

Treatment of the Vietnamese Minority

In Democratic Kampuchea

From a Comparative Perspective

By

Elizabeth Do

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Political Science Department

Advisor: Terry Karl

Stanford University

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## Introduction

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge (KR) seized control of Cambodia and renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea (DK). During its three and a half years of rule, the ultra-communist regime attempted to transform Democratic Kampuchea into an agrarian utopia. As part of its communist goals and opposition to foreign forces, the Khmer Rouge ordered the mass evacuation of cities, enforced communal living, instituted policies for forced labor, and exterminated hundreds of thousands of suspected “enemies” of Angkar (the Organization). Determined to eliminate anyone resistant to its revolution or who didn’t fit into its ideals, the Khmer Rouge targeted people belonging to different class, political and ethnic groups in Democratic Kampuchea. Victims included people from the cities, intellectuals, monks, business people, officers and soldiers from the previous Lon Nol regime, people who had been educated in a foreign country or spoke a foreign language, and different ethnic minorities such as the Chinese, Cham Muslims, and Vietnamese.

While the Khmer Rouge had a number of targets, its mistreatment of the Vietnamese minority in Democratic Kampuchea presents an important case study. Not only do Khmer and Vietnamese people share a long history of ethnic tension but beginning in 1977, Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam were involved in a border war. Considering these factors, many scholars have raised the question of whether the Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea were subject to discriminatory treatment by the Khmer Rouge, which is related to the broader question of whether the Khmer Rouge committed genocide against the Vietnamese.

The first task in answering these questions is finding out if the Khmer Rouge treated the Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea any differently than it treated other people. My thesis

takes on part of this task by devoting a whole study to comparing the KR treatment of the Vietnamese with its treatment of the Khmer ethