1960s to refer to the Cambodians who were members of the Communist Party and other left-wing organizations. This study uses both the terms "Khmer Rouge" and "Democratic Kampuchea" to refer to the regime that ruled Cambodia from 1975-1979. *Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)*, D42188. Debates on the term are presented in the Documentation Center Center's *Searching for the Truth*, 6 (June 2000): 56.

² The Malays or Chvea (Javanese) practice Islam like the Cham, but they do not speak Cham. They speak Khmer with a little *bahasa* Malay. The term Cham Muslim refers to the Cham and the Chvea. There is a small group of the Cham called Cham *Jahed*. This group is well known for being the maintainer of the Champa custom and tradition. Scholars argue that the Malays migrated to Cambodia a bit earlier than the Cham, probably in the 14th or 15th centuries A.D. In "The 'Khmer Islam' Community in Cambodia and Its Foreign Patrons" *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, November 2004, Milton Osbone claims that the Chvea consists of 15 percent of the total Cham Muslim population. Also see interview with Sos Aishah, 74, Stung Trang district, Kampong Cham province, 2006 and interview with *tuan* Haji Zen, Phnom Penh, 2006. The Cham fled the Vietnamese incursions in Mi Son, the capital city of the Champa Kingdom; Panduranga; and other Champa territories to Cambodia several waves, but it is believed that the first Cham settlers came to Cambodia in the 16th century A.D. *National Council of the United Front of Kampuchea for the Building and Defense of the Homeland*, 1987, 7.

³ It was probably on April 18, 1975.

country, and finally reached Kratie province. Upon arrival, she was assigned to live with a family of Base people⁴ in Prek Proloung village, Kratie province.

My mother had long hair, fair complexion, and an oval face, and these characteristics put her in danger during the regime. She was accused of being a young female commando⁵ and was nearly sent to a re-education camp. In fact, she was not that at all, she proclaimed. Fortunately, she was saved by several Base people who vouched on her behalf and guaranteed that she was not a commando. She was later released.

A few months later, her hair was cut short and she was drafted into a female mobile brigade, a vanguard squad, while her mother was assigned to a widow's mobile brigade, her older sister worked in the village where she stayed with her three small children, and her younger sister was also drafted into a female mobile bridge. My mother emphasizes that her family members were separated by work forces imposed by the *Angkar*.⁶ She had to work despite fatigue in order to survive. Her main work included building dams, digging canals, and producing rice. She recalled that at this point she was not able to cook her own favorite food, do her favorite job, and worship her God. Everything had changed completely for her. She had to submit herself to the *Angkar*. Food was distributed to her at the communal dining hall. Her daily ration was porridge, and she sometimes received rice, if lucky. In addition to meager rations of food, *unhalal*

⁴ The Khmer Rouge divided people into two main classes: New People or 17 April People and Base or Old People. April 17 or New people referred to those who had lived in the capital city and other cities before April 17, 1975 and were evacuated to the countryside when the KR marched into the city. In contrast, Old or Base people referred to those who had lived in the Khmer Rouge liberated zones before 1975. Most Cham Muslims were classified as the New People, or "deportee." For more details, see Pivoine Beang and Wynne Cougill. *Vanished: Stories from Cambodia's New Peoples under Democratic Kampuchea*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), 2006), vii.

⁵ Member of military unit of the former regime trained as shock troops for hit-and-run raids against the KR.

⁶ This term literally means "Organization" which referred to the inner circles of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK). It was used to refer to the collective authority at the highest level of the Party.

(unlawful) food bothered her because she was expected to eat the same as non-Muslims. Although she could escape from eating pork, she confessed that she could not avoid pork flavor in soups and other food offered by the dining hall as there was no visible meat. When asked how she could have energy to work, she said she sometimes knitted secretly at nightfall for some Base people in exchange for extra food to eat. Life was very difficult and oppressive. She was required to achieve the agricultural production goal set out by the *Angkar*, and especially to fulfill her obligations as a vanguard unit member.

In 1978, she received a marriage proposal from a young Sino-Khmer man who had finished his Baccalaureate from Lycee Sisowath,⁷ Phnom Penh. My father was the only son in his family who had left his hometown, Chau Doc, Kampuchea Krom,⁸ to pursue education in the capital city of Cambodia. He was caught in the evacuation of April 1975. He left with the mass exodus to the countryside, and eventually settled in the same place with my mother. He safely hid his identity as a student from the watchful eyes of the *Angkar*. Their marriage, along with a dozens others, was arranged by the *Angkar*. All they had to do was to declare “I will sacrifice for the revolutionary cause.” My mother has never forgotten this event. She recalled that the marriage was organized and arranged without the presence and blessings of her guardian and relatives because the

⁷ It renamed the Lycee Sisowath in 1935 and was opened on the boulevard Doudart de Lagree (today’s Norodom Boulevard). See John Tully. *Frances on the Mekong: A History of the Protectorate in Cambodia, 1863-1953*. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002), 222.

⁸ I once visited my father’s hometown with my mother when I was about thirteen years old, only a few years after my father passed away. According John Ciorciari, Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, ethnic Cambodians known as *Khmer Krom* (literally “Lower Khmers”) have inhabited the fertile lowlands around the Mekong River delta. Until the 14th century the delta region was predominantly Khmer, but Vietnamese influence in the area rose over time. By the 19th century, the French authorities included the Mekong delta region into Cochinchina, a Vietnamese majority and large settlements of ethnic Chinese joined the lowland Khmer population in an ethnic *mélange*. The Khmer population in the area had become a relatively small minority after the (South) Vietnamese gained independence in the 1950s. See John D. Ciorciari, “The Khmer Krom and Khmer Rouge Trial.” I received the article from the author via email on May 31, 2010.

Angkar took the role of parents. Although the *Angkar* did not have any blood connection to my mother, they claimed full authority over her, allowing no room for her mother to bless her or for her to pay respects to her mother as customary in our culture for hundreds of years.

Besides her own experience, my mother also recalled her sister and brother who lost their lives during the regime. My aunt was reportedly killed because of her husband's background as a Lon Nol soldier. My uncle died of gun wounds when he was fulfilling his mission as a Lon Nol medic during the fighting in the 1970s.

The meager rations of food, *unhalal* food (i.e., pork soup), inability to practice Islamic rituals, hard labor, and violence were the main issues my mother wanted to tell me about her life. I learned that her loss is immense. She lost her loved ones, her house, and her property. She lived separately from her mother and did not enjoy childhood as she had anticipated. When asked how she managed to survive, she gave a short answer that "God" and her skills had saved her.⁹

After the KR regime was overthrown in January 1979, my mother, who was now pregnant, traveled back home. She decided to settle in a community located along Kilometer 8 instead of her hometown because she heard that her hometown was not stable. My parents, like other survivors, had to start their lives from scratch after the trauma and loss. A few months later, she delivered a baby girl, my older sister. Unfortunately, the baby died of disease when she was less than one year old.

⁹ I did not probe further at that time. But I know that my mother and many other Muslims thank God in their hearts first before they extend verbal thanks to people.

The end of the KR regime did not mean the end of suffering. Fighting between the KR guerrillas and the People's Republic of Kampuchea troops¹⁰ was still going on. During most nights between the mid-1980s and late 1980s, my parents, younger sister, and I hid in the trench nearby my house. Sometimes, my little sister and I were prepared to hide in the trench, but sometimes we were not. We were often awakened in the middle of the night by our parents. They hugged us close to their chests to keep us warm and to make sure that the sound of gunfire would not frighten us too much.

At day time, soldiers' trucks ran back and forth along National Route 5 in front of our house. When the then Phnom Penh government forces defeated the Khmer Rouge guerrillas in a battle, we were happy. When government forces lost, we were worried. My concern was that if the country fell into war again, my family would be separated from each other. Our tribulations and fear were on and off. After hearing the government's announcement to recruit people to a K-5 mission,¹¹ my father volunteered because he wanted to contribute to making the country stable so that his family could live in peace. We, especially my mother, were very worried about his safety. She prayed to God to safeguard him and bring him back to us as soon as possible. About a year later, he safely came back to us and we were reunited.

¹⁰ This regime was installed by the Vietnamese troops in 1979 and ruled Cambodia until 1989.

¹¹ This mission was launched by the Vietnamese-installed government between 1984 and 1986 to protect Cambodian territory from the surviving KR forces. Margaret Slocomb writes, "By definition, Kor (the first letter of the Khmer alphabet) referred to the initial syllable of 'Kar Karpier' (defense). K5 was therefore the fifth defense plan, which was the plan for the defense of the Cambodian-Thai border." in *The People's Republic of Kampuchea 1979-1989: The Revolution After Pol Pot* by Margaret Slocomb. (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2003), 229.

Background of the Khmer Rouge Regime

Democratic Kampuchea, better known as the Khmer Rouge regime, came to power on April 17, 1975 after the Lon Nol regime was toppled.¹² A group of communist leaders, armed with radical Maoist and Marxist-Leninist ideologies, aimed to transform the Cambodian country into a utopian agrarian society.¹³ In order to achieve their goals, the KR abolished markets, money, and all forms of religious practices, and closed down banks, academic institutions, monasteries, churches, religious institutions, and commercial transactions.¹⁴ Many mosques and monasteries were profaned or turned into pigsties, storages, stables, and torture chambers. Former soldiers, officials, political opponents, educators, and medical doctors were targeted. Monks were defrocked and sent to the countryside to undertake agricultural work like lay people. Some were killed, while others were sent to the battlefields. Likewise, the Grand *mufti*,¹⁵ his adjutants, and *hakem* as well as educated religious teachers were tortured and killed. Religious rituals and religious books like the Buddha Dharma doctrine and the Qur'an were collected to be burned or used as toilet paper. The KR intended to assimilate all ethnic minorities into one ethnicity, the Khmer.

¹² The Lon Nol regime was led by Marshal Lon Nol from 1970-1975 after the Sangkum Reastr Niyum was overthrown in 1970.

¹³ David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, Chanthou Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future: Confidential Leadership Documents from Democratic Kampuchea*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988), 47-48.

¹⁴ By abolishing money and bank system, the KR believed the organ of capitalism and feudalism would be destroyed. Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 40. Chandler. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*, 1. According to Prom Tun, a Khmer woman who survived the KR regime, one Catholic Church in Ksach Poy, her hometown, was blown up during the regime in *The Monk, the Farmer, the Merchant, the Mother* by Anne Best. Illustrated by Georgia Verey. (Phnom Penh: Japan Printing House, 2005), 124.

¹⁵ Religious leader in charge of Islamic religious affairs in Cambodia.

The KR instituted radical policies that began with the evacuation of all people from the capital city of Phnom Penh and other towns to the countryside to embark upon a mass agricultural transformation which relied largely on manpower. The Khmer Rouge regime divided society into “pure” Base people consisting of rural people and “corrupt” new people made up of urban dwellers. David Chandler, an American historian specializing in Cambodian history, argues that the Base people were treated less harshly than the others since they had joined the revolution earlier¹⁶ and the regime entrusted them to make decisions on local cooperative livelihood. Evidentially, Pol Pot, the DK Prime Minister, announced, “As for the figures set out in the report, let people in the base areas make the appropriate decisions.”¹⁷

The KR banned all languages except the Khmer language. All forms of art, including music, song, performance, and drama of the former regimes were banned and artists were targeted. The KR substituted all forms of worship to *Angkar* and told people that everything achieved was due to *Angkar*'s blessings.¹⁸

Under the Khmer Rouge, the Cambodian population lived under unimaginable hardships. All Cambodians had to dress in black peasant clothing, were stripped of basic freedoms, and prohibited from making any protest. All Cambodian people – Khmer, Cham, Chinese, Vietnamese, and other indigenous groups – suffered greatly under the KR regime. In a span of less than four years, almost two million people, approximately a

¹⁶David Chandler. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. (Westview Press, 1999), 1.

¹⁷ Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 157.

¹⁸ See Francois Ponchaud, *Cambodia: Year Zero*. Translated from the French by Nancy Amphoux. (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1978), 88.

quarter of the population, lost their lives as a result of exhaustion, starvation, disease, and execution.

The KR regime was overthrown by Vietnamese troops and the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation forces in January 1979.¹⁹ Immediately after the fall of the regime, many evacuees returned to their hometown or settled in a new place. People had to rebuild their new lives with their bare hands after major economic, cultural, and educational institutions were devastated during the KR regime.

According to scholars, the estimates of Cham Muslim deaths during the KR era range between 100,000 and 500,000.²⁰ The number varies because scholars use various pre-KR era figures to estimate the initial population.²¹ Cham Muslims suffered tremendously because of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. They were not allowed to pray or abstain from pork in accordance with Islamic law. Usually, Cham Muslim men were targeted and killed because they rebelled against the KR openly and also because of

¹⁹ David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood (eds). *The Cambodian Agony*. (M.E. Sharpe, 1990), xliii.

²⁰ Many Cham Muslim men were arrested and killed during the rebellions and subsequently persecuted. See Ysa Osman. *Cham Rebellion: The Survivors' Stories from the Villages*. Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2006.

²¹ According to the consensus done by King Sihanouk administration, the Cham population was about 150,000; however, another source argues that Sihanouk's censuses, like colonial surveys before them, counted only male adults who paid taxes, and neglected women and children. There was also a sizeable number of fishermen with no indication of village or origin and living in boats sailing on the Mekong, the Bassac and the Tonle Sap. They placed the number done by the Lon Nol administration in 1974 at around 700,000 and the figure of Cham Muslims who survived the KR was about approximately 200,000 according to the census in 1983. Thus, the number of Cham people who died during the KR was nearly 500,000. Also see Ysa Osman's *Oukoubah: Justice for the Cham Muslims under the Democratic Kampuchea regime*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2002). The booklet "The Search for Peace," published by the Lon Nol administration some time before its fall, estimated the Muslim population at 10 percent of the total Kampuchean population in 1974, i.e., about 700,000 (claimed by Cham inside Cambodia and in exile)—a more plausible figure, 11-12. In contrast, Father Francois Ponchaud places the Cham population in 1975 at 250,000 according to the *Ethnic Minorities in Cambodia*, 1995, 10. Michael Vickery, referring to Jacques Migozzi, even places the estimated number of Cham pre-war very low, at about 173,000. Some other foreign scholars estimated the number of Cham people at about 87,000. See Michael Vickery, *Kampuchea: Politics, Economics, and Society*. (London: F. Pinter; Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers, 1986) and notes on chapter 1, 174.

their background in the public sphere, and this left all the burdens to their wives or female family members. Approximately 65% of survivors were women, making their participation in the rebuilding of their community critical.²² Although women had very low levels of education and no experience in public leadership, they had to support and educate their children after their husbands died.

An Overview of the Cham Muslim Community Prior to the KR Regime

Before 1975, the Cham Muslim community comprised 700,000 people out of 7,000,000 in Cambodia, or about 10 percent.²³ Cham Muslims settled in various parts of Cambodia, including Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampot, Pursat, Battambang, Kandal, Phnom Penh, Kampong Thom, and Kratie, but the majority of Cham Muslims lived in Kampong Cham province.²⁴ Many Cham Muslims lived collectively. Some lived near Khmer villages; some others shared villages with Khmer people and other ethnic minorities, including the Vietnamese and Chinese.

Most Cham Muslims practiced Sunni Islam, which means they were orthodox Muslims, followers of the Shafi'i school.²⁵ There were about 113 mosques across the community, each led by its own Cham Muslim dignitaries including the *hakem*, an

²² Bhavia C. Wagner and Dubasky, Valentina. *Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia*. (Berkeley, Calif: Creative Arts Book Co., 2002), 15.

²³ "Islamic in Kampuchea" National Council of the United Front of Kampuchea for the Building and Defense of the Homeland, 1987, 11. The estimated number of the Cham Muslim population before 1975 varies from one source to another. This figure (700,000 Cham Muslim population) is close to that of the research of the Central Islamic Association of the Khmer Republic titled "The Martyrdom of Khmers Muslims," ed. the Directorate of Islamic Association of the Khmer Republic and the Association of Islamic Youth, 1974, 36. Also see footnotes 21, p. 17.

²⁴ Interview with Haji Muhammad *ibn* Sraleh, Ponhealeu district, Kandal province, 2006.

²⁵ One of the Islamic law schools, the rest are Hannafi, Maliki and Hanbali. However, today there is a variety of Muslim faces in Cambodia and around the globe.

Islamic religious judge or community leader, who takes charge of mosques and community affairs such as marriage and settling disputes in his respective community; the *imam*, who leads the prayers;²⁶ the deputy *hakem*; the *ustaz or tuan*,²⁷ Islamic religious teachers; and the *bilal*, who call the faithful to daily prayers, amongst other religious and non-religious people who helped improve their mosque.²⁸ The community was officially led by the Supreme Chief of the Islamic religion of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum and the Khmer Republic, Oknha Haji Res Los, also known as Reachea Thibdei or grand *mufti* to Cham Muslims, seconded by his two adjutants, Haji Suleiman Shukri, the 1st Adjutant, and Haji Math Sales Slaiman, the 2nd Adjutant. The *mufti* was counseled by General Haji Les Kosem and Haji Yasya Asmath.²⁹ However, in other liberated zones, especially Kampong Cham province, Sos Man, the Front's leader for Islam in Cambodia, appointed Haji Muhammad Kachi as the top Islamic leader taking charge of Cham Muslims in Kampong Cham province in the 1970s.³⁰

²⁶ As cited earlier, there are three levels of *imam* which are widely known in Cambodia: 1) Village *hakem* who serves as imam *masjid* (mosque); 2) The *imam srok* (district imam); and 3) The *imam khet* (provincial imam), all of which are supervised by a *mufti*.

²⁷ This term is derived from the Malay word, which has various meanings. One of them is used to refer to *Sir*. but later was adopted by Cham Muslims to refer to a person who is knowledgeable about Islam. Nonetheless, in Cham context "*tuan*" refers to a Qur'anic teacher.

²⁸ "Islam in Kampuchea," 11. See also interview with Haji Ibrahim, Trapeang Sangke commune, Kampot district, Kampot province, 2005.

²⁹ The Directorate of Islamic Association of the Khmer Republic and the Association of Islamic Youth (eds), "The Martyrdom of Khmers Muslims," *Phnom Penh: Central Islamic Association of the Khmer Republic* (1974), 36. This Islamic religious organizational structure had been appointed by Sihanouk, and is still recognized by the Lon Nol regime.

³⁰ Gaffar Peang-Meth, "Islam, Another Casualty of Cambodian war." in *Khmer Representation at the United Nations*, London. ed, Douc Rasy. (London: 1974), 253. Peang-Meth had been one of the first Cambodians to join the Indochina Communist Party. After the French defeat, he traveled to Hanoi and commenced political studies. He returned home in 1970 and joined the Eastern Zone Communist Party of Kampuchea committee. He also established the "Eastern Zone Islamic Movement," which he ran with his son Mat Ly. Sos, then traveled around the zone to encourage Chams to "carry out the revolution." Also see Ysa Osman. *The Cham Rebellion: Survivors' Stories from the Villages*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2006),13.

In traditional Cambodia, most Cham Muslims were believed to live in closed micro-societies, forming separate villages and maintaining economic relations with the Buddhist majority. They had their own mosque and Qur'anic school where religious instruction was given in Arabic and also in Malay, a language akin to Cham. As for Cham families, they spoke in Cham to their children at home. Most Cham Muslims strictly observed the five pillars of Islam: 1) *Shahadah*, the declaration of faith, stating there is no god but God, and that Prophet Muhammad (*pbuh*) is the messenger of God); 2) *solat*, the five daily prayers; 3) *zakat*, the personal taxes paid during Ramadan and on wealth, and *shadaqah*, charity; 4) *sawm*, Ramadan fasting; and 5) *haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. The latter is mostly observed by those who are financially and physically able to do so.³¹

Besides practicing the five pillars of Islam, Cham Muslims observed other important Islamic religious festivities and other aspects of Cham culture, including *Eid-ul Odha* (Islamic New Year), *Mawlid* (Muhammad's Birth Day), and *ziarah* (visitation to the grave of religious figures and their loved ones). The funeral ceremony is important for Cham Muslims. In Islam, it is imperative that the ceremony, along with ritual prayers for dead bodies, be prepared in a religiously appropriate manner so that the dead bodies can rest in peace.³²

In the 1970s, Cham Muslims rose to political prominence and held positions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government offices. Les Kosem was given

³¹ "Islam in Kampuchea," 8. See also interview with Haji Ibrahim, Trapeang Sangke commune, Kampot district, Kampot province, 2005. See also *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations 2nd Edition* introduced and translated by Michael Sells. (Oregon: White Cloud Press, 2001), 39.

³² According to religious custom, Cham Muslims' dead bodies are buried soon after the person has died.

command of a separate Cham battalion.³³ Of the five Cham Muslims in Foreign Affairs, Peang Abdul Gaffar was one of the younger diplomats to the Khmer Embassy in Washington and the Cambodian representative to the United Nations.³⁴ However, there were not any Cham Muslim women reported to be in such high positions as men. Ordinary Cham Muslim people were fishermen, animal butchers, garden farmers, foresters, rubber plantation workers, blacksmiths, traditional herbal sellers/healers, and weavers. Most Chams practiced a small-scale family fishing on the rivers, especially the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. One of the women interviewed in this study, Yeb Maisom, a Chrang Chamres resident from Kampong Cham province, started to catch fish in the Mekong River and lakes with her parents when she was very young. She said that after her mother passed away, she took care of all burdens with her father. And after she got married, she continued fishing along side with her husband and sometimes helped her father weave baskets to trade.

Family, built on bonds of trust and love, embraced values associated economic, religious, cultural, and moral strengths and transmitted them from one generation to the next. Inheritance practice provides a case in point. According to Shariah law, men are given two thirds of the inherited wealth since they are responsible for household expenses and other family duties.³⁵ In practice, however, Cham Muslim daughters often enjoy an equal share or even a bigger share than their male counterparts, depending on practical

³³ Michael Vickery. *Cambodia 1975-1982*, (Boston, MA : South End Press, 1984) 11.

³⁴ Douc Rasy. *Khmer Representation at the United Nations*. (London, 1974), 251. See also, the Directorate of Islamic Association of the Khmer Republic and the Association of Islamic Youth (eds), "The Martyrdom of Khmers Muslims," 54.

³⁵ John L. Esposito with Natana J. DeLong-Bas. *Women in Muslim Family Law*. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 40.

circumstances and mutual understandings. This sharing happens either after their marriage or their parents' death.³⁶ Such flexible practices demonstrate the role of women in the family in Cham Muslim society.³⁷

Research Questions, Aim and Scope of the Study

Both my mother's experience and the impact of the KR regime inspired me to explore other women's stories. My mother and the women in the study belong to the generation of survivors, a generation that is aging and quickly becoming a minority in Cambodian society. In this thesis, I seek to understand how Cham Muslim women made sense of their experiences as expressed in the way they remember and narrate their stories in the present day. What did they remember and how did they narrate their past traumatic experiences, which took place over 30 years ago and were subsequently shaped and reshaped by the subsequent regimes? How did they respond to the KR treatment in order to survive and preserve their cultural and moral values?

This thesis examines Cham Muslim women's experiences and narratives under the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) from a gendered perspective. This perspective is grounded in the belief that Muslim women underwent different experiences from men due to the special suffering they endured on account of their gender roles, ethnic identities, and religious backgrounds. Written from a gendered perspective, this thesis examines how memory and narrative are gendered through consideration of (1) the nature of women's narrative and interpretation, (2) the thematic empirical facts of what

³⁶ Interview with Lek Riya, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, 2009.

³⁷ Interviews with Sman Zainoab, Kampong Cham province, 2007 and 2009.

happened to women during the regime. While the former examines the way women narrate their stories and remember the past, the latter focuses on the KR treatment of women and women's responses to these policies. Both of these parts are interwoven within each thematic discussion. The thesis examines each of the three underlying themes – evacuation, family and motherhood, religion and identity – at length in separate chapters.

My argument is that women's memories of their personal experiences of separation, loss, and pain, which are transformed into collective memory, shed light on the KR systematic policies towards Cham Muslims and other people. The KR's attempt to transform the country into an agrarian society brought dramatic and unprecedented changes to women's lives.³⁸ The KR brought about social change by eliminating, prohibiting, terrorizing, and punishing people in a systematic fashion to force women's compliance. Instead of full compliance, I argue, women used nuances of responses. They embraced some forms of compliance and resistance, which James Scott calls "weapon of the weak,"³⁹ coupled with "hidden struggles"⁴⁰ to maintain hope for living under such harsh conditions. Since all forms of relations, rallies, and movements were suppressed, women resisted the power of KR domination and control emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually using various forms of individual actions and emotions such as preserving the concepts of family and motherhood, Islamic religion, and ethnic identity during the regime. Women's narratives reveal that the responses they made were not only for the

³⁸ Chandler, Kiernan, and Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 1988, 18, 45, 156 and 157.

³⁹ James Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 26.

⁴⁰ See Risa Whitson, "Hidden Struggles: Space of Power and Resistance in Informal Work in Urban Argentina," *Environmental and Planning A*. 39 (2007): 2915-2916. DOI: 10.1068/a393394.

sake of survival, but also to preserve what women treasured secretly – their family and religious traditions.

The study further argues that women’s narratives of their strategic action during the KR period are not only forms of resistance, but also forms of punishment, as they establish truth and place accountability for past atrocities through their speech and non-verbal languages. Like memories of other women, Cham Muslim women’s memories are gendered and so are their narratives, because they remember and experience events differently from men due to their gender roles, religious faith, and ethnic identities. Through this gender analysis, the thesis presents a gendered perspective of Cham Muslim women who lived through the KR regime.⁴¹

Women lost almost everything to the regime including their homes, property, and loved ones; what remains is their memory of the KR regime. In a sense, these memories have become their belongings, and through their stories, they may reformulate what they have lost. As noted by Skinner *et al.*, the transformative power of narrative makes people realize the “links between identities, experience, and history” and “the existence of person in history and history in person.”⁴² The act of remembering becomes a tool for Cham Muslim women in reviving their ethnic and religious identity. These women still hope to rebuild their lives and the future of their children.

⁴¹ See also Elizabeth Baer and Myrna Goldenber (eds). *Experiences and Expressions: Women, The Nazi, The Holocaust*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003, 1-20. This argument will also be discussed in literature review section.

⁴² Skinner, Debra, Pach, Alfred, and Holland, Dorothy (eds). *Selves in Time and Place: Identities, Experience and History in Nepal*. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. 1998), 3. See also Roxanna Waterson (ed). *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2007), 7.

Research Methodology

This thesis grew out of a larger five-year project entitled “The Cham Muslim Oral History Project,”⁴³ carried the Documentation Center of Cambodia’s (DC-Cam) to document the experiences of the Cham Muslim community during the Khmer Rouge regime. DC-Cam, a research institute and large repository of KR documents,⁴⁴ works to promote memory and justice for Cambodian people. The purpose of the project is to give Cham Muslims the chance to speak out about their past experiences in order to preserve their memories, to search for truth and justice for the community, and to transform their suffering into educational purposes. From 2004 through 2009, the DC-Cam’s oral history project team, under my supervision, conducted 400 interviews with Cham Muslim community members, including *hakem* (Islamic judges) and religious teachers, ordinary Cham people, women, and youth, of which 386 interviews were transcribed into 9732 pages (103 interviews or 2659 pages were conducted and transcribed by me). I conducted 50 interviews with female Cham Muslim survivors and 53 interviews with male community leaders. Prior to fieldwork, the team including the DC-Cam staff and university student volunteers received oral history trainings on methodological issues such as how to approach interviewees, how to conduct interviews, how to manage the material after the interview, and how to transcribe the audio recordings.

As an oral history project leader, I am responsible for planning, supervising, overseeing implementation of all programming related to Cham Muslim oral histories, and coordinating and facilitating the outreach program with the Cham Muslim

⁴³ http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Public_Info/Public_Information.htm (accessed 10 May 2009)

⁴⁴ www.dccam.org. The Oral History project is one of a dozen projects of DC-Cam.

community before and during the trial proceedings of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).⁴⁵

The thesis is based on in-depth interviews that I conducted with nearly forty Cham Muslim women across Cham villages in Cambodia from 2004 through 2009. I was trained in oral history research methodology at the Summer Institute of Columbia Oral History Research Office in 2007.⁴⁶ The program, along with subsequent training at DC-Cam by Professor Ronald Grele, the former president of the American Oral History Association, allowed me to improve my skills in interviewing and analyzing oral history materials. I also attended trainings on primary and secondary trauma and self-care strategies lectured by the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), a leading NGO working in the field of psychology and mental disorder in Cambodia. Both primary and secondary sources are interwoven in this study. Interviews, collection of archival data such as old photographs that some Cham Muslim women shared with me, KR telegrams and documents, and other scholarly writings on the Khmer Rouge period are important for this research.⁴⁷

In my interviews, I used both semi-structured and unstructured techniques to allow flexibility and depth. The former allows me to focus on particular subjects, but leaves room for my participants to provide particular meanings based on their own

⁴⁵ The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) was the collaborative effort between the Cambodian government and the United Nations. More information about the ECCC can be found at http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/about_eccc.aspx

⁴⁶ See <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/web/indiv/oral/about.html>

⁴⁷ A number of volumes of related existing literature are used to cross check dates, facts, and other events with oral sources.

perceptions and experiences.⁴⁸ The latter allows open-ended questions and empowers women to speak in their own voices.⁴⁹ Although I came to my interviewees with prepared topics to cover, I allowed the interviewees to discuss other topics first, or topics that I had not planned to cover, so that they would feel comfortable talking with me. At the beginning of the interview, some women started talking about their experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime, others began with their childhood years and continued in chronological order up to present day, and others began by discussing their missing family members.

The interviews varied in length and lasted from one hour to five hours, averaging about two hours. All interviews were conducted in Khmer, the official language of Cambodia. Several of the women spoke some Cham, which they translated into Khmer during the interview. The study is based on verbatim transcripts because this allows me to understand the meanings conveyed by my interviewees more deeply. In total, interview transcripts for this study, including follow-up interviews, amount to approximately 700 pages in Khmer. All interviewees were provided with information about the interviewer's background, the project, the topics under consideration, and the importance of their participation in the project. All of the women consented to having their real full names published. The oral consent of the interviewees and the whole process of interviews were taped recorded.

⁴⁸ See Charlotte Burck, "Comparing Qualitative Research Methodologies for Systemic Research: The Use of Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis and Narrative Analysis." *Journal of Family Therapy*. Blackwell Publishing, 27, 3 (Aug. 2005): 240. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-6427.2005.00314x.

⁴⁹ See Yow, Valerie Raleigh. *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd Edition. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 8-11.

I organized the forty interviews according to demographic information, geographical locations, and occupations, and from this, selected twelve in-depth interviews to focus on for this thesis. My selection represents a diversity of women in terms of geographical locations and current occupations; the birth dates of the women range from 40 to 80. I chose 12 women to do the follow-up interviews in summer 2009. These women were evacuated to different provinces and have now settled in different locations, representing 10 cities and provinces of Cambodia. One of the twelve now lives in California, in the United States. Their occupations include grocery, cloth, or traditional herb seller, assembly worker, NGO officer, housewife, and religious teacher.⁵⁰ The twelve follow-up interviews contain a wealth of information, covering most of the topics laid out in the beginning of the interviews. Although the follow-up interviews provide the basis of my thesis project, I also cite some interviews with other Cham Muslim women and men that I conducted for the larger DC-Cam's oral history project in the thesis.

In practice, selecting interviewees to analytically focus on for this thesis posed a challenge. Each interview entailed valuable and insightful information about the life of a Cham Muslim woman, making the initial selection difficult. Taking a subset of these interviews required careful selection of a small number of women, which inevitably led to the exclusion of some interviews and the information they contain. It was impossible to include everything due to time and analytical constraints, but what I have chosen to analyze in-depth, I feel, successfully achieves the goals of this study.

From the interviews, I obtained substantial information regarding their experiences of motherhood, wifehood, imprisonment, sexuality, resistance, religious

⁵⁰ Their identification will be cited in footnotes and included in the bibliography.

practice and responses to the KR, all issues that have not received scholarly attention. These women not only bore psychological wounds, but also carried great burdens of raising their children, taking care of their extended families which may include parents and grandparents, and earning a living. The full extent of their stories, however, has not been well documented, in part due to the domination of Khmer Rouge research and scholarship by male scholars who have privileged male gender perspectives. This gap in the literature has motivated me to bring to life women's harrowing stories and important perspective on the Khmer Rouge regime.

Oral history editing methods and ethnographic coding were used to analyze interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. Oral history seeks to enrich historical scholarship with human experiences.⁵¹ The conversion of verbatim transcript to an edited extraction requires careful listening. Robert Emerson *et al.* provide insightful suggestions for coding field notes, transcripts and documents, selecting themes, and interpreting the emerging themes.⁵² The method of data analysis that I used involves: 1) initial coding of interview transcripts and field notes during which tentative categories emerged; 2) final coding based on how the emergent categories relate to one another; and 3) focusing on the themes and interpreting the results. These levels of coding generated the themes that constitute analysis of the data.

The initial emerging themes were: starvation, separation, communal eating, hard labor, exhaustion, execution, pregnancy, childbirth, childrearing, terror, violence, *unhalal*

⁵¹ Willa K. Baum. *Transcribing and Editing Oral History*. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977), 5.

⁵² Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 146-168.

food, changes in their life style, and religion. Many of the women provided details of these themes in the first interviews, with additional information and clarification gathered from follow-up interviews. I categorized these emerging themes under the following main themes: evacuation, family and motherhood, and religion and identity.

I tried, to the very best of my knowledge and effort, to retain women's words and understand their meanings through their verbal and non-verbal communication because these forms of expression are lost when women's oral narratives are transformed into written text. To counter this concern, I emphasize their feelings and gestures while presenting their narrations of the particular events.

During my research, I encountered several main challenges, but these challenges were addressed through the following skills. Some women were reluctant to speak out at the beginning because they were overwhelmed by emotional pain. However, once they understood the importance of the research and trusted me, they felt more comfortable opening up about their lives. I have noticed that trust is crucial in doing oral history. Prior to each interview, I had to build rapport with my female participants by explaining my position and answering all of their questions about my research project to make them feel comfortable and to remind them that they are also the actors of the history.

In addition to building rapport, I realize that an empathic listening skill is important to follow women's stories and trace their meanings, and through which I can exhibit my empathy toward my interviewees in order to make them feel comfortable with

narrating their stories as much as they can. Furthermore, this true listening skill, I have observed, enables me to share women's suffering and making narrators feel a relief.⁵³

I am extremely grateful to my interviewees who spoke about their experiences despite the tremendous pain it might have brought them. Some spoke with passion while sobbing, others tried to hold back their tears. It was a cathartic experience for them nonetheless. I hope that through the process of sharing their stories and my empathic listening skills, they are able to achieve some modicum of healing. I feel honored to be part of their reflection, and to have the opportunity to help them transmit their memories to a wider audience.

This study has impacted the women who were interviewed, but it has also impacted me as a researcher. As part of the generation in Cambodia that grew up after the Khmer Rouge regime, I am limited in my emotional capacity to truly understand the hardships that survivors of the regime faced. During the course of interviewing these brave women, reviewing the tape recordings and transcripts, and writing this thesis, I am keenly aware of my struggle to place myself in their shoes. While I feel tremendous sympathy for them and strive to understand their point of view, I recognize that I cannot feel what they were feeling. Thus my empathy is constrained by the enormity of the brutal and inhuman experiences my interviewees went through. However, I have emerged as a stronger person because I have witnessed their courage and honesty. I am motivated to prevent such an atrocity from ever occurring again and investigate more issues related to Cham Muslim Women and women in general for further research.

⁵³ See also Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses" in *The Oral History Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (London: Routledge, 2006), 129-142.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review section is two-fold: first, to demonstrate that there is a lack of research on Cham Muslim women in the existing KR scholarship; and second, to conceptualize the intersection of oral history, memory, and narrative in the context of Cham Muslim women's experiences. In doing so, the first part presents and discusses primary existing KR literature by scholars from various backgrounds: history, political science, anthropology, and law, as well as memoir and oral history work on this topic. The second part discusses the role of oral history in documenting a gendered perspective on past trauma/atrocities, and the work of memory and narrative in relation to traumatic experiences.

This thesis is informed by several bodies of literature. Of particular relevance is work on the KR history, politics, and crimes, as well as efforts to achieve justice and reconciliation after the KR. For example, scholarly works by David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, Steve Heder, Craig Etcheson and Alexander Laban Hinton focus on the origins, policies, and ideologies of the Khmer Rouge.⁵⁴ In addition, works by Suzannah Linton and John Ciorciari consider reconciliation and what kind of justice can be provided by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.⁵⁵ The survivors have also been writing stories about their experiences during the KR regime. Poignant accounts, memoirs, and autobiographies were written by those in the Cambodian Diaspora, particularly in the United States, Australia, Canada, and France. Most of these authors were very young during the KR.

⁵⁴ They are looking through the lens of various disciplines such as history, anthropology, and political science.

⁵⁵ Suzannah Linton. *Reconciliation in Cambodia*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2004). John Ciorciari (ed). *The Khmer Rouge Tribunal*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2006).

They have tried to recall and reconstruct their memories for the purpose of sharing their stories with other survivors.

However, Cham Muslim women's stories, in particular, are still largely unknown and undocumented. Ben Kiernan's work makes some reference to the Cham Muslim community under the Khmer Rouge regime, particularly in regard to ethnic cleansing policies.⁵⁶ Only a few sources – two books by Ysa Osman and one collection of survivor accounts by Bhavia C. Wagner and Valentina DuBasky – refer to the suffering of the Cham. Ysa's first book, *Oukoubah: Justice for the Cham Muslims under the Democratic Kampuchea Regime*,⁵⁷ examines the suffering of Cham, especially Cham Muslims at S-21 prison. His second book, *Cham Rebellion: Survivors' Stories from the Villages*,⁵⁸ explores the resistance of Cham Muslims in two villages to the Khmer Rouge, and this work includes several stories of Cham Muslim women. Wagner and DuBasky's *Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia*⁵⁹ tells the stories of a dozen women and children survivors, including one Cham Muslim woman's story. However, there has not been a detailed account of the experiences of Cham Muslim women. Thus, the literature on the KR regime is still insufficient to provide a broad understanding of gendered perspectives, particularly that of a marginalized group – Cham Muslim women – who have a distinct culture, beliefs, occupations, religion, race, ethnicity, identity and language.

⁵⁶ Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 251-288.

⁵⁷ Ysa Osman. *Oukoubah: Justice for the Cham Muslims under the Democratic Kampuchea Regime*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2002).

⁵⁸ Published in 2006 by the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

⁵⁹ Bhavia C. Wagner and Valentina DuBasky. *Soul Survivors: Stories of Women and Children in Cambodia*. (Berkeley, Calif: Creative Arts Book Co., 2002).

The study is based on memories and narratives of the Cham Muslim women and it proposes a framework to understand the interconnections of memory, narrative, and oral history. Memory and narrative are considered oral history materials, while oral history *per se* refers to the whole enterprise of doing oral history including planning, conducting interviews, transcribing, analyzing, writing up, and publishing oral history materials.⁶⁰ Furthermore, oral history is an interdisciplinary field that combines journalistic, anthropological, psychological, linguistic, archeological, and folkloristic approaches to understand human past experiences.

Memory is gendered because men and women remember and experience events differently due to different biological functions, gender relations, gender roles, and interests, canal factors affecting the ways that they narrate. Selma Leydesdorff *et al.* have observed that the first initial insights, which depend on various disciplines including linguistics, psychology, and oral history, suggest that women's lives focus on household, family history, and personal experience,⁶¹ and that women tend to focus more on feelings and can recall "fuller and richer account related to feeling expression."⁶² Men tend to dominate the public sphere and public memory, so the way they recall are mostly associated these issues. But they both also share something in common, particularly general knowledge with regard to concepts and facts of larger issues. For instance, in this study women recalled evacuation, starvation, and work under the KR, just to name a few. However, the way that they recall the important aspects of these themes is not the same,

⁶⁰ Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (eds). *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 4.

⁶¹ Selma Leydesdorff *et al.* (eds). *Gender and Memory*. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 14.

⁶² Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 50.

and that owes particular attention to individual salient memories and interest. Thus, while we acknowledge that memory is gendered, we also admit that people remember and recall what is salient to them the most.⁶³

Although memory is fragmented, contested, and conflicting, it also typically presents consistencies across time. Memory is fragmented because it can fade away as time goes by. Women in the study sometimes forgot dates of the events, or, in some cases, could not recall events in a chronological order.⁶⁴ Memory is contested because women find it hard to store all the information about events they lived through because they not only lived through the KR, but also other regimes; in other words, the events formed several layers of their memory. In other cases, Cham Muslim women's memories are also conflicting, which means the way that women recall their memory is in conflict with one another due to the complex events and gray area. For example, their recollections of some Base people or KR cadre who were mean to them come into conflict with their memories of the Base people or other KR cadre who were helpful to them. They sometimes find it hard to put what they feel and think into words. This study is concurrent with the work of Urshavi Butalia on Partition in India, who identified contested and conflicting memories as she listened to women's narratives on partition and its aftermath. She observed that her informants had to ask themselves, "What should I tell and why?" This question reflects women's reluctance to reveal everything and the

⁶³ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁴ Alessandro Portelli. "Peculiarities of Oral History" *History Workshop Journal*, 12, 1 (1981): 100. Also see Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 22.

conflicting memories of the convulsions associated with Partition violence.⁶⁵ Like Butalia, I have seen this dilemma in Cham Muslim women narrators as they narrated their complex life experience. This makes me aware that they told me their experiences selectively. They did not describe or were reluctant to talk of some extremely painful experiences because it was not easy to put them into words. Some other concerns related to privacy, as women will not reveal certain events unless they felt that it is useful and important to speak out.

Despite these inconsistencies, some scholars argue that memories related to feeling are consistent. As Paul Thompson's research findings suggest, feelings are, no doubt, usually consistent within an individual's testimony; for example, his narrator's memories of her father in *The Edwardians* were consistent over three different interviews, even if she did not remember the details of where her father came from.⁶⁶ Despite these challenges, women find a sense of belonging in their memories, and the act of remembering bring their stories to light. In this study, Cham Muslim women hold on to their memories to reformulate their loss. Therefore, memory is gendered, contested, fragmented and conflicting, but it is consistent in most cases as the site of women's belonging.

This study also explores the interconnections of oral history, memory, and narrative, which have not explicitly been stated by scholars in the field of oral history. It is critical to note that Cham Muslim women recall their actions of compliance and resistance during the regime as part of a process of seeking justice, both moral and legal,

⁶⁵ Urvashi Butalia. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. (Duke University Press, 2000), 3-20.

⁶⁶ Paul Thomson. *The Voice of the Past*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 146-47.

and punishing and condemning the KR. In this way, their oral narratives provide a way for them to express their needs for legal justice by demanding that the KR take responsibility for its crimes.

Women's responses to the KR treatment are nuanced. As Mona Lilja argues, "Researchers of resistance movements have tended to focus on collective action, such as revolutions, strikes, and boycotts; resistance has been analyzed as actions that are violent or non-violent, confrontational or circumventing, rejecting or hindering."⁶⁷ Women admit that they complied with the KR rules and policies because they were dominated and could not oppose, but they also found creative strategies of enacting emotional and sometimes intellectual resistance. They hid their true feelings of opposition to KR policies and acknowledged their inability to resist at that time, but they also tell stories about how they argued with the KR cadre intellectually by using their reason and logic. Hence, women's narratives are not only about their voices of suffering but also their voices of resistance.

Moving beyond the past experiences, women's narratives also touch on moral and legal justice, which is a sign of dealing with the past and moving forward. Women implicitly and explicitly condemned and punished the KR through their oral narratives, including verbal speech and nonverbal actions. The essay collections in *The Oral History Reader* focus on five important parts of oral history: critical development, interviewing, interpreting memories, making histories, and advocacy and empowerment,⁶⁸ but none has

⁶⁷Mona Lilja. *Power, Resistance, and Women Politicians in Cambodia: Discourses of Emancipation*. (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008), 3.

⁶⁸ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds). *The Oral History Reader, 2nd Edition*. (London: Routledge, 2006).

explicitly discussed the intersections of oral history, memory, and narrative which help us understand how women use their narratives to condemn past atrocities and seek for justice in the present. In fact, women demanded the KR be held responsible for crimes before the law. This becomes a very important piece for the Khmer Rouge tribunal as well as society more broadly in order to understand what women need in the present as they struggle to deal with human right violations in the past.

Overall, there is a need to record and analyse Cham Muslim women's experiences under the KR because it is still overlooked and under-investigated. Oral history is a way to collect women's stories and to allow them to express their thoughts and feelings toward the past atrocity. Their memories are contested, fragmented, and conflicting, but consistency comes across, and importantly it becomes their belonging, which can help them reformulate their loss. The interconnection of oral history, memory, and narrative demonstrates women's emotional and intellectual resistance. It also reveals the message of morally condemning and punishing the past atrocity as well as women's need for legal justice on the grave human right violations that they endured.

Conclusion

There is a lack of research in this area on Cham Muslim women's experiences. Recording and analyzing women's experiences provide a way of saving their memories from oblivion. The Cham Muslim women's accounts may add greater information to the court proceedings which have been taking place in Cambodia prosecuting senior Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible for the crimes committed between April 17,

1975 and January 6, 1979.⁶⁹ Knowing this helps women feel that their account is not only recognized but also valued.⁷⁰ The narration of their experiences also helps Cham Muslim women reformulate their culture, religion, and ethnicity, which the KR sought to eradicate during the regime.

In addition, the forms that memory, narrative and oral history take depend on the interconnection of socialization, gender relations, researcher and narrator's relationship, and meaning making, which both narrator and researcher seek to achieve. Recalling the past using present thoughts does not reveal "everything" about the past, but it does demonstrate the meaningful experiences that belong to each individual survivor. The act of remembering can provide strength to rebuild the lives of survivors and to seek truth and justice.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 explores the "turning point" – how life transformed when the regime changed in 1975 and the KR forced evacuation from Phnom Penh and other towns, with special attention to what women experienced in the trek and at the checkpoints as well as in the new place where they were settled. Chapter 3 deals with changing forms of family and motherhood, which were a target of change and at the heart of women's experiences. Cham Women's narratives show the policies and tools that were used to erase gender

⁶⁹ See footnote 45, p. 26.

⁷⁰ See Louis Bickford. "Unofficial Truth Projects" *Human Rights Quarterly*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 29, 4. (November 2007): 999. (accessed November 2008). This article discusses Lundy and McGovern who provide an example of the Ardoyne Commemoration Project (ACP) which play a crucial roles in undertaking truth telling mechanism at the time of lacking official truth-telling in Northern Ireland. This mechanism breaks the silence and the cycle of lies or half-truths and it may be a means to help heal the wound of people by conducting interviews with survivors in order to achieve lasting peace.

roles and their impact on Cham Muslim women. Chapter 4 examines the impact of the KR on the religion and identity of Cham Muslim women. Islamic faith and practices that are central to Cham Muslims' way of life were suppressed during the KR regime. Women's responses to these harsh policies will be discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 will conclude the study and propose future research.

CHAPTER 2: THE EVACUATION AS THE TURNING POINT

The forced evacuation of the cities and towns in April 1975 was a turning point for every Cambodian, including Cham Muslim women. The evacuation drove people out of their home towns and cities to the countryside⁷¹ to undertake agricultural work which they had never done before. In fact, from 1973 there was a deterioration of the country's socio-economic fabric, familial and communal bonds, and human lives due to political instability and fighting between the Khmer Rouge troops and the Lon Nol soldiers that began in 1970. During this period of civil war (1970-1975), some people fled their villages to live in the cities and towns, the prices of goods rose, and political unrest developed. Still, most of the people led normal lives. However, with the arrival of the KR regime in 1975, the situation worsened. The first drastic change resulted from the KR forced evacuation on April 17, 1975, which severely affected women's lives.

Panicked by the forced evacuation, Cham Muslim women collected their children, gathered around their husbands or parents, and packed whatever belongings they felt necessary and portable. They traveled along with other people to the destination that the KR set for them, although in some cases, individuals were able to choose their own destinations. Some people decided to go to their parents' hometown or that of relatives, some to other places to avoid being known, some to places they perceived as rich and

⁷¹ Some parts of the country were controlled by the KR forces, which were better known as the liberated zones. See <http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Mapping1973.htm>.

fertile land that could accommodate them well.⁷² During the evacuation process, many people died of exhaustion, execution,⁷³ and disease. Many others died subsequently after they reached their new homes. As they were forced from their homes, pregnant women and patients faced special hardships. Like some other pregnant women, one Cham Muslim woman respondent delivered a child on the road side; a few others had just given birth to their children several days before the evacuation, and they had to leave with other people in the trek. The evacuation policy distanced people from their ancestral lands, homes, and property, and began the process of transforming their cultural heritage and tradition.

This chapter examines the evacuation process as well as the new homes where women settled after the evacuation. It describes the violence that took place against the backdrop of the civil war and examines mass evacuation from the capital city, other cities, and smaller towns to the countryside. For the first time in their lives, these people experienced violence prior to the evacuation and the mass evacuation from the city and other towns, at the checkpoints, and as they settled into new settlements. Although the reasons for evacuation have been debated,⁷⁴ this displacement had a severe effect on people, especially those who were too old, too young, patients, and pregnant women.⁷⁵ Through attention to Cham Muslim women's narratives, the chapter explores the changes and consequences associated with the evacuation. The central question is: how did

⁷² In general, most of these places lacked basic necessities ranging from electricity and a market, to running water.

⁷³ Former officials and soldiers were targeted first. Others such as the educated and those considered counter-revolution were targeted when they reached their new homes.

⁷⁴ David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood (eds). *The Cambodian Agony*, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), 24

⁷⁵ These groups were the most vulnerable groups and they need a special care and treatment.

women respond to this quick transition from one regime to another, and how did such forced evacuation affect their lives?

The evacuation process and its consequences will be examined through the lens of about a dozen Cham Muslim women. Not all of them were originally from the capital city, Phnom Penh. A few of them had fled to live in the city just before and during the civil war, and were evacuated in the mass evacuation, while others who had remained in their hometowns were evacuated to rural areas in April 1975. They have various backgrounds and stories to tell about what they witnessed and experienced. One common scene that they share is the horrific picture of the forced evacuation and the KR treatment along the way – fear of armed KR soldiers, the stench of swollen corpses, the killings, etc. All recalled how they were in a state of panic and confusion, and experienced the loss of property and family members. The basic necessities that they packed and brought along included clothes, rice, cooking pots, and religious sacred texts such as the Qur'an, *Muqqadam* (elementary Islamic book), and *kitab* (Islamic religious books) to worship. They believed it was their obligation to do so, and that these sacred books would take care of them all the way.

I argue that although Cham Muslim's lives were affected by the civil war (1970-75), the forced evacuation in 1975 tremendously affected Cham Muslims and other people, which immediately turned Cambodian society upside down. People were forcibly evacuated out of the city to the countryside without exception. Along with the mass evacuation, the KR implemented the scrutiny of former soldiers, officials, and educated persons. Young KR combatants kept their eyes on former soldiers and those who looked

like capitalists, professors, and teachers, on the way to the countryside. Those who fell into these categories were arrested and killed.⁷⁶ The evacuation greatly benefited the KR goal to turn the country into a peasant society, enabling them to identify and dispose of their opponents and enemies. While most Cham Muslim women were not targets of the killing during the evacuation because they did not hold such positions as men did, their family and their relatives, in some cases, were. Still, they endured pain and suffering along with men or as a result of losing their husbands or family members. Reportedly, some women were executed along with their husbands or family members who were deemed enemies of the revolutionary during the evacuation. Technically, these women used their modest skills to hide their identities and lived with the trauma along the way.

Violence against the Backdrop of Cambodia's Civil War (1970-1975)

When fighting escalated, some Cham Muslim women left home for Phnom Penh city to find employment, education, and a safe place to live because their houses had been burnt and villages had been destroyed. This displacement and change occurred in some parts of the country. Women recalled small moments of separation and loss even before the Khmer Rouge totally took over the country because their lives had gradually deteriorated through the war.

After giving birth to her son, Lek Riya, a Cham Muslim interviewee, divorced her husband because she could no longer stay with him, and then went to find a job in a factory in order to buy powdered milk and food for her baby. She still lived with her mother and traveled back and forth from her ancestral home, in Kandal province, to her

⁷⁶ Reportedly, many close relatives of the Cham Muslim interviewees were executed.

factory in Km 6, Phnom Penh every weekend. Her life seemed to be better after she got paid. Similarly, Toek Sary, originally a Kampong Tralach resident, was asked by her brother-in-law to eke out a living in Pochentong, southwest Phnom Penh, where her husband became a brick house maker in the 1970s. He could earn about 25 riel/day⁷⁷ and later became a Khmer traditional healer (*kru Khmer*). Her life was a bit better with her husband's income.

While Riya and Sary left home for a job and a living, Seth Maly left home for education. In 1971, she left her home village, Svay Khleang, with her younger brother to continue her education in Phnom Penh. She lived with her uncle near Psar O-Russey (O-Russey Market), staying there for about a year until she married a former Lon Nol soldier. Her parents could not join her wedding because the country was unstable. They gave her aunt and uncle the authority to take care of the marriage ceremony and preside over the wedding. Soon after her marriage, Maly moved into a dorm near Prey Nup fort, Sihanouk Ville, with her husband. She gave birth to two children for him.

Sos Zarah left her hometown, Kampong Chhnang province, for Phnom Penh in order to get on a plane to the northwest region because her house was burnt down and her village was threatened by the fighting. She lived close to Lon Nol's fort, which was one of the targets of KR bombardment.⁷⁸ The fighting left many casualties and partially destroyed the road to northwest zone. She and her husband took a taxi from her

⁷⁷ 25 riel was a reasonable amount of money during that time. However, it is now equal to 0.0062 USD (1dollar=4,000 riels).

⁷⁸ It was one of the Lon Nol's army headquarters located in Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province.

hometown to Phnom Penh city in order to catch a plane to Banteay Meanchey province, where her other relatives had fled earlier.

In liberated zones, women could hardly avoid being drafted into the revolution. They were either forced or motivated to join the revolution. Mousa Sokha, born to a Cham Muslim mother and Sino-Khmer father, is the only daughter in her family. Under the guidance and instruction of Sos Man, a Cham communist of Kampong Cham province,⁷⁹ she became a female Khmer Rouge cadre when she was 15 years old in 1973. She was trained in Khmer Rouge politics, revolution, and arts. Her duties and responsibilities included spreading Khmer Rouge propaganda, mobilizing people in Po-In and other villages to join the revolution, and learning KR revolutionary songs. She also led a women's mobile brigade to achieve the Khmer Rouge plans, i.e., producing rice and gaining political consciousness. She recalls:

At that time I was still young and extremely influenced by the Khmer Rouge movement. Rakiyah, granddaughter of Sos Man, and I did get along well. We were like sisters. We often went to work together. I was usually asked to speak to a large crowd of people about the revolution and to convince people who had not completely devoted to the revolution to join the revolution. We traveled from one village to another to do the same routine jobs. I remember that I could sing lots of KR songs because I was one of the leading artists in my band. My aunt was chief of art band in my village and perhaps in the entire province. I worked very hard, but enjoyed it at that time.⁸⁰

Sokha was one of the many other Cham Muslim women in Kampong Cham province who was indoctrinated with the KR ideology and became a Cham Muslim female KR

⁷⁹ He was Math Ly's, former Khmer Rouge cadre, father and most scholars agree that he was pro-King Sihanouk communist, a more moderate group than the hardline KR. See Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, Genocide in the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979)*, 258. See also Gaffar Peang-Meth, "Islam, Another Casualty of Cambodian war." in footnote 29.

⁸⁰ Her stories can also be found in *Searching for the Truth*. http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Magazines/Magazine_Searching.htm. According to Sokha, Rakiyah went missing after she left her wedding in 1975. Sokha assumed that Rakiyah was killed because she was a helpful KR cadre, not a hardliner.

cadre. She said that, from the beginning, the KR revolution appealed to her because they claimed that they were nationalists. Later on, her mother interrupted her revolutionary work by arranging her marriage in 1975. She recollects:

After I served the revolution for about two years, my mother called me to Chimoan village (my husband's hometown) and arranged marriage for me with a Cham Muslim man who led a male mobile unit. I did not want to get married at that time because I wanted to continue the revolution. But I could not oppose my mother.

As the stories show, after encountering trauma in their home town, some women took refuge in the capital city and settled there for a while. They found their lives a little better because they lived farther away from the battle zones. When the war was over, women in the city and the countryside felt a big relief for a moment as they assumed that there was no more war and they could live in peace. However, their hope was short-lived. What they had never expected and never wanted to hear about arrived – mass evacuation.

Mass Evacuation from Phnom Penh City

“Beloved brothers, sisters, workers, youths, students, teachers and functionaries! Now is the time! Here are our Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces, brothers! Rebel!... It is time for you to rise up and liberate Phnom Penh.”

– Announcement on the clandestine CPK radio on 16 April, 1975.⁸¹

When the KR soldiers entered Phnom Penh, people in the city cheered them nervously and naively. They thought the country was at peace. However, their hope turned into a nightmare when the KR new order was announced. The horrors began a few days after the KR took power over the city and started their forced evacuation plans.

⁸¹ Quoted from Voice of the National United Front of Cambodia (Clandestine), 16 April 1975, in U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Asia Pacific, 16 April 1975, H6, in *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979)*, 31.

Diplomats and foreign embassy staff were forced to leave for the French Embassy, where all foreigners were being gathered for expulsion.⁸² Journalists made their efforts to capture important episodes for their respective newspapers. People in the capital city were confused at this time, feeling fearful of the KR soldiers and uncertain of their own future. Loung Ung, author of *First They Killed My Father* memoir, recalled that her family gathered in her house before the evacuation and then were forced to leave home immediately.⁸³ Patients in hospitals were forced to leave and travel along with other ordinary people to their hometowns or other settings.⁸⁴ As David Chandler puts it, “everybody in all colors – except the young KR soldiers – was ordered to leave the city within twenty four hours. Generally, there was no excuse for patients, pregnant women, the disabled and the old to stay longer.”⁸⁵ Consequently, within a week there was nobody left in the capital or in any town formerly controlled by the Republic.

The Khmer Rouge viewed most people who lived in Phnom Penh city as feudalists and capitalists.⁸⁶ These people were deemed enemies of the DK regime together with the imperialists.⁸⁷ As a Khmer Rouge cadre wrote in his notebook: “We drove all the foreign imperialists from Kampuchea [Cambodia]. On 17 April we

⁸² Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979)*, 39.

⁸³ Loung Ung. *First they Killed my Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*. (New York : Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 23. Ung was still a little girl when the KR marched into the city.

⁸⁴ Interview with Toek Sary, Kampong Tralach commune, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province. 2007.

⁸⁵ Chandler. *Brother Number One*, 103.

⁸⁶ The majority of Cham Muslims lived in the countryside and small towns. They were not market people, but peasants, fisher folks, rubber plantation workers, laborers as indicated in the introduction chapter. There was no exact figure to suggest the number of Cham inhabitants in the capital city before 1975. But a few wealthy Cham people had lived in the city. Later a number of Cham Muslims took refuge to the capital city in late the 1970s.

⁸⁷ This is a reference to American imperialist.

evacuated the feudalists and capitalists out of the cities to become farmers. By this, manual work would transform city dwellers into laborers on agricultural communes. The city people shirked productive work. Their real problem was that they were not trusted to remain in their homes.”⁸⁸ Scholars agree that there is no clear explanation of why people were evacuated from the city, but a few reasons for the evacuation can be ascertained through KR leaders’ announcements, documents and survivors’ stories. For the DK minister of Defense Son Sen, the main reasons for the evacuation were first to divide and destroy the strength of the enemies, and second to protect the Party. Nuon Chea, former DK Chairman of People’s Assembly, announced success to a delegation from Denmark: “Right after liberation, we evacuated all the people from the cities. Then agents of the CIA, KGB, and the Yuon [Vietnamese] had to go along to the countryside and were unable to carry out their preconceived plans.”⁸⁹ Ieng Sary, DK Vice Premier in charge of Foreign Affairs, however, told reporters at the Conference of Non-Aligned States held in Lima, in 1975 that the reasons for the evacuation were economic and humanitarian. He repeated the claim that people (city dwellers) had to be evacuated to the countryside because there was no food in Phnom Penh and his new government had no means of transporting food to the city.⁹⁰

Regardless of the cause of the evacuation, many KR survivors reaffirmed that they were merely told to leave the city immediately after the KR marched into Phnom Penh to avoid American bombing, and those evacuated from other cities and towns

⁸⁸ Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (1975-79)*, 62.

⁸⁹ Meng-Try Ea. *The Chain of Terror: the Khmer Rouge southwest zone security system*. Translated and forward by Rich Arant. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia. 2005), 9.

⁹⁰ Martin Stuart-Fox. *The Murderous Revolution*. (Bangkok: The Tamarind Press, 1986), 17.

recalled that the KR spread a rumor that Cham Muslims would be sent to foreign countries – Malaysian, Arabic, and Indian countries in exchange for oil.⁹¹ Their lives ended up in places from which they could not return within a few days, or even a few years

A few days before April 17, 1975, Riya moved to the southwest of the city with her new husband.⁹² She was then called to take care of her son because he had the measles. When she arrived at the textile factory at Km 6, the situation in Phnom Penh was very tense. She recalled, “I heard the announcement that the bombs would be dropped soon. So the road system would be blocked immediately. My husband suddenly drove back to Kamboul to pack some clothes, rice and some household items for me and my son. Unfortunately, the road to Kamboul was blocked and he could not come back to me at that time.” This made Riya frightened and worried about her husband’s safety. Even in the interview, she looked worried. She hid herself in a loom within the factory.

Riya continues, “I almost could not stand with the sound of gun fire nearby the factory. I called my mom and my sisters who were also hiding there to come out, but I did not hear anything from them.” As she remembers, at around 1 a.m., the young armed men in black uniforms marched into her factory and aggressively ordered her to leave the factory immediately. In the interview, she recalls, “They pointed the gun at me and said, ‘leave now, if not the US will bomb you.’ I rushed to prepare pots and rice that I had bought the day before to cook for her baby. If I had not had Ismael’s help with the rice, I

⁹¹ Interviews with Seth Maly in Phnom Penh city, 2007 and 2009.

⁹² Her husband was a minivan driver. He drove back and forth from Phnom Penh to Kampong Speu province, southwest of the city.

would not have it to cook for my son because I definitely could not carry the rice and my baby while I was pregnant.”⁹³ Riya could not wait for her husband to come back as the KR repeatedly ordered her to leave. Thus, she began her travel with other people including her mother and sisters, following the direction the soldiers set. During the interview, she raised her voice when she said, “The KR soldiers commanded us to go ahead; we could not go backward. So we were heading on national Route 5 to Prek Pnoeu on foot.”

At this point, Riya describes the aspect of exodus as a big trauma for her. Riya asserts that “I saw many corpses along the way to Prek Pnoeu and in every corner of an abandoned house while I was finding drinking water for my children.” When asked if she feared the dead bodies, Riya replied that she did, but she tried to deal with the horrific and awful phenomena.

Back in Phnom Penh city, at Pochentong, Sary, her husband, and her children were injured from the gun fire and then they were transported to a clinic behind Calmet Hospital for surgery. She was unconscious. After returning to the state of consciousness, she said, “I was extremely thirsty, but the doctor did not give me any water to swallow because I was injured by the gun fire.” She not only remembered her wounds, but also her domestic ducks: “The bomb also caused my domesticated ducks to die. I pitied them.” Immediately, she was ordered to leave the hospital and traveled with other people to her hometown. During the interview, she argues, “If you did not leave, the KR shot you, there were many shot already.”

⁹³ Ismael was her close relative. He also came to work in the factory and got stuck there with Riya.

In another different lens, Kalichip had just given birth to a baby girl in a hospital before the KR marched into Phnom Penh. The KR soldiers forced her to leave her bed in a hospital ward and to walk out of the city. During the interview, she recalled, “I could not walk fast as I was still painful after giving birth. I was weak. My husband bought antibiotics and then I injected myself along the way.”⁹⁴ Kalichip was heading to her hometown in Cham krom village, Kandal province with her husband and the baby. She stayed there for about a few months before being sent to other place.

Maly flew with her husband, a Lon Nol Chief of Battalion, and two children from Sihanouk Ville into the Ponchentong Airport in Phnom Penh city several days before the evacuation. She wandered in the city until she was told to leave for the countryside. She followed the direction that the KR soldiers set for her and other people, thereby heading to Prek Pnoeu commune, Ponhea Leu district. She took a small bundle of clothes, jewelry, and identification cards for her and her husband. She did not know where to go after Prek Pnoeu, so she decided to go to Chamkar Leu district, Kampong Cham province, but not her hometown to avoid being identified. She narrates:

On the evacuation day, I saw many [KR] trucks full of soldiers heading to Olympic stadium. They exclaimed, ‘Bravo!’ I found myself confused by the situation which I had not seen before. It was like our country was going to have war again. We were asked to go out of the city immediately and we were told that B-52 bomber will be dropped in Phnom Penh soon. On the way out of the city, I saw Chroy Changva bridge blown up. At the moment, we did not think of anything besides hiding our identity from the Khmer Rouge and finding a safe place to live. My husband was afraid of being known as the KR hunted down former Lon Nol soldiers. When the KR forced us to leave the city, we decided to go east.

⁹⁴ Interview with Kalichip, Prek Thmey commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal province, 2005. She knew some medical stuff because she used to attend a medical training.

All these women were evacuated out of the cities in the same direction, Prek Phnoeu, but they did not remember whether they bumped into each other. Everyone tried to get away from the KR apprehension in their search mission.

Evacuating Other Cities and Towns

Many other people were also evacuated from their houses in most towns and cities, such as Kampong Cham, Battambang, Kampot, and Sihanouk Ville,⁹⁵ in April 1975 or later dates. A written communiqué by Chhon, a KR cadre, which is dated approximately two months after the Cham rebellions in Koh Phal and Svay Khleang villages (September 1975) describes the implementation of orders that were stated to have come from the Party Center to evacuate 50,000 Chams, as well as plans to evacuate 100,000 more from Kroch Chhmar district, Peam Chileang district, and Chhlong district, to take Chams away to the North and Northwest Zones.⁹⁶

The KR used different strategies to make people leave their homes. In Kampong Cham and Kandal provinces, they spread a rumor around Cham Muslim villages that said, “Cham Muslims will be sent to foreign countries in exchange for oil.”⁹⁷ This was circulated among those who were about to be evacuated to other places. When asked about the provenance of this rumor, Sman Zainoab, a midwife and Qur’anic teacher, replied: “It was circulated from one to another by word of mouth.” While some were

⁹⁵ These places had been under the control of the Lon Nol forces. Lon Nol forces controlled some parts of cities and towns until April 17, 1975.

⁹⁶ “Telegram of the Khmer Rouge No. 15,” dated November 30, 1975. Documentation Center of Cambodia Catalogue No. L01045. See also Ysa. *The Cham Rebellions*, 114.

⁹⁷ Interviews with Cham Muslim interviewees. Many of them, especially in Kampong Cham and Kandal provinces, recalled that the same.

excited about going to a foreign country, others were skeptical about it. However, they had to leave immediately. There was no time for them to ask for clarification. Zainoab asserted, “Although I was influenced by the Khmer Rouge rumor, I was not convinced because I thought it was strange. However, I had to pack my clothes, utensils, rice, and Qur’an to recite. I also brought my medical equipment with me, anticipating that this will help me to save other pregnant women’s lives.”

This rumor was also confirmed by Sos Maisom in Kandal province after she returned from her cattle business in Stung Meanchey, Phnom Penh city, to her hometown, Cham Leu village. On the way, she witnessed various scenes in Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge forced everybody to leave the city. Her husband was riding a motor-cart and she sat on the cart. She recalls, “I saw Kbal Thnol [in Phnom Penh] setting ablaze. My husband kept riding the motor-cart to Koh Thom district. Later, our cart was confiscated by the KR soldiers. They [KR] checked and took everything from the cart. They also confiscated my brother-in law’s car. They asked us to walk.” She was heading to her house and planned to stay there; however, the KR did not allow her to do so. Instead, she was further evacuated from her native village to Cham Krom village, Kandal province. For nine months, she was assigned some work to do in the village before being transferred to Pursat province. The villagers were told that they would be sent to India. She recalls:

Ta [grandfather] Lach [now deceased] was the one who ordered us to leave our house and later told us that we will be dispatched to India. So some people including myself put on several layers of clothes because we could feel the colder temperature in India, and that we had to be ready. It was just a lie. We were trucked and then dropped off at [Phnom Penh] rail way station. We were placed there under the dew for long time before being transported to Pursat and our final destination, Kandeang district [of Pursat province].

Maisom's narrative includes her own loss as well as that of her relatives and others because she witnessed and experienced them herself. Her description recalls the extent of losses she and her people experienced during the regime and the false rumor that spread among Cham Muslims, which was a mere pretext to induce Cham Muslims to assemble for evacuation.

Undoubtedly, many women felt great attachment to their houses, land, and property. Although they did not want to leave, they had to decide. As a young girl, Teur Sros very much loved her red horse toy that her mother bought for her. With it, she would not leave home and go to play near the river.⁹⁸ During the interview, she said that she only had a chance to play with her toy for several days before the Khmer Rouge came. She had to leave it because it was too big to bring along. However, she was very nostalgic about her toy: "I looked back at my beautiful toy several times hoping that I could have brought it with me. I loved it so much."

In line with this, Halimah recalled that she was insulted by the Khmer Rouge and forced to leave her newly-built house at once. She recollects with regret and a shaky voice:

The KR cadre forced me to leave my lovely residence to stay in a hamlet. He [cadre] said, 'come down to live in the hut, let the poor people who used to live in the hut replace you.' I was very upset by his words. I tried to hold my tears back. I could not say anything. Rather, I climbed up the stairs to prepare my belongings for another village.

Halimah was transferred to live in another village in 1976. She was preoccupied with her house because she had found her life prosperous and harmonious.

⁹⁸ Sros' native house was near Tonle Sap River, Kandal province. Her mother was afraid that she would be drowned if she usually went to play near the river.

In Battambang province, the Khmer Rouge asked people to leave their houses for only three days. They were told that after everything in the towns was cleaned, people would be permitted to return to their home. However, the fate of these people was not different from that of others throughout the country. They were forced to work in the countryside for almost four years. Seila's firsthand knowledge sheds light on a large scene during the evacuation. She said that at first she thought it was not serious, but then she was shocked when she saw Lon Nol soldiers losing the battles and ran toward the town. Not long after this episode, she was also evacuated. In her clear voice, she describes this panic moment as follows:

I saw the [Lon Nol] soldiers, namely Corpra, running toward my village and declaring that 'we lost the battle and the KR took over O-Many village.' The soldiers were fighting with the Khmer Rouge soldiers in Tapon commune. Some of them got injured; some took off their military uniform and replaced it with plain (civil) clothes. Perhaps, they were feared of being captured by the KR. I heard that some of them were held captive, while some were killed. 'We are running out of bullets to respond to the KR, so be careful my people,' the soldiers informed us. Hearing this, we left home and ran toward the provincial town, which was about three kilometers from here.⁹⁹

Seila describes the situation just before her deportation from her hometown, Sophy village, with other town folks. The evacuees were upset by this deportation. She says, "I only brought some money and jewelry that I saved and a few sets of clothes. I did not bring any wedding photos along at all. They vanished. My house was pulled down."¹⁰⁰ Her husband consulted with her about the place they should go. As a former reporter of Koh Santepheap newspaper, he was afraid of being known. He wanted to go to his parents' house in the Battambang town, but Seila stopped him and said, "Please do not go there. If you go, you will be recognized and arrested. Look! Your boss was arrested and

⁹⁹ Seila had just delivered her baby boy a few months before this incident.

¹⁰⁰ She did not find these when she returned home in 1979.

sent away,” Seila advised him. They ended up going to O-Many village, about 10 kilometers from Sophy village.

At the Checkpoints and Along the Way to New Homes

The Khmer Rouge set up checkpoints at various main avenues in order to locate former soldiers, officials, educated people, and other opponents. Their purpose was to identify and arrest former soldiers by convincing the evacuees to tell the truth about their backgrounds and promising that *Angkar* would re-appoint them accordingly. Some did confess, while other did not; those who confessed were then put aside or were shot immediately.

When reaching a checkpoint at Prek Kdam,¹⁰¹ Riya and her husband, Moeun,¹⁰² told the KR that her husband was a taxi driver and she was a housewife. She did not tell the KR that her husband was a former soldier. She had known that soldiers’ bodies along the way were an explicit reminder. She exclaimed, “one man in shorts was just shot in front of us and the KR claimed that he was an enemy.” Finally, her family got through this checkpoint.

At another checkpoint, the situation seemed tense at around 9 p.m. Confused by the situation from the beginning, Maly did not know in advance that the KR would ask people about their backgrounds. Fortunately, one of her classmates, now a KR cadre, drove on his motorcycle from another direction, and was kind enough to whisper to her that if she wanted to survive, she should tell the KR that she was a worker. She explained,

¹⁰¹ Prek Kdam, located in northwest of the country, was one of the main channels where the KR used to distribute people to various directions and ferry was a means of transporting the people.

¹⁰² He just reunited with Riya at the checkpoint. He also brought his daughter and a small bag of rice along.

“The KR asked me, ‘do you want to survive?’ I replied ‘Yes.’ The KR cadre continued, “If yes, remember the words ‘worker, poor and illiterate when you are asked about your background.’” Maly was skeptical about these clues but tried to remember them well. She was not sure if she should tell the KR that she was a student and her husband a soldier, but she held tight to the word “proletariat” when passing through the checkpoint.

While many could hide their identities, others could not. After revealing their backgrounds, many were arrested and then killed. This happened to their closest relatives such as siblings and parents. In Siem Reap, A Aishah recalled that her oldest brother, Ma, a high ranking Lon Nol soldier, was arrested by the KR soldier. Her father who went back to collect some remaining properties after being shelled by the KR soldiers was also captured. Aishah believed that they were killed because the KR did not spare former soldiers.¹⁰³

This also happened to Kalichip’s husband. She sobbed with tears rolling down her cheeks when talking about her husband who was arrested and killed. She said “I am overwhelmed with this story. It’s painful,”¹⁰⁴ Her husband had been a teacher. When the Lon Nol regime came to power in 1970, he was drafted into the military. He fought in many battles. After being identified as a soldier, he was arrested and sent to Po Tonle prison several weeks after April 17.¹⁰⁵ At this point, she sighed and paused as if something stuck in her throat. I paused for a while to allow her to digest until she

¹⁰³ Interview with A Aisha, Svay Dangkm commune, Siem Reap district, Siem Reap province.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Kalichip, Kandal province, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ One of the infamous KR prisons where many people were imprisoned and killed. For more information, see DC-Cam’s mapping report which can be found at http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Memorials_Study_Report.pdf, 20.

returned to the normal state. During the interview, I listened carefully to her testimony to share her suffering. She maintained eye contact with me and continued her story.

Moving to another side, Riya was waiting to unite with her sister, Lek Aishah, at Prek Kdam. Without seeing her sister, Riya, nine-months pregnant with her second child, embarked on a ferry with her family and a large crowd. After reaching the shore, they were trucked to Sre Veal village, Kampong Cham province. Riya described that the journey in the truck was adventurous, and physically and emotionally exhausting. Her belly was almost flattened by the crowd of the people. She said that she tried to be patient and struggled with the situation. “I prayed every single minute for my safety. I was very suffocating in the truck with so many people. The chickens and ducks that they brought along were accidentally stepped on by the crowd until death.” Pitying his wife, her husband created a protective barrier for her.¹⁰⁶

When reaching Sre Veal village, Kampong Cham province, Riya’s husband wanted to go to Battambang province. He thought that the province was rich in rice production that could feed his family. A helpful cadre recommended that he go to other places rather than Battambang province, but provided no reason or explanation. Considering this suggestion, they all decided to go to Kratie. She said: “The cadre kindly advised us because my husband helped fix his car after we got off in Sre Veal village. He told us to go to eastern or northern parts other than Battambang province.” Suddenly, Riya felt that she would deliver her child soon. She and her family were taken by KR oxcart to Tamao, another village where she delivered her baby with the help from a midwife. There was no medical equipment or medicine along the way. The people in the

¹⁰⁶ He stood opposite her so that the belly would not be pressed.

trek were short of food and drinking water, which was a disaster for them. The evacuees drank whatever water they could find at hand. Seven days later, her family was asked to proceed except Riya, her baby, and her husband. Knowing that she was not able to go with them, Riya decided to give her two children to her family to take care. She would follow them after she recovered from the natal bleeding.

Many evacuees were placed in main waiting areas, one of them an abandoned monastery hall, prior to being sent to other places. Riya was asked to stay in a monastery hall temporarily with many other evacuees. She emphasized, “I did not feel comfortable to stay in the monastery hall, but I had no choice. The Stupa and cremation chamber were there. I felt afraid.” Ten days after giving birth, Riya begged her husband to find her other children and family until he agreed to take her to the place. She recalls, “I missed my son and daughter. I asked my husband to get a travel pass from the KR to take me to meet them. We traveled under the sunlight, and I pitied my newborn child so much. He cried because of the hot weather. However, we kept walking until we met them in Prek Prolong pagoda, Kratie province.”¹⁰⁷

New Home and New Way of Life

The families all traveled between one week and one month before reaching their final destinations. Lack of food and drinking water and exhaustion made people, especially older and younger people as well as patients, die.¹⁰⁸ The estimated death rate of people evacuated from the city was equal to 0.53 percent (10600 out of 2 millions)

¹⁰⁷ Riya said that Kratie province during the regime was better than other zones in term of food.

¹⁰⁸ Cham Muslim women interviewees witnessed this along the way.

including children, elderly, patients, pregnant women, and women delivering a baby.¹⁰⁹ Martin Stuart-Fox claims that during the first month of the KR regime, as many as 35,000 Cambodians could have died, including civilians and non-civilians.¹¹⁰

Most of the people who were deported from Phnom Penh in April were branded as April 17 people or New people, and those who were evacuated from other cities and towns were branded as evacuees or deportees.¹¹¹ Most of them were evacuated to different directions, zones, and regions, particularly to agricultural areas in the northwest of the country. Before being placed in a particular location, the evacuees were gathered in the vicinity of the pagoda. They were taken by either trucks or boats to provincial towns or districts, divided into small groups (ranging in size from 10 or 20 families), and transported by an oxcart to new locations. The KR chose this method of distribution, not simply to divide people, but more importantly to disperse them. Cham Muslims were dispersed into Khmer or other ethnic minority families such as Vietnamese and Chinese. They were not allowed to live collectively. By segregating people, the KR could protect its political and ideological agendas without concern that people would unite and fight against them.¹¹²

In most parts of the new areas, no new houses were built yet, so many Cham families were assigned the task of building huts for themselves. Scarcity of food was a big problem for the evacuees. Many Cham Muslim women portrayed their new homes as

¹⁰⁹ Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge (1975-79)*, 48.

¹¹⁰ Fox argues, "Not all 200,000 or more army officers were killed, though most of those who were not were subsequently executed. Of the 30,000 civil servants, few seem to have been killed at first, though many died later." in *The Murderous Revolution*, 19.

¹¹¹ Almost all of the Cham Muslim interviewees were called evacuees or *depositee* (panhae).

¹¹² Riya said that the KR divided people. They did not want Cham Muslims or other people to live collectively. "If we united, we would retaliate," she said.

concentration camps rather than shelters. Kalichip's family was put in Chantrea village, Boeng Ha commune where she found it far different from what the KR has described to her. "We were sent to a re-education camp instead of a normal place. We found it hard to live due to scarcity of food and the new environment," she complained.¹¹³

Zainoab and her family were sent in an oxcart to Anlung Ataeng village, Battambang province where she and her husband built a small hut to live. Some other families were asked to live with some Base people whose houses were still there. Riya's family was assigned to live with one Base family, namely, *Ta* [grandfather] He. She was concerned about her new place as she was afraid that it might not accommodate her and her children well. A few days later she started to feel homesick.¹¹⁴

People were forced to share a home with Base people or live miserably in hamlets in the country instead of their ancestral homes, and were forced to renounce most of the wealth and property, including tangible and intangible assets. Geographically, those areas were far from their houses and lacked everything ranging from basic necessities to sanitation. This generated fear and difficulties for Cham Muslim women and other evacuees. They had to learn how to live with this new way of life.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

A sense of harmonious life among people, including the Cham Muslims, was broken gradually when the country fell into civil war. Many people in KR-liberated areas

¹¹³ The KR lied to her that Pursat province was a rich place for her to go saying that it was full of agricultural crops and other food.

¹¹⁴ She missed her home and felt isolated.

¹¹⁵ None of them had ever experienced such large-scale separation and relocation, so they found life was difficult.

or countryside encountered the huge trauma during the civil war, while townspeople and city dwellers encountered the trauma later. However, a dramatic change happened overnight when the regime changed in 1975 which affected Cambodian people. Women's hopes and expectations for peace vanished during the forced evacuation. The forced evacuation was ordered at gunpoint, and those opposed would risk death. People were driven out of their homes and ancestral lands, and separated from their belongings. People were allowed to take with them a small bundle only.

Although Cham Muslim women did not know in advance whether the choices they made were right, they packed, gathered with their family members, and went on the trek without protest. Most of the women recalled that they forgot or failed to bring many necessities, but the most memorable things were rice, cooking pots, some clothes, and religious books – Qur'an and *muqqadam*. Cham Muslim women called it a pitfall that they could not see any point to return home. Their new homes did not accommodate them well. They were far away from their hometowns and beloved family members. Some died of malaria and exhaustion as a result of a long travel.¹¹⁶ They did not resist physically because they knew that they could risk death as they witnessed some immediate consequences. However, their emotional resistance surged inside.

The individual and collective memories of the Cham Muslim women interviewees shed light on the large events that affected people as a whole. Their narration was full of confusion, horror, fear, uncertainty of their future, and responses to the atrocities they encountered. Women narrated not only about their own experiences but also what they

¹¹⁶ Interview with Riya, Phnom Penh city, 2009. Her husband died of disease after living in new place for a while. She also missed the time she lived happily with her husband prior to the war.

witnessed along the way. They acknowledged some helpful KR soldiers who gave them some clues to get through the checkpoints. They also believed that God had saved their lives until they got to the new places safely. However this was just the start of their lives under the communist regime. What it meant to be a mother and a woman will be discussed in the next chapter

CHAPTER 3: CHANGING FAMILY FORMS AND WOMEN'S ROLES

...in particular, large-scale industry has transferred the woman from the house to the labour market and the factory, and makes her, often enough, the breadwinner of the family, the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation...

Frederick Engels, from *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.¹¹⁷

“...before the woman had to work, to come home and search for the fish, the rice, to cook it, care for the children. This was terrible. In communal living they only have to come home from work and eat.”

Ieng Thirith, DK Minister of Social Affairs¹¹⁸

The KR efforts to transform Cambodia into a socialist regime emphasized the rhetoric of women's emancipation promising restructuring of the family, redefining women's status, and restricting gender relations. Like Thirith's epigraph above, the KR regime emphasized that women had been exploited by both their families and former regimes – Sangkum Reastr Niyun of the then Prince Sihanouk and the Khmer Republic of Field Marshal Lon Nol. As an economic force, “family” was deemed incompatible with collectivization and viewed as oppressive to women. Male economic power that women traditionally depended on was seen as the root cause of women's subordination. Hence, the family had to be supplanted by cooperative organizations to force women out of the home and into the labor force. Also, individualism had to be replaced by collectivization.¹¹⁹ Historians such as David Chandler and Ben Kiernan unanimously

¹¹⁷ Frederick Engels. *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State: In The Light of The Researches of Lewis H. Morgan*. (New York: International Publishers Co., 1942), 59.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Elizabeth Becker. *When the War Was Over: The Voices of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 186.

¹¹⁹ “Family-ism” was heavily criticized during the Khmer Rouge regime. Everyone was asked to renounce their traditional family life style.

agree that the brand of KR communism was different from other previous revolutions due to the fact that the KR wanted to make their revolution unique by making it more efficient and more productive than other revolutions. Its policy on women was also distinct.¹²⁰ According to the KR, a number of policies and rules were instituted to liberate women, force them to participate in the revolution, make them abandon their family domain, and ensure that they would join the cooperatives completely. Only through these means would women be emancipated and equal to men.¹²¹

While the KR policy condemned the economic function of the bourgeois family, it ignored the psychological and spiritual functions of the family while simultaneously denying the possibility of oppression within the proletarian family. The possibility that male sexuality was highly likely to continue to pose a great threat to women in a socialist regime was never raised.¹²² Nor did they take into consideration ethnic minority groups, such as Cham Muslim women, and the ensuing consequences of the harsh policy for this group. The rosy rhetoric of women's emancipation was simply a political ploy that the KR used to mobilize women to join their revolution. It overtly declared that their unique

¹²⁰ See Zal Karkaria, "Failure of Negligence: Khmer Rouge Policies Toward Women." *Searching for the Truth*, 46, (October, 2003): 19.

¹²¹ Women had to quickly submit themselves to *Angkar* without exception. The Khmer Rouge leaders superficially declared, "Our revolutionary movement is a new experience, and an important one in the whole world, because we do not perform like others. We leap from a people's democratic revolution to a socialist revolution, and quickly build socialism. We do not need a long period of time for the transformation. We do not follow any book. We act according to the actual situation in our country." See Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 49. This rosy rhetoric is similar to that of Engel's philosophy. However, while Engels emphasizes the inclusion of women into large-scale industries, the DK leaders drove women into subsistence agricultural production.

¹²² The KR emphasized and condemned moral offence, but the issue of rape was not discussed in length as to who would be put on trial. In most cases, it seemed like both victim and offender were convicted.

revolution would be able to make men and women equal and free from oppression. In reality, women's problems and interests were not addressed by the regime.¹²³

This chapter discusses mechanisms the KR implemented to change women's roles and status within their families and society. It also explores women's responses as they struggled patiently to hold on to their families and maintain their roles within family life. This suggests that the intellectual and emotional responses of Cham Muslim women made them courageous mothers who sacrificed for their families. The final section discusses motherhood and how Cham Muslim mothers struggled and responded to the regime. Given the fact that the KR policy toward women was ruthless, women found it hard to adapt, but they made an all-out effort to deal with the treatment. Still, regardless of their responses to the policy, they now sometimes feel guilty about the past.

I argue that in everyday life, women were merely treated as a labor reserve; they were forced to break their bonds with their home and family. The KR proudly declared that women were equal to men, and they could do anything men could. This policy was problematic. It demanded that women exert their physical abilities exhaustively to fulfill their assigned tasks and be equated with men. This jeopardized their health and family. Cham Muslim women suffered from this violent policy and suppression, and their gender roles and social relations changed drastically. They were forced to renounce their intimacy, affection, and sympathy toward their family members and male relatives. Rather, they had to devote themselves to *Angkar*. At this point, the KR intent to fully integrate Cham Muslim women, along with other ethnic minority groups, into the

¹²³ No good programs for women were developed for women, with the exception of hard labor that women and women had to carry out.

majority impacted women in terms of eating, working, and living without considering their distinct culture and religion. They commanded women to transfer their roles (as mothers, wives, and daughters) as prescribed by the Qur'an to communal obligations.¹²⁴

As stories show, women responded to the policy variously. They adapted to the policy when they could not refuse to take up the assigned job or eat a given meal. They compromised whenever they felt they had a chance to do so – retrieving their children from the children's unit or getting permission to stay longer after childbirth. They resisted emotionally and intellectually when they perceived that the KR treatment was so harsh that they could not endure, especially when their children were deprived of food. I argue that the nuances of their responses – adaptation, compromise, and resistance – were made not only to survive but as a form of resistance to the KR, who aimed to destroy traditional forms of family and motherhood that defined the identity of Cham Muslims. Because they could not physically gather all family members under one roof like before, they, in some cases, secretly met their children at the dining hall.¹²⁵ At night fall, they taught their children how to be a good people, they stayed with their children to make sure that they would not belong to *Angkar*, and they tried to feed their children as much as they could.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ In Islam, woman is assigned many roles. Role as a mother and daughter is discussed at great length in *Motherhood in Islam* by Aliah Schleifer. Louisville: The Islamic Texts Society USA, 1996.

¹²⁵ To be a Cham traditional family means all family members share the same roof. The father is responsible for providing economic support to sustain family unit, other members also help earn a living. Sometimes the mother also shares this economic burden by doing small business at home or at market. They all get together after returning from making income and share weal and woe. None of the members separates from the family unless he/she has his/her own family after marriage.

¹²⁶ They sometimes forgot about their hunger, but sometimes they had a sense of betrayal when they ate and their children did not have anything to eat.

Communal Living as Social Transformation

At a “Special Center Assembly” held on April 17, 1975, Pol Pot in his address called for the immediate implementation of an Eight-Point Plan: Evacuating people from all towns; abolishing all markets; withdrawing the Lon Nol currency and withholding the revolutionary currency which had been printed; defrocking all Buddhist monks and putting them to work growing rice; executing all leaders of the Lon Nol regime, beginning with the top leaders; establishing high-level cooperatives throughout the country with communal eating; and expelling the entire Vietnamese minority population. After the forced evacuation on April 17, 1975, the KR quickly began to implement collectivization. This plan aimed to eradicate the concept of individualism; each person had to collectivize their private property and belongings and turn them over to *Angkar*. Everyone had to learn to think in terms of communal interests. Families were supplanted by cooperative communal organizations. Some cooperatives had existed in liberated zones in May 1973 under the name of the Peasant Co-operative Organization, but they were implemented on a large scale in 1976.¹²⁷ Those who lived in the liberated zones had been influenced by the KR ideology and proletarian living style in the 1970s or even since the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), which was established in 1963.¹²⁸

The organization of the cooperatives varied in size from place to place where solidarity groups (*krom samki*), mutual aid teams (*pravas dai*), mobile work teams, and associations¹²⁹ were forged. In most cases, May Ebihara explained, “Cooperative units

¹²⁷ Chandler, Kiernan, and Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 5.

¹²⁸ Kiernan. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge*, 13.

¹²⁹ The Khmer Rouge created several associations, one of which was Youth Association also known as Youth League.

were grouped together at the *khum* (commune) level of management; and the basic *krom* (group) were organized progressively into larger units using a military system of designation into platoons, companies, battalions, regiments, brigades, and divisions. Each consisted of three units of the lower level (i.e., three companies made up one battalion).¹³⁰ These formations marked the increasing militarization of economic production. The people at the front had to fight against the enemies while those at the rear, mostly women, had to work harder in the absence of men and take charge of men's work.¹³¹ Sokha, who was recruited by the KR to work as a female cadre from 1973-1975 and later became a women's group leader in charge of a work team, said that *Angkar* discipline was like that of the military because people were asked to address each other as "*Mit*" (contraction of comrade) and wake up at dawn to exercise like soldiers before going to the rice fields. Cooperatives had multiple functions enabling *Angkar* to control people's lives. In 1976, Radio Phnom Penh outlined the function of a cooperative: "...a *phum* (hamlet)" enabled it to "mobilize basic peasant forces to conduct production work in all fields; handle communication and transport of its products; deal with education, culture, welfare, and sanitation, barter of goods, ensure security, and inculcates in the peasantry the Organization's political, economic, military, social, and cultural line."¹³²

Individual family members were divided into separate work teams based on age, sex, and marital status.¹³³ Basically, fathers were assigned to work far from their families

¹³⁰ May Ebihara, "Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture" in *The Cambodian Agony*, ed. David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood, 27.

¹³¹ In fact, some women were sent to fight at the Cambodian-Vietnamese border along with men.

¹³² Carney, 19. See also FBIS-APA, IV, No. 23, February 3, 1976. See also Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans The Future*, 17.

¹³³ Sexual division of labor was believed to make people disciplined and to achieve a socialist society.

and could come back to visit their wives and children only once a month or even every three months.¹³⁴ Mothers or widows with small children, along with elderly and inform people, usually worked in the village. If a widow did not have any small children, she was put in a widow's mobile brigade (*kang memay*) and moved from one to another remote area. In Kampong Chhnang province, as a widow without any small children, Sary was drafted into a widow brigade. Usually, babies were placed with wet nurses in childcare centers when the mothers went to work. It was optional for mothers to breastfeed their babies at home during lunch breaks; otherwise, wet nurses would feed the baby. Children below age seven worked with other children in the children's unit (*kang komar*) during the day time and were allowed to stay with their mothers at night. Children from seven to thirteen were drafted into a children's unit and most of the time had to stay in the dormitory.¹³⁵ They were seldom permitted to come back home and stay with their mothers. Children over thirteen or adolescents were drafted into youth mobile brigades (*kang chumtung*) and had to work far away from their family members. They rarely had a chance to come back to see their parents. These brigades were considered vanguard units. Each work team was headed by a committee of three or more people, including a chief, deputy chief, and other members for particular responsibilities.¹³⁶ The practices of forced labor, communal dining hall, livelihood meeting and criticism/self-criticism were instituted to put women under *Angkar*'s authority.

¹³⁴ Interviews with Seth Maly, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, 2007 and 2009.

¹³⁵ Interviews with Teur Sros, Battambang district, Battambang province, 2007 and 2009.

¹³⁶ Interview with Mousa Sokha, Kratie province, 2009. See also May Ebihara, "Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture," 32.

Hard Labor

If a person doesn't rest, he gets very ill. It is a strategic objective to increase the strength of the people. Therefore, leisure must be considered to be basic. The schedule of free time shall be one day off out of ten and in a year from ten to fifteen days off for travel and study.

– The KR Four-Year Plan¹³⁷

There were too many jobs during the regime. We worked without a good rest, from morning till sun set and then sometimes at nightfall... We worked all year round.

– Sos Aishah, Cham Muslim women survivor¹³⁸

Agricultural production was the main task of social and economic life under the KR regime. Both the Old and New people were commanded to produce three metric tons of paddy per hectare per year in order to meet the needs of the population. The irrigation systems, including canals and dams for rice production, were to be developed, maintained, and extended. Women were assigned the same work as men, such as carrying soil, building dams and canals, chopping firewood, and removing tree trunks in cooperatives. Work schedules and conditions varied from cooperative to cooperative, but work was typically enforced from around 6:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. and from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. A night shift was usually implemented to maximize agricultural production. Although women worked hard on all of these projects, they rarely received enough rice to eat. This will be discussed in the following section.

In Chrung Romeas village, rice production took place twice a year, in the rainy season and dry season. A group leader (*mekang*) led Halimah's group to transplant the rice in Tuol Sangke cooperative. Halimah went to work on a rice paddy every morning

¹³⁷ Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 158.

¹³⁸ Interview with Sos Aishah, Prek Bak commune, Stung Trang district, Kampong Cham province, 2008.

and came back every evening. She left for work in the morning and took a break for lunch at noon. Then she started her work in the afternoon. Sometimes, she had to work on the night shift when the KR demanded more rice production. In addition, she worked on various assigned jobs in her cooperative. She said, “I dug out some tree trunks and carried dirt to build a small dam in my cooperative.” Her husband was sent to work in a fishing unit and her small children undertook work, such as collecting cow dung, chopping Khmer herbs to make natural fertilizer, preventing birds from destroying the rice production, and taking care of the cattle among other tasks. Children were indoctrinated in revolutionary politics under a tree or in abandoned halls.¹³⁹ They stayed at a children’s unit dormitory with other children. Exceptionally, her two small children under seven stayed with her at her hut but had to work as other children. She raised her voice as she narrated her experiences: “I was shocked when they [the KR local authority] took each of my children. They said, ‘your children have to go to work, they can’t stay with you anymore.’ They took all of my children from me one by one.” Halimah said that she could not oppose this separation because other children were also taken away. However she tried her best to fulfill the assigned work and safeguard her children.¹⁴⁰

Some Cham Muslim women were insulted when they worked too slow or too fast. Women were not familiar with transplanting the rice at the beginning because this task was new for them. They felt afraid that they could not do the job well and would be reeducated. But they tried until they could do it well and faster than some Base people. While some Base people supported the working pace of Cham Muslim women, others

¹³⁹ Interview with Ros Aishah, O-Chrov sub-district, Prey Nup district, Sihanouk province, 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Halimah expressed her resentment with this policy during the interviews. She already had six children when the KR came.

called this “naïve behavior.” In Prek Proloung village, Riya did not know how to transplant the rice because she used to live in the town and had been involved in factory work and household chores rather than rice fields. She said that as a beginner she transplanted the rice very slowly and some Base people looked down on her. But she kept learning and concentrating on paddy rice work without complaint. Within a short period of time, she could do it well and quicker and better than some other people. She recalled, “Instead of crediting my work, they [Base people] scolded me, ‘why do you do it so fast, are you crazy? Don’t you care about your health?’” Riya commented that this was because they themselves were lazy and did not want other new people to take over for them. “No matter what I did, a bad or a good job, they scolded at me,” she continued.¹⁴¹

Some women were asked to perform jobs that were considered taboo in Islam, such as raising pigs. Everyone had to do the same jobs regardless of their background or ethnicity. In Sre Veal village, Kampong Cham province, Rohimah was forced to raise 50 pigs with four other women: two Cham Muslim women and two Khmer women. She raised her voice when she said, “I dared not refuse even though I know that it goes against Islam.” Her responsibilities included mixing food for pigs and bringing the food to the pigsties located about 500 meters from her work site. Twice a day, in the mornings and afternoons, she and other women were required to feed the pigs. She said every time she fed the pigs, she was afraid and felt disgusted because she had never performed this job before. She recalled, “Every time I dumped the food into the pigsties, I ran back quickly because these pigs were unruly and disgusting. I asked other women to rinse the

¹⁴¹ Interview with Lek Riya, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, 2009.

pigs; I did not do it. I remembered one day when the pigs stepped on my toes, I was so scared of them. I regretted that I failed to purify myself at that time.”¹⁴²

Other unmarried women were recruited to work with local KR authorities to train young children. In O-Chrov commune, when the KR recruited Aishah and other young women, Aishah refused to join the revolution because she did not want to live separately from her parents and did not know how to do the assigned job. But after two attempts she had to go with the group. She explains, “When I was 14 years old, *uncle* Saveth, a KR cadre, chose me to work as a revolutionary medical woman, but I refused because I did not have skills in medicine and did not want to leave my parents. Later, he recruited me to work as a children’s unit leader. I forced myself to join because my parents were afraid that they [the KR] would mistreat my family due to my denial.” Aishah led a work group of children and taught them revolutionary lessons.

All these women worked hard with little rest and food. They could not refuse although the job went against their will and religion. But what they could do was to adapt and compromise. For example, instead of refusing to do a job, Rohimah negotiated with other women to wash and take care of the pigs. She undertook only possible and negotiable tasks, such as dumping the food for the pigs and quickly running away.

Communal Dining as a Tool to Replace Women’s Kitchen

Building on the concept of glorious revolution, communal dining halls were instituted in 1976 in various places across the country¹⁴³ in order to reduce women’s

¹⁴² Interviews with Tulors Rohimah, Kokor commune, Kampong Siem district, Kampong Cham province, 2007 and 2009.

domestic duties in cooking and doing household chores. The KR said that in this way women would be free to work outside the home and their status would be equal to that of men. But this expectation proved problematic, for it dismantled traditional and cultural ways of dining for all people. This is also an example of why a gendered perspective is important, for KR policies affected Cham Muslim women's way of life differently than men's way of life. Women had to give up cooking their own food, serving what their families liked and making sure that there was enough food for family members.

The KR openly declared, "Rations range from three cans [of rice] a day to two cans a day...Desserts will be available in 1977 once every three years [sic]."¹⁴⁴ However, there was never enough food was for people. Everyone starved.¹⁴⁵ Porridge was the common meal during the KR period. People who got rice once in a while were considered lucky. Most people got only porridge or watery rice soup, or cassava with corn beads. Usually, two meals were distributed a day at the communal meal, in the afternoon and in the evening. No breakfast was given. When the bell rang, the people got off from work in the rice fields and gathered at the respective communal dining hall.¹⁴⁶ Women and children were placed at different dinning tables. Rice porridge or watery rice soup was distributed to each able-bodied person who went to work. An infirm person received a smaller ration of food than the able-bodied persons, and sometimes received

¹⁴³ May Ebihara, "Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture," 33.

¹⁴⁴ Chandler, Kiernan, Boau. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 158.

¹⁴⁵ Cham Muslim women interviewees recalled this when asked about food during the regime. There were some assumptions that they could not get enough food to eat. The regime depended entirely on manpower rather than machinery in producing rice and they did not justify this with natural disaster. The KR also demanded each cooperative to collect a portion of the yield for export. No matter how much the yield was, the local authority overstated the report. They gave a portion of the rice to their superior in order to avoid punishment. As a result, the people starved because the local authority decreased their daily ration.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Lek Riya, Phnom Penh city, 2009.

nothing.¹⁴⁷ Food was also distributed at the work site when people were asked to work far from communal dining hall. People at the dining hall or work site lined up to get a ladle of porridge. In the interview, Halimah recalls, “We no longer were able to eat with our individual family. I ate differently from my children and husband. I ate with my female colleagues in another hall. My children ate with other children at another hall. I was concerned about them. I did not know if they were full or not.”¹⁴⁸ Many people reported that they were still hungry even after eating their meal because it did not balance the energy that they consumed in their work. In some cooperative units, only four cans of rice were made into watery rice soup and distributed to forty people, so this tiny amount of food, of course, weakened the workers’ ability to work in paddy fields or perform other heavy tasks. Timah asked rhetorically, “How could we feel full if they [KR] cooked several cans of rice for three to four dozens of people?”

When pork was served in the dining hall, everybody was forced to eat so that they could gain energy to do their work. Anybody who went against this order would be seen as anti-revolutionary and sent to be re-educated or killed. A few Cham Muslim women were reported to eat pork as an example for other Muslims to follow. When pork soup was put on a communal dining table in front of them, Cham Muslim women interviewees said that they could not protest. Halimah begged the KR to allow her more time to adjust to the revolution. She said, “*Mit Phors*¹⁴⁹ can eat today, I will try to adjust myself to the pork. I think I will also be able to eat pork the following day or soon. Leave me some time.” She was excused, and asked for salt to eat with her porridge instead.

¹⁴⁷ Depending on local authority management.

¹⁴⁸ She was obsessed with her children’s well-being.

¹⁴⁹ Her Cham Muslim neighbor.

In times of meager rations, some scholars assert that individuals found themselves hiding whatever food they could find – wild plants, for example, instead of sharing it with family members. They argue that “[such] acts destroyed family confidence and solidarity” and “sometimes led to feelings of distrust, hostility, and even vengeance between spouses.”¹⁵⁰ Cham Muslim women, however, shared food with their family members and sometimes even sacrificed their own share for their children. For example, no matter what the situation was, Aminah shared her meager ration with her sick son who was deprived of food.

The shortage of food affected women, but they found some ways to deal with the problem. They sometimes bartered gold¹⁵¹ with the Base people or searched for extra food after work or at nightfall, or offered to serve at the communal dining halls. This helped mitigate their starvation. When she needed palm sugar and tobacco, Maly bartered her gold ring with Base people in her village. This was called a night or black market. No one talked about this. She emphasized, “Some Base people still wanted gold. They whispered to me asking if I had any wealth to exchange for basic stuff. We did this several times. They usually hid palm sugar and tobacco.”

Halimah and Aminah had similar ways of searching for food. Aminah picked vegetables at her small garden to mix with watery rice soup to make her feel full.¹⁵² Halimah secretly collected shells, spinach water, and crabs in the rice fields after evening shift and then cooked them for her children and husband when they came to visit home.

¹⁵⁰ May Ebihara, 30.

¹⁵¹ Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 47. Money belonged to the former regime was abolished. The KR printed their own kind of money, but it was not a medium of exchange among people.

¹⁵² Interview with Tae Aminah, Kampot province, 2005.

Halima, like some other Cham Muslim women, kept basic utensils, such as a cooking pot, kettle, and a few plates, but this cooking was illegal and needed to be covertly done. Such an act would be identified as anti-revolutionary and be punished.

We had to find more food to eat; otherwise, we would be weak and have no energy to work. After the food was ready, I woke my children and husband up late at night and we ate silently together. But we had to be very careful of KR militiamen if they caught us cooking and eating individually at home. Some people were arrested and never came back after they were accused of eating home individually.

Eating in communal dining was not only difficult for Cham Muslim women, it also distanced them from their home and family kitchens. They made every effort to collect edible plants in the jungle or sometimes in small gardens in their village. When pork was served, women had to decide how to proceed and deal with it wisely. Some ended up swallowing it; others rejected it, but with appropriate reason – pleading for more time to adjust or covertly giving it to someone nearby. As stealing anything was considered a crime, women tried to avoid stealing food and other communal property. However, sometimes it was inevitable as they encountered malnutrition and scarcity of distributed food.

Livelihood Meeting and Criticism/Self-Criticism Sessions

It is a shortcoming that the stance regarding class struggle and the stance regarding enemies are still rather limited in scope. This means that we have probably overlooked many [enemies], and it seems likely that we overlook many others now. The task of preparing to defend ourselves secretly and efficiently against them is not yet complete. The methods of defense must be secret. This is a different task from defending our territory. Technically, the fight must be swift and successful. Those who defend us must be truly adept. They must observe everything, but so those being observed are unaware of it. This is particularly true of the long term.

The KR called on people to fight the enemy embedded at all levels and sharpen political consciousness. This prompted anxiety and fear for people because it created distrust and a sense of betrayal. The KR organized livelihood meetings and criticism/self-criticism sessions where political revolutionary lessons were communicated, and people were told to reveal their revolutionary shortcomings. Women were asked to report on their own behaviors and those of others. Women were directed to speak out, but if they spoke out, they would be in trouble. Their shortcomings and those of their families would be revealed, affecting relationships with family members and sometimes leading to danger or punishment.

Livelihood meetings and self-criticism sessions were held in the countryside before 1975 and became even more widespread thereafter. The Party repeatedly emphasized that such meetings were necessary to nurture the people in “politics” and “consciousness,” to keep people in the revolutionary line, and to expose traitors.¹⁵⁴ The livelihood meetings were held in a large hall where people in the cooperative unit gathered and listened attentively. A KR committee was tasked to develop political consciousness and struggle by criticizing the individualism, capitalism, and feudalism of former regimes.¹⁵⁵ Criticism/self-criticism sessions were held on a regular basis where cooperatives and work teams discussed practical problems of work organization and

¹⁵³Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 211. See also May Ebihara, “Revolution and Reformulation in Kampuchean Village Culture,” 33. Besides criticism sessions, speeches, songs, and the like were used in the same purpose. The KR created associations, political study schools, radio broadcasts, magazines, newspapers and theatrical performances with song and mime as further instruction and propaganda, an active program of indoctrination into their ideology.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁵⁵ It was repetitive and boring, but people could not express their bored feeling.

productivity. People in cooperative units had to embrace the criticism to prove that they were devoted to *Angkar*.

After night shift, people had to meet as teams of between 10 and 40 people in an open field, where criticism/self-criticism sessions were held. These were like people's courts, with justice and punishment meted out. Pol Pot (Brother Number One) once stated that there was no court other than a people's court.¹⁵⁶ In practice, chiefs of cooperatives or group leaders (*mekang*) did the criticism. In Kratie province, Mousa Sokha worked in the child care center with about five persons in her group. Each took a turn to criticize the others for four to five minutes. Sokha criticized each wet nurse in the group and then asked them to criticize her activities, behavior, and devotion to revolution.

Maly recalled that the chief of her cooperative instructed everybody in the group to learn how to criticize each individual about his or her work, behavior, productivity, and revolutionary thoughts toward *Angkar*. When it was her turn, Maly dared not look directly at other people's faces. She was afraid of them and did not allow them to see her real feelings through eye contact. While staring at the grass surrounded by a dozen people, she confessed, "I devote myself wholeheartedly to *Angkar* and I will continue to make it excellent. If I have any flaws, please tell me." In the interview, Maly's facial and verbal expressions told me how she wanted to avoid these sessions, but she could not. She recalled how she trembled when she was picked to talk. She continued, "I talked only about this good thing. If you talked more you would make mistakes. Thus, *Angkar* would

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Becker. *When the War Was Over: The Voice of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People*, 426. Also see interview with Mousa Sokha in Kratie Province in 2009.

recognize you. I did not tell them how I felt and how much I understood their political lessons.”

Some people dared not criticize others because they feared being severely criticized in retaliation or that the *Angkar* would identify them as lazy or antagonistic, so they just said they had nothing to criticize because they followed the KR plan. Riya said she dared not say anything about herself or others after having one bad lesson. She dared not say she kept leftover porridge for her children while distributing it to people in the village for fear of being criticized. One of her friends, an April 17 person, was taken away after he criticized the group and the KR plan during a self-criticism session. She related, “I remember that the *Angkar* did not like intellectuals like Chhay [to criticize].”¹⁵⁷

In short, the KR created a system of mutual distrust giving rise to suspicion at all levels. Revolutionary consciousness and political lessons were instructed repeatedly during livelihood meetings and criticism sessions. Women chose not to talk much or to keep silent. They found that too much talk would not benefit them, but rather put them in trouble. They saw no benefit if they revealed their shortcomings or those of family members. Although Cham Muslim women were not criticized in the sessions, some of them were criticized in work sites or villages. This system affected all people including women. They were caught in a dangerous trap, so they had to have discipline at every step and force themselves to show devotion to *Angkar* to ensure that they would not be

¹⁵⁷ Chhay was an educated person evacuated from the city. He was sent away after he criticized *Angkar* and never came back. His sister was traumatized by this bad news as she was proud of this young intellectual person.

criticized and punished. The sessions terrorized women, but women made efforts to escape punishment.

Women's Struggles to Safeguard Motherhood, Pregnancy and Childbirth

Childbirth in Islam is considered God's gift to women,¹⁵⁸ so Cham Muslim women are happy to accept this gift and bring this new life to their family. Women are placed in a lofty position because of pain and suffering that women endure throughout pregnancy until delivery. This means that childbirth and childrearing are considered difficult tasks for women already. But these tasks became more difficult during the KR regime due to the lack of basic necessities, hard labor, separation between mother and child, and terror that women were exposed to.

During DK, Cham Muslim mothers had mixed feelings during and after delivering their children. Women were worried about their own health and safety and also the welfare of their children after birth. The new life brought happiness because most women said that they felt a big relief after delivery and hoped that this newborn could replace separated family members.

At the same time they also felt uncertainty about their child's future and childrearing. They knew that they would not have any time to take care of their children because mothers had to go to work shortly after their natal bleeding, starting from light to heavy work. This led a few Cham Muslim women to wish that their children had died at birth. This may sound like women did not want to be good mothers, but concern about the well-being of their newborn babies forced several women to express their anxiety. In

¹⁵⁸ Aliah Schleifer. *Motherhood in Islam*, 51.

Pursat province, Paung Lim said that she did not want her baby to be alive because she did not have food to nurture the baby. She recalls, “I was exhausted with pulling out tree trunks along a dike. I almost fell down. Under such circumstance, I was told to rub my skin with a coin. I used a spoon pretending it was a coin to rub my skin. I did not want my child to be weak and endure such pain like me. I think it would have been better if she had died the day she came.”

Despite hard labor and the shortage of food, most women made every effort to care for their pregnancy. Halimah remembered how she missed beef bone soup the most. Back in 1970s, there had been an old man, a dirt laborer, who came to buy beef bones from her when she ran a small business in Takeo province.¹⁵⁹ She sighed and said:

An old man told me that he would make beef bone soup to eat so that he could gain more energy and power to carry dirt for money. During the KR regime, I thought to myself that, ‘if I have the soup to eat, it would help me and my baby a lot.’ I felt very disappointed with the way they treated pregnant women so badly.

When she expressed her feelings and mentioning the difficult moment to her husband, he told her to be patient and that the regime would not last long.¹⁶⁰

Later she missed palm sugar but could not find any. Being exhausted and hungry, she laid down on the loose soil and fell asleep when her work brigade went to lunch. She started to dream about the palm sugar. Halimah laughed as she recalled, “You know I was hungry for something sweet like palm sugar. I fell asleep at the work site and dreamt about sipping palm sugar. I imitated the dream. I dipped my index finger into the dirt and sucked the finger for a while. When I woke up, I realized that I was sucking dirt, not palm sugar.”

¹⁵⁹ Her cattle business ran well during that time. But everything changed when the KR came.

¹⁶⁰ He is knowledgeable about Islam and said that the authoritarian regime does not last for centuries.

While a few Cham Muslim women delivered their children themselves, others depended on midwives. In some cooperative units, husbands had three days off to care for their wives during delivery, while other cooperatives restricted husbands. Maisom, a traditional midwife, delivered her children herself. She said that she did not feel much pain. “After the baby came out, I removed the placenta, cut the baby’s natal cord and knotted it before washing the baby with warm water. The baby was wrapped with a piece of cloth, and then I put it on a tray. Next, I washed the placenta before I buried it. I put it in a coconut shield and filled the hole in order to protect it from evil.” I felt skeptical about her ability to practice this during the KR, but I came to understand her practice after I heard her story of how she became a midwife and after her family member confirmed about her special skills.

Other women were attended by KR midwives or medical revolutionary women. Some Cham Muslim women said that they almost died because of the poor skill and care from their KR midwives. Halimah complained that the KR midwives were young or ill and poorly trained. “My placenta was stuck in my womb for about two hours and the medical staff did not know what to do. I felt the blood rushing to my head. I felt that the KR treated me like a dog or cat.”¹⁶¹ However, Halimah gave birth to her baby girl safely.

Halimah’s memories are fragmented in terms of the dates of her childbirth during the regime. Halimah, at first, narrated that she delivered her child in 1973 after she was evacuated to Chrung Romeas village for about a year. Feeling skeptical about the given birth date of her child. I cross checked with her by asking several questions. 1) How old

¹⁶¹ She was very upset with what the revolutionary medical staff treated her during the delivery and she compared it to the way in which cat or dog delivered its baby.

was the child when the KR collapsed? 2) Do you know her year of birth, if counted by the lunar calendar? 3) Did you deliver your child during the harvest season or transplanting season? Surprisingly, she could respond to all of these questions, stating that her child was about two years old when the KR collapsed in 1979, that the child was born in the year of snake, and that she delivered her child in transplanting season. Thus, the child was born in 1977 not 1973. Cham Muslim women, including Halimah, usually are better at remembering events according to the lunar calendar year rather than the solar calendar year because it is their traditional way of measuring time.

Keeping the Child within Islamic Culture

Cham Muslim women intended to keep their babies within the Cham cultural and religious domain. Some Cham Muslim women performed Islamic rituals for their newborn babies and gave them Muslim names. Halimah recalled that every night she silently recited the *adzan* (call to prayer) and *shahada* (declaration of faith) into both ears of her baby girl, starting with her right ear.¹⁶² “It is our Islamic ritual practice. We normally do this to a newborn child. I wanted her to become a Muslim and adhere to Islamic faith.” Maisom, Zainoab, and Riya also whispered the call to prayer to their new-born child. Riya spoke in Khmer language, while Maisom spoke Cham.

Some Cham Muslim named their babies after their lost loved ones; others chose the names of Islamic prophets or family members, while still others provided Khmer names to their babies. Zainoab named her baby “Slaiman.”¹⁶³ She said that she loves that

¹⁶² Islamic ritual practice usually starts with right side.

¹⁶³ It is the name of one of Islamic Prophets.

name because it was her father's name. "My father passed away during the KR, so the only way to commemorate him was to name my child after him." In Kampong Chhnang province, Tvae Put chose the name "Aishah."¹⁶⁴ "It is a beautiful name and lots of girls bear that name," Put contents. Riya named her child "Da" on the ground that it is short and easy to call, although it is not a Muslim name. "We [she and her husband] love this name, so we chose it." No matter what names were given to their children, they signified the mothers' effort in keeping their family bonds and culture alive.

Childcare Centers and Childrearing

Under the KR mothers were not allowed to stay with their children or devote full care to their babies because the KR believed that this could slow down the goal of agricultural production – three tons per hectare per paddy rice. As the KR Four Year Plan announced, "...mothers must not get too entangled with their children; there should be time (for the mothers) to go and work."¹⁶⁵ In order to ensure efficient production, childcare centers were set up throughout the country.¹⁶⁶ There were large halls reserved for taking care of babies or small children. Usually grandmothers were assigned to care for newborn babies and small children. Each grandmother looked after ten or twelve

¹⁶⁴ The seventh wife of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh).

¹⁶⁵ Chandler, Kiernan, Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 159.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-17. See also Elizabeth Becker. *When the War Was Over*, 235. She argues, "Like other authoritarian societies bent on becoming wealthy overnight, the Khmer Rouge were schizophrenic about sex and procreation. On the one hand they thought sex should be restricted because it took up too much time and detracted from the chores at hand, overnight industrialization and glorification of the motherland. Yet they also decided there should be many more Cambodians to carry out this program and ordered that the population double."

children.¹⁶⁷ The mother would bring her baby to a child care center for the wet nurses in the morning when they left for work and pick up the baby in the evening after work. The mothers were not allowed to look after their children because this competed with their loyalty to *Angkar*. It meant mothers had to distance themselves from their babies and children. Similarly, researcher Mam Kalyanee, in interviews with five widows who had been sent to live at Koh Khsach Tonlea, concluded that, “this entire matter shows the absolute attempt of the KR to break up family ties and the traditional relationship between husband and wife, between mother and child among Cambodians.”¹⁶⁸

According to the Four-Year-Plan, women would have two months’ maternity leave. In this time, they would perform very light tasks.¹⁶⁹ In general practice, however, maternal leave was much shorter. The length of maternal leave varied from cooperative to cooperative, but the average was one month. During this time, women were asked to perform light work in the village before resuming heavy work in the village or cooperative depending on the respective local authority and the need for labor. Women did not oppose this policy overtly. Some followed it without any complaint. Others tried every way to keep their child with them as long as they could. Zainoab brought her son to a child care center in the middle of her village and left him with a grandmother there. She went to weave mats and rugs with some women in her village. Halimah, being attached to her child and concerned about her maternal health, said she was not ready to go to work

¹⁶⁷ This may vary from one to another child care center. In other place each wet nurse may have more or less than that.

¹⁶⁸ See also Mam Kalyanee, “Koh Ksach Tonlea: Widow Island” *Searching for the Truth*, 4 (April 2000): 58-61, and 5 (May 2000): 55-60. Koh Ksach Tonlea was a reeducation camp for women whose husbands had been taken and killed or were separated from their husbands because of accusations that they were soldiers or workers for the Lon Nol regime.

¹⁶⁹ David Chandler, Ben Kiernan, Chanthou Boua. *Pol Pot Plans the Future*, 158.

in the field yet.¹⁷⁰ She decided to find a reasonable excuse to convince her *mekang* to extend her maternal leave, so that she would be able to continue taking care of her baby longer.

I was shocked when my *mekang* demanded that I go to transplant the rice leaving my 30-day old baby with another woman [wet nurse] at the center. I myself wanted to take care of her. I wrapped the baby with a warm wet cloth and made the baby look ill. I approached my *mekang* and said, 'look at my baby, she is not feeling well. I have to look after her. I cannot go to work.' I started to praise the revolution, 'Comrade, our revolution will last very long, allow me to stay longer. I will be able to contribute to our glorious revolution step by step.'

Halimah was permitted to work in her village a bit longer. She considered this important because it allowed time for the bond of love with her baby to grow. After this moment of happiness, however, Halimah and other women faced concerns about separation, hard labor, and breastfeeding their newborns.

Although women had the option of breastfeeding their babies during lunch break at the childcare centers, they had to come back to work on time. Women who were not breastfeeding a child were not allowed to visit their children. Halimah devoted part of her lunch break to commute to breastfeed her baby at the center, about two kilometers from her work site. "After I swallowed porridge at my work site and got permission from *mekang* to feed my baby [at the child care center], I ran quickly toward the place. I felt that my stomach was digesting and the porridge almost came out of my mouth, but I tried to hold it back. Upon arrival, I breastfed my baby quickly so I would be back to work on time."

In conclusion, the length of maternal leave was long in theory but very short in practice. Women were made to carry either light or heavy work shortly after they gave

¹⁷⁰ She preferred to work in the village rather than in the field because it was from the village of which she did not feel close to her baby.

birth. Child care centers and wet nurses were established to distance women's relationship with their babies so that they could devote their energy to agricultural production.

To what degree women have sacrificed for their children, a sense of guilt plagued them with regard to the loss of their family members. For instance, Rohimah is still guilty with her newborn child who died of exhaustion while she left him in a hammock alone to fetch the porridge at the communal dining hall. She mentioned that moment twice during both interviews. She looked so sad when she recalled, "I should not leave him alone in the hut, at least I could take care of him in the last minute. However, I could not find any person to look after him while I myself needed to get the porridge to feed him who was sick. Unfortunately, after I returned only to find that he passed away."¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Women's emancipation was merely rhetoric that the KR employed to mobilize women's support and exploit their labor through cooperative units, communal dining, childcare centers, wet nurses, and work brigades. This ideology denied support for women struggling for equal rights in Cambodian society. Rather, they were separated from their loved ones and made to be equal with men in term of labor. For the KR regime, forcing women to endure hard labor was "gender equality." The love for family was supposed to be transferred to communal units. During the regime, families became extremely fragile.

¹⁷¹ After her husband was taken away to be killed, the son replaced the loss her missing husband in some ways. But when the son also died, she was lonely.

People, especially women, worked without proper rest, and when they were pregnant, they worked until they were ready for childbirth. Shortly after natal bleeding, women were told to do both light and heavy work, which harmed their health. No special care or rules supported women in agricultural work. As a consequence, general health problems and unique health issues of women cost many lives. Food shortages prompted women to take multiple responses – bartering, getting extra food at nightfall, offering services at the communal dining hall, and stealing. Occasionally, women got basic food necessities by bartering with Base people. Many picked vegetables or manioc from their small garden or jungle¹⁷² to cook and mix with their routine ration of food provided by the communal meal. Others ended up stealing communal food, such as rice, yam, and tomatoes. Some were arrested and sent for re-education or death.¹⁷³ During DK, everyday life was under surveillance – spies and watchful eyes. People had to exercise discipline at every moment – sleeping, eating, and working. There could be no chatting during eating or working. People dared not express humor. The KR produced endemic distrust among people. People were encouraged to report on each other. Livelihood meetings were held to instruct people in the proper mode of “drinking, sleeping, walking, and talking”¹⁷⁴ and criticism/self criticism sessions were instituted to search out traitors, anti-revolutionary people, and enemies from within. This was not a platform for those who wished to express real concern or provide feedback to correct the revolution. Those who exhibited

¹⁷² The Khmer Rouge urged people to be self-reliance, mastery in finding extra food and in other fields. But many people were caught when they were accused of stealing the food.

¹⁷³ After his wife was taken away and killed, Math had to nurture his family alone until he married a new wife after the regime.

¹⁷⁴ David A. Ablin and Marlowe Hood (eds), xxxv.

their real feelings, resentment, or concern about the revolution were arrested and sent away to be killed.

The KR did not liberate women from being exploited and suppressed. In fact, women became more oppressed and exploited. The KR eliminated women's privacy. Under the KR, the subordination of women began with forced labor, family separation, restricted personal freedom and suppression of the psychological and spiritual aspects of a family unit. Women resisted in any way they could. Halimah safeguarded her children and maintained her relationship with her mother by arguing with the KR and traveling to her mother's place to signify that this was what a mother and daughter should do to hold on to their traditional family and duties. No matter what the result would be, she continued to stand up. Despite suffering and pain, women sacrificed for their families. In some cases, they did not care about the physical pain they experienced for their family members. This made them courageous defenders of their family, but at the same time, women felt a sense of guilt about the decisions they were forced to make. Even decades later, they continued to wonder, "What if this happened because of what I did or why did I do that?"

CHAPTER 4: RELIGION AND IDENTITY UNDER THREAT

All people have the rights to beliefs or to any religion and have the rights to no beliefs or no religion. Any reactionary religion which destroys Democratic Kampuchea and Cambodian people is forbidden.

– Democratic Kampuchea Constitution¹⁷⁵

In my dream, I was carrying my baby, and Chhron (a KR cadre) grabbed my hand and dragged me to a papaya tree near my house and then put his sword, which was very bright, at my neck and threatened, “I will kill you because you pray.” I tried to protect myself from being killed by the sword, but all of a sudden *hakem* Sos appeared and asked me to accept this killing. He said to me, “Let him kill you, Halimah. Dying in the name of Allah (prayer), you will go to heaven.” I thought to myself that I have been trying to fulfill my religious obligation as a good Muslim in order to go to heaven, so why not follow his advice. Thus, I no longer protected myself from being killed. I stretched my body and remained motionless. But then I woke up from the dream immediately and looked for my small children who slept near me. I trembled, sobbed and feared. I thought it was reality. Thanks to Allah, it was not. I felt relief when seeing my children near me.

–Halimah, Cham Muslim woman survivor.¹⁷⁶

Religion, according to the KR, was incompatible with the regime’s socialist ideology and was seen as an obstacle in building a pure socialist state, so all religions had to be eliminated. Ethnic groups were also seen as a hindrance to a utopian agrarian society. By assimilating all these groups into the Khmer majority and punishing those who resisted, the KR believed that their goal would be achieved.¹⁷⁷ In order to destroy the foundations of Islam, the KR implemented a wide range of practices and policies targeting the Cham Muslim community: (1) killing religious leaders, Islamic teachers, and those who countered the revolution, (2) destroying copies of the Qur’an and other religious books, (3) profaning mosques and graves, (4) closing down Qur’anic schools,

¹⁷⁵ Democratic Kampuchea (DK), “Chapter 5: Rights to Beliefs and Religions” in *DK Constitution*, 1976, 15-16. This constitution was adopted on December 14, 1975 and promulgated on January 5, 1976.

¹⁷⁶ Interviews with No Halimah in Kandal province, 2005 and 2009.

¹⁷⁷ DK constitution, “Chapter 6: Law Implementation,” 8-9.

(5) transferring people's beliefs in God to *Angkar*, (6) forcing people to work hard in the hope that they would forget to worship, (7) forcing people to relinquish religion, so that they would work more, and (8) assimilating people into the majority Buddhist Khmer community and treating them as Khmer.¹⁷⁸

The KR treatment of Islam and ethnic identity had severe effects on Cham Muslim people, including Cham Muslim women. The treatment caused some Cham Muslims to rebel against the KR to free themselves from this violent rule. Some male religious leaders dared to die in the name of religion.¹⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, women mentally suffered when their co-religionists were killed because their loss was also their grief. The KR implementation of segregation, suppression, and punishment put women in a dilemma regarding the decisions they had to make to survive; in other words, they became caught between their fundamental moral principles and their survival.

This chapter examines women's narratives to shed light on the status of Islam and Cham Muslim identity under the KR regime as well as women's responses to the KR treatment of religious beliefs and practices. It describes the various ways that the KR forbade Islam and ethnic identity, the effects of these policies on women's issues, and the nuances of their responses. It also discusses the principle of patience in Islam, which provided Cham Muslim women with the moral strength in order to struggle and live under unimaginable conditions. This chapter also looks at the way in which women

¹⁷⁸ The majority of Cambodian population are Khmer Buddhist, comprising approximately 85%. The minority groups include Cham Muslims, Vietnamese, Chinese, and hill tribes. In this context, "Khmer" is referred to the oppressed Khmer during the regime.

¹⁷⁹ Ysa Osman. *Cham Rebellion: Survivors' Stories from the Villages*, 2-13. Also see interviews with Seth Maly, Phum I, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, 2007 and 2009.

narrate their “stories from the below” in order to illustrate larger issues with regard to Cham Muslim communities and other minorities during the KR period.

My central argument is that although state violence and genocidal policies obviously had a severe impact on Islamic institutions and practices, they simultaneously produced moral strength and responses that, to some extent, motivated women to hold on to their religion and ethnic identity in a different way than before, which in turn helped women to survive. Besides the forms of compliance, various forms of resistance were seen through women’s responses to the KR policies. Women transformed traditional practices to a new form of practice and showed their hard work to the authorities in order to save their lives and safeguard their modest beliefs after male religious leaders could no longer lead their community. This new form of practice was a combination of emotional and intellectual resistance. In order to create new forms of religious practices under this harsh period, women reduced religious physical performance and ethnic identity signification but increased profession of faith in their hearts (known as declaration of intention) and secretly performed religious rituals and rites in whatever way they could, based largely on *shabar* Islamic principle.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the KR policies towards religion and ethnic identity. The second part examines women’s perceptions, nuanced feelings, and the choices they made to survive and to safeguard their Islamic values and ethnic identity. The third part discusses the intersection of fear, regret, patience and the importance of religion. Cham Muslim women felt guilty and sometimes felt they had betrayed Islam when they failed to practice Islamic rituals or were unable to

properly comply with the traditional aspects of their ethnic identity. Paradoxically, this ultimately reinforced their attachment to their Cham identity and their religion.

The Destruction of the Muslim Community and the Erasure of Cham Identity

The article on religions cited above in the DK constitution is paradoxical and contradictory. Although the first half suggests that the KR were sympathetic to any religion, the article overall emphasizes that all religions are reactionary and need to be eradicated. The KR considered Buddhism an exploitative religion.¹⁸⁰ Although the KR did not publicly announce this position, there was evidence to suggest that the regime considered Islam a polluted and inferior religion. As for the ethnic Cham, the KR criticized them for the loss of their territorial sovereignty, the Kingdom of Champa, to the Vietnamese.¹⁸¹ Halimah felt resentment when she recollected in our interview, “They [some Base people and Khmer Rouge cadre] scolded us that we lost our territory and came to settle in Cambodia. They humiliated us.”

The banning of religious beliefs and policies descended from the top KR leaders down through zone leaders, to regional, district, and cooperative chiefs. The chief of cooperatives, as well as the KR organization, played an important role in implementing the plans and policies. The KR organized meetings and warned of serious consequences for anyone who resisted KR policies. Then they started to close down or destroy mosques, pagodas, Buddha statues, relics, churches, and religious books. Copies of the

¹⁸⁰ Ian Harris. *Buddhism under Pol Pot regime*. (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), 1-30.

¹⁸¹ The Kingdom of Champa, which was situated in the central and southern Vietnam now, lost to the Vietnamese in the early 19th century.

Qur'an, *muqqadam*, *Kitab*, Buddhist *Tripitaka*, and other so-called reactionary items were collected and destroyed. The KR had various means of destroying or profaning all the Islamic sacred texts. They burned them, threw them into the river, or used them as toilet paper, which angered many Cham Muslims. Aminah recalled:

I was suppressed in all aspects of my life during the Khmer Rouge. Personally, I could neither laugh nor cry because I was asked not to express my emotion or mourning. When the KR collectivized all my belongings and destroyed my religious books such as the *Muqqadam* I could not hold my tears back. I think I have the right to mourn what I lost, don't I? But when the KR forcibly asked me what happened, I lied to them that dust accidentally got into my eyes. I dared not tell them the truth; otherwise, I would be killed.¹⁸²

The destruction of Islam and other religions and religious leaders began in early 1976,¹⁸³ after the DK constitution was promulgated. Collecting and destroying religious texts, profaning religious shrines, killing religious agents, and closing down religious schools enabled the KR to implement their radical policies smoothly.¹⁸⁴ Some religious leaders, mostly men, could hide their identities and survive, while some could not. In the same vein, some Cham Muslim women could hide their religious texts, while some could not.

¹⁸² Interview with Tae Aminah, Trapaeng Sangke commune, Kampot district, Kampot Province, 2005.

¹⁸³ In liberated zones, Islamic prayer had been banned before the KR came to take power in 1975. In many villages of the Kroch Chhmar district such as Trea village, Koh Phal village, and Svay Khleang village, the KR forbade Islamic practices and arrested religious leaders, soldiers, officials, and Qur'anic teachers since 1974. Peang Abdul Ghaffar proclaimed, "When the Communists stressed that they would not allow prayers five times a day as the Khmer Moslems [Muslims] requested, the invaders who had abducted only selected villagers, began to arrest the Khmer Moslems in earnest beginning November, 1973. To date, at least 300 Khmer Moslems have been arrested, a large majority of whom are from Kroch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province. Most of the arrested persons were prominent Moslem villagers and religious leaders, especially Koranic teachers." Quoted in Douc Rasy *Khmer Representation at the United Nations, 1976*, 251-155.

¹⁸⁴ "Islam in Kampuchea," 11. Of 113 mosques throughout the country, only five were not reportedly destroyed, pulled down or profaned. The report did not state the reason why those were not profaned. This might have some special exception. May Ebihara argues that although Khmer language was the only language allowed during the regime, it was reduced and used in a revolutionary manner, 30-31.

After banning religions, the KR proceeded to erase the identity of each ethnic minority group by ordering people to embrace a single race: Khmer. They instituted a racist, chauvinistic policy of forced assimilation, or “Khmerization,” of the Cham and other ethnic minorities. The KR declared that languages other than Khmer were banned, and that Cham language was considered foreign. This meant that Cham Muslims were not permitted to express their ethnic identity and had to adapt to what the KR called Khmers. David Hawk’s work, which was cited in “Phnom Penh Tribunal Document No. 2.4.02,” submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission A/C. 3/34, elaborates on this treatment. In decrees sent to the provinces, the Khmer Rouge declared that:

There is one Kampuchean revolution. In Kampuchea there is one nation, and one language, the Khmer language. From now on the various nationalities [listed according to province] do not exist any longer in Kampuchea. Therefore [Cham] individuals must change their names by taking new ones similar to Khmer names. The Cham mentality [Cham nationally, language, costume, habits, and religion] are abolished. Those who do not abide by this order will reap all consequences.¹⁸⁵

Researcher Ysa Osman describes the KR’s bad treatment of Cham, saying that in the Northern Zone the KR leadership considered the Cham an “enemy” and a “viable threat,” after the Cham rebellions.¹⁸⁶ A report sent to Pol Pot on the topic of the “enemies” of the revolution dated April 1976 by Ke Pauk, the Secretary of the Northern Zone, accused the Cham of being “former Lon Nol soldiers, some former chairmen of

¹⁸⁵ David Hawk, “Democratic Kampuchea and International Human Rights Law”, in *The Cambodian Agony*, 127, ed. Ablin and Hood. This statement was cited in “Phnom Penh Tribunal Document No. 2.4.02 submitted to the UN Human Rights Commission A/C. 3/34 in a slightly different translation (from French to English) than the tribunal document translated from Khmer to English.

¹⁸⁶ In fact, the situation was already bad, but got worse after the rebellions.

cooperatives who had served under the older smaller-scale system, and the entire Cham race.”¹⁸⁷

In order to erase Cham Muslim identity, the KR forced all Cham Muslims to comply with the rules that every Cambodian had to follow after the revolution. The KR decreed that since all people were Khmer and that there were no other ethnic or religious groups, the whole population had to eat the same food and act the same way. All minority groups were reduced to being “Khmer” during the era. This had a severe effect on Cham Muslims, especially Cham Muslim women, because they could not comply with Islamic law and the women’s code of conduct in a strict manner – headscarving and donning long dress. The new order forced women to choose between maintaining their ethnic and religious identity or surviving.

The killing of male religious figures affected women’s religious beliefs and practices since the foundation of Islam, including the people, community, and sacred texts, ceased to exist.¹⁸⁸ Women’s major roles as Cham Muslim mothers and carriers of Islamic practices were cut off through the repressive policies. The patterns of maintaining and reinforcing religious and identity practices, in which the husband teaches his wife and the wife teaches the children, were transformed. Parents’ authority over their children was transferred to *Angkar*. The family bond, as discussed in chapter 3, was transformed to a communal one. Family law and discipline were destroyed by the *Angkar*, and in return the KR indoctrinated people with their own discipline and ideologies. Making

¹⁸⁷ Ysa. *Cham Rebellion: The Survivors’ Stories from the Villages*, 115. Also see “Telegram of the Khmer Rouge No. 15,” dated April 2, 1975. Documentation Center of Cambodia Catalogue No. L01187.

¹⁸⁸ Women of all religions rarely have high religious position in religious institutions. Often time, men do have and direct religious message to all people.

friends with other Muslims as their brothers and sisters, through *ziyarah* (visitation to someone's house or a shrine) with their family members and relatives, was not permitted. No Qur'anic recitations or religious gatherings were allowed. Usually, those who fought against these policies and rules were punished.

The Responses of Cham Muslim Women

As discussed in the introduction, Islamic rituals or Five Pillars of Islam include profession of faith (*shahadah*), prayer (*solat*), fasting (*sawm*), charity or tax (*zakat*), and pilgrimage to Mecca (*haj*). Due to the KR suppression, however, only the profession of faith was often practiced by Cham Muslim women (and men) because it can be done in the mind. Prayer and fasting were practiced in very limited ways by Cham Muslim women (and men). Prayer requires activities of the mind, body, and soul, which can be apprehended by others, while fasting requires strong physical and spiritual strength.

Although the KR warned Halimah not to perform Islamic rituals, Halimah secretly prayed. When I asked her where she could perform *wudu* (ablution), she said that she used the river near her village after she returned from work in the evening and hurriedly performed so that she could come to the prayer time without being seen. She did this occasionally. But at one point she was interrupted by the KR when she was praying. She recalled one day when the KR medicine distributor almost caught her praying, but she pretended to be a patient while the distributor passed her hut.

I was praying *fard ashar* (evening prayer), and had done, I think, two *rak'a* (unit of prayer),¹⁸⁹ My sister-in-law, who was not feeling well, did not realize I was praying, and then she called the KR physician to come to my hut in order for her to get some pills. I was very afraid and did not know what to do because I was still in white prayer dress. If I stopped praying it meant I feared human beings more than God, but if I continued praying, the KR would see me and report to the chief of the cooperative and I would be punished or killed. I wrapped myself in a red blanket so the KR would not see my prayer dress and I pretended that I had a fever, asking for some pills to cure it.

Pretending to ask for pills allowed her to make sure that she would not be suspected of performing religious rites. She preferred to stop praying for a while and finished a moment later.

The dream described in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter suggests that Halimah's felt that Chhron, the KR agent, had stolen her freedom of religion. If she resisted, she would be killed. In her dream, she meant to die as a martyr as pointed out by *hakem* Sos. From a different perspective, while she chose to die in the name of God, her eagerness to continue living and to reunite with her children woke her. She was caught between the religious message of *hakem* Sos and her duty as a mother. While in her dream, she was encouraged to accept the killing according to the strict interpretation of Qur'anic verses that of *hakem* Sos prescribed so that she would go to heaven, in reality, her husband encouraged her not to pray in order to avoid punishment and to continue her life so that she could take care of the children, who would find life very difficult without her care. He interpreted some verses from the Qur'an regarding prayer in a different sense:

Prayer is our religious obligation, but during this harsh time it is not obligatory. If you pray and then the KR kill you, what do you think about our children? We have many children. I can't stop you; or, I will be the one who sins before Allah, so let you reconsider.

¹⁸⁹ Daniel Brown. *A New Introduction to Islam, 2nd Edition*. (Chichester, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-BlackWell, 2009), 162. There are five time prayer : Fajr, Zuhr, 'Asr, Maghrib, and 'Isha' and each consists of various units of prayer. Fajr, Zhur, and 'Isha' comprise four units; Magrib, three; and Fajr, two.

At this time, Halimah was caught between the different interpretations of Qur'anic verses with regard to prayer provided by two male religious leaders. Halimah recalled that she did not say anything to her husband except, "It was hard for me to choose." After a long consideration, however, she decided not to pray anymore and hid her prayer dress (*mukana*) from the KR. "I folded the prayer dress and put it in the pillow of my newborn daughter while some women used it for diapers," she recalled. Although she did not pray overtly, she made *niat* (declaration of intention) of prayer and asked God to witness this observance.

At this point in the interview, Halimah and I both sighed as we recognized the tension that was coming into play. As a listener and researcher, I knew that the complexities of ritual interpretation and Islamic jurisprudence have been debated and practiced variously in normal situations. I also knew that these issues place people, especially women into difficult positions as adherents attempting to follow religious dictates during the authoritarian regime characterized by suppression and punishment.

Other women observed a form of sitting-gesture prayer. Under normal conditions, elderly persons who are physically weak may observe prayer this way due to necessity. Under the KR, Zainoab adopted this prayer position. She could not perform prayers with normal gestures with a set of unifying mind, body (physical movements), and soul. She often sat down and prayed because she could not give up prayer immediately even though the KR insisted that she do so. During the interview, Zainoab also showed me how to perform a sitting-gesture prayer in a modest way and explains:

You have to know the *kibla* (direction of prayer which faces Mecca)¹⁹⁰ so you can pray no matter what your physical movements, as long as you know its *rukun* (integral). I think Allah, the almighty, knows my intention.

Besides prayer, Zainoab said she observed fasting occasionally when she was still strong, when the ration of food was still reasonable and the labor was not yet heavy. She hid her afternoon ration for breaking the fast at sunset and her evening meal for breaking the fast before sunrise. Later, she forced herself to give up due to exhaustion and suspicion from *Angkar*. She recalls, “It was not easy to observe religious rituals during the KR, but I tried several times to fast because I did not want to miss so many times; otherwise, I would owe God very much.” She expressed her regret that she could not adequately fulfill Islamic rituals, particularly prayer. She said, “I could not continue to fulfill my obligations.”

Although both Halimah and Zainoab were caught between the religious message and survival, they embarked on similar forms of resistance. They responded by transforming their religious obligations into moral responsibilities, using their minds and souls to hold on to their religion and maintain contact with God.

The Islamic funeral practice was also forbidden. Traditionally, the funeral ceremony is considered both a religious ritual and an expression of Cham Muslim identity. It is important for Cham Muslims to help prepare the dead body religiously so that the body will rest in peace. When the KR suppressed their religious practices like funeral ceremonies, the Cham Muslim women did not resist overtly. After her husband was killed in Po Tonle prison, Kalichip and her children were evacuated to Pursat

¹⁹⁰ Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri. *Reliance of the Traveler*. Translation of Nuh Ha Min Keller. (Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications 1994), 123.

province. She had to do heavy work, including carrying soil from one place to another to build a dam, producing rice, and performing other agricultural jobs assigned by the KR. She volunteered to bury the dead in addition to the other jobs the KR assigned to her. After work each evening, she helped bury Cham Muslims, Khmers, and Chinese who died of starvation, exhaustion, and disease in her cooperative. At least three or four people died every day during 1977-1978 due to starvation and disease. When asked how many dead she took care of, Kalichip said she could not count them all as there were so many. Although it was not fully *sas* (pure), she said she tried to do as much as she could. She felt that her job was important to help them rest in peace and she could also feel a sense of blessing from God:

The KR did not ask me to do this task, but I pitied the dead bodies. Some were not buried properly, allowing wild animals to dig them out the pit. Some people asked me to help with their funerals when they died, and I promised to do so. I rarely asked permission of the KR to bury the dead and used water to purify the Cham Muslim bodies before I buried them, I did it on my own without telling them. Samraub, an evacuee, helped me with carrying the dead bodies to bury.¹⁹¹

Kalichip recalled performing the funeral of a *hajaj* (female pilgrim):

I pitied her so I tried to help her as much as I could. Before she died, she pleaded me to help take care of her body in order to avoid being torn by wild dogs or other wild animals and to put her to rest in peace.

The funeral was not completely in accordance with Islam because Kalichip lacked water and there was no Islamic religious authority to perform the ritual prayers for the dead.

Kalichip said that the reason that she was allowed to perform funerals was because the KR saw her as a well-reeducated person who worked hard for the KR.

¹⁹¹ Interview with Kalichip, Prek Thmei commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal province, 2005. She was an active chief of women in her commune and encouraged her sons to fight against the KR guerrilla after 1979. She passed away in 2007 without seeing justice done.

Some women were obsessed with their relatives' funerals, but failed to convince the KR to allow them to perform the funerals. They were not even allowed to mourn over the dead bodies of their relatives. After her husband died, Riya tried to have his body prepared and buried by several Cham Muslim men who were also April 17 evacuees, but she was not allowed to do so. Kha, head of a hospital in her area, criticized those who cried over their husbands' deaths. Riya recalls:

They had about seven pieces of bamboo shoots to carry my husband's body to bury on a hill. It was miserable. At the burial site, I did not cry in front of Kha because I did not want him to scold me. Another woman whose husband's body was buried near my husband's was crying, and Kha insulted her saying, "Look at *Mit Ya*. She did not cry at all. What about you? Why are you crying?" I was fed up with his sarcastic words.

Cham Ethnic Identity Persecution

No ethnic identities were recognized during the regime because everyone was forced to dress in the same clothes (black pajamas or plain clothes), speak the same language (Khmer), and to adopt KR revolutionary names (which sounded like Khmer names). The local cadre claimed that Cham names were difficult for them to pronounce and were not smooth like Khmer names. No headscarves were allowed for Cham Muslim women. Women were forced to uncover their hair and cut their hair short. This section discusses the ways in which Cham Muslim women responded to this suppression. In order to avoid discrimination or being hunted down, most Cham Muslims had to shorten their names or change them to Khmer names, dress in Khmer clothes, and behave like Khmer in all situation.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Interviews with Cham Muslim women, 2005 and 2009. Most of them gave the same reasons. Also see Elizabeth Becker. *When the War Was Over: The Voice of Cambodia's Revolution and Its People*, 262-263.

According to the Cham Muslim women, the name change usually took place in two phases: 1) changing from their original names to other Cham Muslim names in order to hide their backgrounds, then 2) completely changing to Khmer names or being given new names. Maly proclaimed that her original name was Chy Krim Naly, but due to her constant fear of being known as a student, she changed to Aminah. In the similar vein, Lek Riya shortened her original Chvea name to Ya, and was called *Mit* (contraction of comrade) Ya during the regime. However, another woman, Aminah, was given the name Thea, which does not represent Cham Muslim name at all.¹⁹³ She said she had to accept it. Nonetheless, some Cham Muslim women retained their original names, but dropped their family names. Sros asserts that she was called Sros instead of Teur Sros, her full name, while she was in a children's unit during the regime.

Regarding dress, Cham Muslim women had both traditional Cham dress and Khmer dress, but they usually used their Cham dress. During the Khmer Rouge, they had no choice but to dress in Khmer Rouge style.¹⁹⁴ Traditionally, Cham Muslim women grew their hair long, rarely cutting it. They usually wore it in a top knot. However, the KR forced them to cut their hair. For Khmer women, cutting their hair was a matter of personal preference more than that of faith, but for Cham Muslim women it was against their faith and culture to give up their way of dress and cut their hair. Zainoab said that she loved her long hair and was very upset when she heard that she had to cut it short.

¹⁹³ Informal conversation with aunty Thea at my house in 2005. This was also corroborated by other women's accounts that I have come across during my fieldwork.

¹⁹⁴ Interviews with No Halimah in 2007 and 2009 and Kalichip in 2005. Also see Elizabeth Becker. *When the War Was Over*, 263.

As far as wearing headscarves was concerned, Cham Muslim women used the *krama* distributed by the KR to cover their head as some women of other religions did. For some Cham Muslim women, this protected them from the sunlight and also served a religious purpose. Covered by the *krama*, they also felt they fulfilled their obligation as Muslim women. In a low voice, Sos Pheah, an Islamic religious teacher, recalled that when the KR arrested and killed Cham leaders and villagers in her hometown, Tuol La-veang, and then evacuated the entire village and her family members to another village, which was far from her hometown. She resented the KR treatment of her religion and culture:

I am aware that Muslim women are asked to cover their head properly, so I tried to use my *krama* to cover my hair. That way made me feel better. However, my *mekang* grabbed it from me. It seemed like she did not want me to cover my hair.¹⁹⁵

In order to further erase Cham identity, the KR forbade Cham language. Many Cham Muslims are bilingual,¹⁹⁶ speaking both Cham and Khmer, but Cham was the language they used with their family and relatives. Thus, when the language was banned, they found it hard to communicate with their children and relatives. Some women received warnings or even were threaten with death when they were accused of speaking Cham. Even though they did not speak their language in the public, some Cham Muslim women secretly used it to communicate with relatives occasionally.

Halimah told a story that illustrates these themes. The roof of her hut in the new village leaked in heavy rain and storms and her family members were soaked. One day

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Sos Pheah in Kampong Thom Province in 2005. She looked depressed by the KR treatment and was also concerned about her current livelihood.

¹⁹⁶ Most of the Chvea or Malays descendents speak Khmer and a little *bahasa* Malay while Cham Muslim people speak more Cham than Khmer. For more explanation, see footnotes in chapter 1.

when she came back from work around 7 p.m., her sister-in-law who stayed home with an ill child spoke to her in Cham language, and saying, “Halimah, tomorrow *Ta* [grandfather] will come to fix our roof.” Halimah replied in the same language, “Great, if they come tomorrow, we will not be soaked with the rain anymore.” During the interview, she exclaimed as she touched her chest to signify an unexpected thing happened, “They [the three KR cadre] who spied on us appeared in front of my hut, dragging a long iron chain, about 2-3 meters and questioned us, ‘what language did you speak and what was it about?’ and I replied to them, ‘the same as mentioned earlier.’ They warned us, “Do not speak any foreign language [Cham] any longer. If you still resist, this chain will work for you.”

I was distressed by this. I could not believe that Chhron accused me of speaking a foreign language, it is not foreign at all. Just before the KR came to power, his mother usually came to my village and sold boiled corns in front of my house; we knew each other well. But he ignored our previous relationship. Cham people and their language were not alien to the Khmer. The former and the latter existed in Cambodia before the Chinese and Vietnamese came. The Chams and Khmer were like brother and sister.¹⁹⁷ I could not understand why everything changed. This might be why he wanted to treat me badly. I dared not speak Cham anymore.

The KR regime transformed her relationship with others in her neighborhood to a gray area. The boundary between her and her neighbor was cut through the “revolutionary line.”

Another Cham Muslim woman, Phaung Lim, whose husband had been killed, was warned by the KR cadre not to speak Cham anymore because it was against the rule of *Angkar*. Lim recalls:

¹⁹⁷ This was part of the oral history of her husband’s family. She recalled it with pride and confidence during the interview.

When I spoke Cham, my *mekang* scolded, “Why do you still use Cham, why don’t you give it up?” I dared not speak it; however, I could not help mixing a few Cham words with Khmer when I spoke to my relatives during that time because my accent was more Cham and I could not recall some words in Khmer. I used it covertly.¹⁹⁸

When I was interviewing her, I noticed that Lim used Cham for some words which she did not know in Khmer. Both Halimah and Lim shared similar experience of how language was banned and how they responded. It can be inferred that the KR, to justify their elimination of race and ethnic minorities, claimed that Cham was a foreign language and punished those who refused to abide by this policy.

Another means to exterminate Cham Muslims was that KR identified them through their language and accent. When the killing escalated in Kampong Cham province after the open rebellions in 1975 and during the KR purges, some Cham speaking people were targeted. This also affected those who were not Cham Muslims but shared the village with Cham Muslim people through the KR all-search operation. Mouy Sreang Khauv, a native of Phum Kokor village, Kampong Cham province, recalls this painful moment:

They pulled off my blanket to see my face. They could tell by my accent whether I was a Cham. The Muslims in my village were killed. They wanted to uproot them. I don’t know why. Hundreds of them; even children were killed. They killed Mas, the last Muslim woman after they pulled her out of hiding. They arrested us with the intention of killing us. They first woke us up and peeled off our blankets at night. They made us talk to try to hear our accent to see if we were the Malays. They wanted to clean out all the Malays. Then to make it easy, they lied to us that *Angkar* wanted the whole village of about 300 people to move to another district. They wanted to kill us all at one time. But we were lucky. When we were stopped by a ditch full of corpse, a messenger arrived at the last minute of our lives with a piece of paper telling our killers to wait.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Interviews with Phaung Lim in Pursat Province, 2007 and 2009.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Ly Y’ *Heaven Becomes Hell*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 155. A story of Mouy Sreang from Phum Kokor, Kampong Siem, Kampong Cham Province. She now lives in Quincy, MA.

All in all, Cham Muslims were stripped of ethnic identity, language, dress, names, and funerals. There was no reasonable time for them to adapt, and there was no protection of them as an ethnic minority group. Instead, they were oppressed and humiliated by derogatory words. Cham Muslims were forced to do, act, and behave the same as other people. However, women responded to the bad treatment by both compromising and resisting in accordance with the practical situation.

Patience as a Hope for Living

The failure to observe religious rituals, apparently, produced regret in women, though women adopted a patience principle as a religious teaching. This gave them hope and strength to survive. Women talked about fear which permeated all aspects of their lives, but when they narrated fear in the context of religious persecution and ritual practices, they blamed themselves for not being strong enough to struggle for their religion. Halimah regretted being unable to fulfill her religious obligations properly. “Every time I think about prayer and religious practices during the KR, I want to cry because we were oppressed in all aspects of our lives.”

However, women remained patient because they believed that patience would transcend their fear. In Islam, patience has a significant meaning, and it inspires people to accept a modest life. Women said that despite their experiences of hardship, they remained patient believing that they would be freed some day.²⁰⁰ Zainoab recalled that she was always thinking of how to behave humbly and remain patient. “I could not find

²⁰⁰ The study also finds that women proclaimed that they were patient with many kinds of situation not only religious practice issue. This will be discussed in the remaining chapters.

anybody to help under such circumstance, so I had to consult with religious teaching, the intrinsic knowledge that I have. It reminded me that I had to be patient no matter what happened.” In the interviews, she explicitly condemned the KR for the banning of ritual practices and elimination of her identity punishing them the KR through her oral narrative as follows:

They deprived us of everything from religion, culture, and way of life to personal freedom, so they have to be responsible for their acts before God and the law. I missed so many prayer times during the regime, and now I am making up the missed times.

She also expresses her strong desire for both legal and moral justice mechanisms to compensate what she had endured and lost.

All in all, why did many women, if not all, hold on to their religious and ethnic identities, even though they were prohibited, knowing that the violation would be punishable? The answer is that they felt regret that they could not observe Islamic rituals, and that consulting religious teachings gave them strength to survive.

Conclusion

The KR controlled every aspect of life, banned all religious practices, and tried to eliminate Cham Muslim identity. Those who opposed or resist these policies were killed or punished. Many Cham Muslim men who were found to be violators or rebels for religious and ethnic grounds were slaughtered. Even innocent religious leaders and prominent Cham were targeted. Many Cham Muslim women suffered from losing their husbands, religious leaders, freedom fighters. Emotional expression such as mourning was restricted.

These women had to struggle with a fundamental moral conflict between religious message and their survival. Women feared being seen whenever they observed ritual but also regretted not being able to observe religious rituals. Based on their gendered perspective, women transformed religious practices from religious obligation to moral responsibility in these harsh conditions, and they believed that God would excuse them.

Their various responses were made not only to survive and but also to protect Islam and their identity. The killings of community religious leaders and teachers and the destruction of Islam made women fearful and depressed, but it made them hold on to their religion and identity secretly. As revealed in these narratives, women tried to safeguard their religion and identity, and this gave them strength to live on, even though they could not observe Islamic rituals. They gave up prayer due to exhaustion, lack of food, and threats. However, they did pray in their heart asking God to safeguard them. Reflecting the KR treatment, women implicitly and explicitly condemned and punished the KR through their verbal and non-verbal actions.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The Impact of KR Policies on Cham Muslim Women's Lives

This study identifies three underlying themes in the narratives of Cham Muslim women who were both victims and actors during the Khmer Rouge regime, which left behind a legacy of devastating loss, trauma, and suffering for women. First of all, the forced evacuation that came immediately after the KR gained full power in 1975 transformed their lives completely. Armed with ultra-Maoist and Marxist-Leninist ideology, the KR drove people from their homes to the countryside to undertake agricultural production. All people had to choose between their belongings and their life. Complying with the order meant they could save their lives. This was not an easy decision to make as people, especially women, were attached to belongings that symbolized their identity. However, direct confrontation could result in death. In the end, women packed whatever they could bring along and left home at once. Traveling in the mass evacuation for many days and adapting to a new settlement produced great anxiety for women. Many had never before traveled such a long and exhausting journey by foot, and those who survived cited their patience and emotional persistence.

Changes in family life and gender roles, as forms of social transformation, proved to be another traumatic experience for women. The KR regime maintained that eliminating the traditional domestic chores of women and making them join agricultural production which men did would lead to the “emancipation” of women. Family members were separated and placed in a work force. Gender roles were transformed by communal duties in which women had to take up men's work. Women were no longer seen as

caretakers of the family. Relations between men and women were also restricted, as men and women were not free to interact with each other. The KR's suppression and oppression were emphasized by women when reflecting on KR policies towards them and their families.

Women made all-out efforts to psychologically emancipate themselves from KR policies. They struggled not only to survive, but also to prevent the KR from enforcing their harsh rules which would further destroy the concept of traditional family and motherhood that women secretly treasured. The spiritual and psychological meanings of family made women strong enough to hold on to what they believed they should do to safeguard their roles as mothers and wives. For women who were pregnant, the new life of their baby was significant, despite their concern over childrearing. Women described how their baby's existence made them strong to confront hardship, and for some women, this new life could replace a lost husband who died or was killed during the regime.

During the KR, the elimination of religion and ethnic identity was a goal. Once this was achieved, it was believed that women could be entirely devoted to *Angkar* and thus increase production. Women were usually caught between the KR rules, the moral principles of Islam, and survival. In every decision they made, they had to manage the delicate and dangerous balance of survival against their religious practice. In making such decisions, women were distressed intellectually, emotionally, and psychologically. Ironically, the violent policies of the KR that destroyed their way of life encouraged women to hold on to their religious faith and obligations as Muslims. Under these harsh conditions, women acted as caretakers of their religion and family secretly, after the

*imam*²⁰¹ and religious leaders were targeted and their husbands were taken away or killed. Women grappled with the process of transforming their lives and religious beliefs in order to comply with the KR policies while maintaining their moral values.²⁰² Despite fear, women adopted a stance of patience, which provided them with the moral strength necessary to live their lives during the regime.

Domination and Resistance: Women's Responses to the KR Treatment

Cham Muslim women had different strategies for survival, most commonly compliance and resistance. Compliance and resistance seemed to evolve in their everyday lives under the regime. Cham Muslim women worked hard to prove that they were loyal to *Angkar*. They tried to avoid direct confrontation with KR cadres, except intellectual confrontation as Halimah's story shows. She argued with the children's unit leader when the leader deprived her daughter of food. However, they did not wholeheartedly perform their jobs, nor did they accept the KR claims that their policies would bring prosperity. Rather they saw that KR policies were violent and paradoxical. As discussed in the findings, women tried to disguise their resistance and pretended that they were complying with the KR.

This study describes the forms of women's resistance in response to the daily threats and acts of violence that they faced.²⁰³ They did not have physical weapons or

²⁰¹ Religious leader or leading prayer. Three levels of *imam* are widely known in Cambodia: 1) Village hakem who serves as imam masjid (mosque); 2) The imam srok (district imam); and 3) The imam khet (provincial imam), all of which are supervised by a *mufti*.

²⁰² Interviews with Cham Muslim women interviewees, 2005-2009.

²⁰³ James C Scott. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xvi.

forces to fight a battle, but they had spiritual and moral strength. One may argue that people resist any kinds of oppression. However, resistance takes place in various ways and for various purposes. Cham Muslim women resisted because of their personal commitment to their ethnic identity, their gender identity, and their religious identity. Their anti-KR sentiments were drawn from their inner strength, while their physical strength deteriorated through forced labor and physical punishment. In a similar context, their own resistance and various responses to the atrocities, which Shoshana Felman calls, “empirical historical facts” and “the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination,” are called into their testimony. This process “entails another repetition of experience of separation and loss” but allows them to recall a “certain repossession of it.”²⁰⁴

Some male religious leaders of the Cham chose to die in the name of Islam, either by engaging in a rebellion or by continuing to pray. Women had to make the decision about whether or not to continue practicing their Islamic faith. Instead of making a single choice, some made multiple decisions with nuanced feelings, transforming their religion into a new form of Islamic practice. For women, treasuring an Islamic identity under the KR regime did not mean fighting physically or dying as martyrs, but rather practicing the five pillars of Islam secretly, especially the profession of faith (*shahadah*) and prayer when possible and rearing their babies and children in the circle of Islam. Cham Muslim

²⁰⁴ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 91.

women, like other women, were the care-takers of religion and the most stubborn defenders of the faith.²⁰⁵

Oral History Materials: Strengths and Limitations

Oral history has both strengths and limitations. Some historians have argued that it is risky to use memory as a historical source because memory is fragmented. They question oral sources such as interviews and narratives, stressing the issue of credibility and subjectivity. Also, they point out that the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer can affect what is remembered and narrated, and the interpretation and representation of people's lives may be affected by the subjectivity of the researcher/interviewer. In addition, oral history cannot tell us everything that happened and how it happened.²⁰⁶

I am aware of these limitations, and my aim in this project is to document Cham Muslim gendered perspectives. I do not expect that the study of Cham Muslim women's oral history can reveal everything about the KR regime or women in general. I expect to learn how women lived their lives during the regime, how the KR policies impacted them as reflected in the ways they narrated their stories, and how they continue to connect the past with the present. For these purposes, I do not consider the limitations of oral history as weaknesses. Oral history helps us understand the human experience of history; it gives us the voices of marginalized groups, "history from below."

²⁰⁵ Susan Slyomovics. *Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

²⁰⁶ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds). *The Oral History Reader*, 1-5.

Although this study is not generalizable, it sheds light on other women's experience of atrocities because survivors share certain common responses. Oral history gives women a voice, and by empowering women to speak out, it provides new insights and a gendered perspective on the atrocities.²⁰⁷ Each Cham Muslim woman has kept in mind her own truth comprised of facts, opinions, and feelings. This provides less information about the details of events but more about their impact. The narratives reveal "sense-making" rather than the factual event itself.²⁰⁸ Women narrators tend to focus more on people rather than events, thereby providing distinctive insights into the psychology of historical actors.

What Cham Muslim women remember and express in their narratives is important. Women use narrative to construct their own stories in connection with the events and to give meaning to their experiences.²⁰⁹ For example, in recalling the evacuation process from their hometowns to rural areas, women were not interested in narrating who made the policies and how these were implemented. Rather, they narrated what they saw along the way, how they felt about it, and how it affected them. They tried to make sense of what happened. But when they recalled events, they were filled with the horror of this unprecedented event as they expressed their fear and recalled their loss and separation.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart and Karen Weathermon (eds): *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 63.

²⁰⁸ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different." in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd Edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. (London: Routledge, 2006), 36.

²⁰⁹ Felman and Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, 59.

²¹⁰ This was examined in chapter 3.

As the three main themes show, Cham Muslim women's narratives of their lives under the KR regime reflect fragmented, contested, and conflicted memories. Women could not recall full events and forgot some dates; sometimes they could not tell their stories in chronological order. Given the emotional pain one might experience when recalling traumatic experiences, women find it hard to recall because they fear, as Butalia warns, "reliving the past"²¹¹ or "re-experiencing" it, as Felman comments.²¹² To some extent, recalling the loss of family members makes narrators feel guilty due to the choices they made – they question whether a particular choice caused the death of family members. Under the KR regime, for women themselves there was no clear boundary between good mothers and poor mothers as both had to make choices in order to survive, and this left a sense of guilt for many women survivors, although they sacrificed so much.

I have noticed that these women need an "empathic" listener to bear witness of their act of remembering and the repossession of their loss and recognize their suffering. Hence the role of listener is very important to make the narrator feel that they are not alone to bear their suffering, but at least they have someone to bear witness of their suffering and to ease their pain. So the listener/interviewer takes responsibility to bear witness to the story that the narrator may not be able to carry alone, and this makes "repossession of the act of witnessing" possible. As Felman puts it, "this joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth."²¹³

²¹¹Butalia. *The Other Side of Silence*, 18.

²¹²Felman and Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, 67.

²¹³*Ibid.*, p. 85.

Cham Muslim women recalled some parts of their stories consistently across multiple interviews, such as missing family members, struggling to survive, delivering a child, practicing religion, and sacrificing for family members. Such consistency suggests that these memories are the most salient in terms of their present lives.

Each narrative becomes a very important piece of information for history – a tool to search for truth, justice, and a way of preserving memory for the next generation. As Elizabeth Tonkin puts it, “[T]o tell a story is to take arms against the threat of time...the telling of a story preserves the teller from oblivion.”²¹⁴

Moving Forward: Oral History and Post-Violence Recovery

KR atrocities left huge wounds because, as Elizabeth Tonkin explains, “The present we live in is built from past events.”²¹⁵ The past is represented by people’s present thoughts. The memories of Cambodian survivors have been shaped and reshaped by their experiences of massive trauma and loss. “The massive trauma,” according to Antonius C.G.M Robben, “is more than the sum total of individual suffering because it ruptures social bonds, destroys group identity, undermines a sense of community, and entails cultural disorientation when taken-for-granted meanings become obsolete.”²¹⁶ Women have been trying to heal their wounds in various ways ranging from religious to non-religious. By encouraging them to talk and by listening carefully to their stories as

²¹⁴ Quoted in Elizabeth Tonkin. *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*. (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1992), 3.

²¹⁵ Elizabeth Tonkin. *Narrating Our Pasts*, 9.

²¹⁶ Antonius C.G.M Robben, “How Traumatized Societies Remembers. The Aftermath of Argentina’s Dirty War” *Cultural Critique*. 59 (Winter 2005): 125.

well as letting them know the power of their stories, we may help them break the silence and their memories may escape distortion and oblivion.

Although they lived through the KR regime, women still have many questions about why and how the Khmer Rouge killed people. Many are still searching for disappeared family members. Other Cham Muslim women are waiting to hear from their missing family members. Some Cham Muslim women still hope that missing family members are alive. For example, in Phnom Penh, Sarifah, age 84, is still waiting for her two sons who disappeared during the regime and were never heard from them again. She hopes that they are still alive. She looks at their photos, which she managed to save from the KR. Her memory of her lost sons is reflected in the photos.

By examining the ongoing legacy of the past within the family and society, oral history creates a greater awareness of the need for transitional justice to ensure preserving, acknowledging victims' dignity, building the rule of law, and establishing peaceful communities. Transitional justice refers to "a response to systematic policies and widespread violations of human rights"²¹⁷ that aims at dealing with past atrocities by bringing democracy, human right, and reparations for the victims. One of the core elements of transitional justice is gender equity or gender justice. Analyses of how women experienced the KR regime differently from men highlights patterns of gender-based violence. This enables us to pursue reasonable justice for female victims.²¹⁸

Asked what kind of justice, Cham Muslim women provide that they need both retributive, which is through the ECCC, and restorative justice, various forms of

²¹⁷ <http://www.ictj.org/en/tj/> retrieved May 10, 2010. Retrieved May 10, 2010.

²¹⁸ <http://www.ictj.org/en/tj/> retrieved May 10, 2010. Retrieved May 10 2010.

reparation, to remedy what they have lost. They give the reason that it is rational that the KR leaders put on trial because it is in accordance with Islamic law. In Islam, Halimah emphasizes, “those who commit good receive good result, and those who commit bad will receive bad result.”²¹⁹ I found this compatible with Buddhism’s law of *karma*. In addition, the most pursuing goal that women need from the tribunal is not only justice, but also truth about why did they [the KR] kill people.

As for moral justice, women refer to reparation. None of them mentioned physical compensation “money.” Rather, they want mosques to be repaired or built, public and religious schools in their community, clinic and health care services, and free well-being plans. They acknowledge that all of these cannot resurrect their lost loved ones or are not equivalent to what they lost, but they said that at least these may make them feel a relief.

To supplement the judicial and moral mechanism, they also emphasize that the KR history education and memory preservation are of great significance. In this regard, DC-Cam, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport, is working to fill in this gap. While this will become a formal genocide education,²²⁰ oral history project will be branded as an informal KR history education.²²¹ This project has laid a concrete foundation to preserve the stories of hundreds of surviving Cham Muslim women.

²¹⁹ She said that the KR committed big mistake that cannot be forgiven. She also wanted to bring lower KR cadre to face justice too because they were the ones who made her suffered.

²²⁰ See http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/Genocide_Education.htm

²²¹ See http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Public_Info/Promoting_Genocide_Education_and_Reconciliation_through_Oral_History.pdf

The recorded oral accounts of Cham Muslim women's experience under the KR may be essential for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) to support its genocide charge against the KR.²²² In other words, while written evidence is limited, oral history may become an important piece of evidentiary information that adds weight to existing documents in a legal proceeding.²²³

As a researcher and a member of what Susan Kaiser calls the "post-memory of terror generation,"²²⁴ I believe that it is important to hear the stories of Cham Muslim women survivors. Although the scars remain, Cham Muslim women struggle to survive and nurture their children. Telling stories to reformulate their existence in order to break the silence and build hope for future of their children makes them stronger. In this respect, much work remains to be done to observe how women's lives have changed and how they have been contributing to building community and the nation.

²²² The ECCC co-investigating judges charged the four surviving senior Khmer Rouge leaders: Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, and Khieu Samphan with genocide against the Vietnamese and Cham Muslims in December 2010. See <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2009121730288/National-news/genocide-charges-laid-at-krt.html>

²²³ <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/english/default.aspx>

²²⁴ Susan Kaiser. *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the "Dirty War."* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002), 2.

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Author's interview with Sos Zarah, age 55, Chhouk Sar commune, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province, 2009. During the 1970s, Zarah fled her hometown, Chhouk Sar commune, to Phnom Penh city to catch a plane to Banteay Meanchey and then to Battambang. She was subsequently evacuated with her family to Pursat province. After the fall of the KR in 1979, she did not want to live in the country because she was afraid of the similar atrocity committed, she decided to go to the camp and then to the US. She is currently living in California, US, but she has frequently traveled back and forth to her hometown in the past few years. She is an assemble worker for an electronic company in Santa Ana, California.

Author's interview with Mousa Sokha, age 51, at Wat (monastery) Kambol, Chaom Chao district, Phnom Penh, August 18, 2009. Sokha was born in Kaong Kang commune, Ponhea Krek district, Kampong Cham province. Now, as a farmer, she lives in Snuol

village, Snuol commune, Snuol district, Kratie province with her husband and children. She had been interviewed by Pheng Pong Rasy and Sou Bunsour on the topic of her old photos and her revolutionary background, September 28-30, 2001.

Author's interview with Lek Riya, age 63, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, 2009. Riya was born in Kampong Luong commune, Ponhea Leu district, Kandal province. She is a traditional herb seller and healer. She lives with her husband, children, in-laws, and grand children.

Author's interview with Ros Aishah, age 54, O-Chrov commune, Prey Nup district, Sihanouk province, 2009. Aishah married to a Cham man in 1980, but divorced her husband when she was 8-month pregnancy with her youngest daughter. Now, she lives in her hometown, O-Chrov commune, with her two children, while her oldest son got married and moved to live in Kampot province.

Author's interview with Sles Phors, age 57, Kampong Sambuor commune, Kampong Cham district, Kampong Cham province, February 4, 2007. Phors is a clothing vendor; she sells Cham Muslim clothes and variety of scarf. Her first husband, a former Lon Nol soldier who separated from her in 1973, remarried a new wife and moves to live in Russey Keo district, but Phors and her husband as well as the new wife usually contact each other in a friendly manner. Her second marriage which was arranged by the KR in 1978 was short-lived. Her second husband left her in 1979 and married a new wife. Phors is now a widow.

Author's interview with Yeb Maisom, age 58, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, September 8, 2007. Maisom was born in Peus commune, Kroch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province. She married to a Cham man and moved to live in Chrang Chamres sub-district, Phnom Penh in the 1980s. She has two jobs now: a midwife and fisherwoman.

Author's interviews with Sman Zainoab, age 66, Kampong Sambuor commune, Kampong Cham district, Kampong Cham province, February 5, 2007 and July 25, 2009. Zainoab was born in Tanung commune, Koh Sotin district, Kampong Cham province. She has lived in Kampong Sambuor since 1979. She is a Qur'anic teacher and midwife.

Author's interviews with Teur Sros, age 43, DC-Cam office, August 30, 2007 and August 18, 2009. Sros was born in Kampong Luong commune, Ponhea Leu district, Kandal province. She has lived nearby her siblings and parents in Slar Ket commune, Battambang district, Battambang province since 1979.

Author's interviews with Phaung Lim, age 73, Banteay Dei commune, Kandeang district, Pursat province, February 26, 2007 and August 8, 2009. Lim remains a widow after her husband was taken away by the KR. She lives with her daughters and grand children in Banteay Dei commune, her birthplace.

Author's interviews with Seth Maly, age 59, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, December 26, 2007 and August 13, 2009. Maly was born in Svay Khleang commune, Kroch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province. She moved to live in Chrang Chamres sub-district in the 1980s. Her husband, Yeb Him, passed away in 1986. She remains a widow and made every possible way to raise her four children. She uses her various skills to earn income to support her family. She is a former member of women's association and now a seamstress.

Author's interviews with Tolors Rohimah, age 62, Kokor commune, Kampong Siem district, Kampong Cham province, July 25, 2009. She was born Kokor commune. She remains a widow after her husband was taken away during the KR regime. She currently lives with her children in her hometown. One of her children migrated to Malaysia many years ago to earn an employment.

Author's interview with Sos Aishah, age 74, Prek Bak commune, Stung Trang district, Kampong Cham province, December 23, 2007. She was born in Prek Bak and now she still lives there with her grandchildren.

Author's interview with A Aishah, age 57, Svay Dangcum commune, Siem Reap district, Siem Reap province, 2007. Aishah was born in Kampong Luong commune, Ponhea Leu district, Kandal province. When the fighting escalated in her hometown, she fled to live in Km 8. After her marriage, she moved to live in Pailin city. When the KR came to power, she was evacuated to Battambang province and lived there until 1979. She finally ended up with her current settlement in Siem Reap province. She has two children, one son and one daughter. Both of them got married and her son has a separate house in another district. She lives with her daughter and grandson in Svay Dangcum commune after her daughter divorced her husband.

Author's interview with Sos Seiha, age 50, Prek Saman commune, Chhlaung district, Kratie province, May 28, 2007. Seiha is a representative of Cham Muslim women in her birthplace. She lives with her husband in the commune, her birthplace.

Author's interview with Toek Sary, age 75, Kampong Tralach commune, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province, May 17, 2007. Sary remains a widow and lives with her children in her hometown, Kampong Tralach commune.

Author's interviews with No Halimah, age 67, Kampong Kong commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal province, September 27, 2005 and August 17, 2009. Halimah's birthplace was in Kampong Thmei commune, the same province, and she moved to live in Kampong Kong commune after she married to *hakem* Yahya. She is a housewife.

Author's interview with Kong Sarifah, age 84, Chrang Chamres sub-district, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh city, September 9, 2005. Sarifah was born in Kampong Luong

commune, Ponhea Leu district, Kandal province. She moved to live in Chrang Chamres sub-district in the 1970s before the KR arrived.

Author's interview with Haji Ibrahim, Trapeang Sangke commune, Kampot district, Kampot province, 2005.

Author's interview with Tae Aminah, age 56, Trapeang Sangke commune, Kampot district, Kampot province, November 22, 2005. Trapeang Sangke commune is Aminah's place of birth. Her first marriage ended in 1965. In 1968 she married a Cham man and moved to live with her husband in Prey Nup district, Sihanouk province. Her husband died of exhaustion during the KR regime. With her few skills, she made an all-out effort to raise her children. She decided to marry Cham widower because of her children in the 1980s. She returned to live in Trapeang Sangke commune in the 1980s.

Author's and Hin Sotheany's interview with Kup Aishah, age 52, Trapeang Chhouk village, Boeng commune, Baray district, Kampong Thom province, October 16, 2005. Aishah was born in Trapeang Chhouk village. She was evacuated to Bak Sna village, border of Kampong Thom-Kampong Cham provinces. She returned to live in her hometown in 1979. I have several conversations about her perspectives on the KR and the tribunal with her DC-Cam invited her to observe the KR trial proceedings in Phnom Penh between 2007 and 2008.

Author's interview with Sos Pheah, age 46, Boeng commune, Baray district, Kampong Thom province, October 13, 2005. Pheah's birth place, Tuol La-veang village, was turned into a cemetery that she could not return to settle there after the KR collapsed. She moved to live in a nearby village, the same commune. Both her husband and Pheah are Qur'anic teachers in the village. I had an informal conversation with her about her thoughts on the KR and the KR tribunal when she came to visit one of her relatives in Phnom Penh in 2008.

Author's interview with Kalichip, age 67, Prek Thmei commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal province, September 27, 2005. Kalichip was a former head of women's association in her village. She played a vital role in advocating gender equity in her community. Unfortunately, she passed away in 2007. Her family still lives in the same commune.

Author's interview with Sman Ny, age 50, Prek Thmei commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal province, September 26, 2005. Born in Prek Thmei commune, Ny is a former chief of women's association in her commune. She is now a seamstress and still actively advocates women's interests. She lives with her only son in the same village.

Author's interview with Timah, age 56, Kampong Trach commune, Romeah district, Svay Rieng province, November 27, 2005. Timah was born in Chhouk Sar commune, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province. She moved to live in Kampong

Trach commune with her husband and the whole family in the 1980s. Her husband is a head of the blacksmiths, a family business in the commune.

Author's interviews with Uom Seila, age 52, Norea commune, Sangke district, Battambang province, August 3, 2005 and 2008. Seila was born in Norea commune and lives in the same commune. Seila has two children. After her husband was taken away during the KR regime, she remains a widow bringing up her children alone. She is a former head of women's association in her village and was recruited to join K-5 mission at the rear. Seila was also asked to safeguard her community and women in her group in the 1980s. She is now retired.

Author's, Youk Chhang's, and Kalyan Sann's interview with Mayas, age 67; Khari, age 30; and Khati, Wat Tamim commune, Sangke district, Battambang province, April 2, 2004. Mayas and Khati are sisters and they delivered children on the same day, when the KR began evacuating people from cities and towns to the countryside in April 1975. Khari is Mayas's daughter. After the KR collapsed, they returned to live in the same commune.

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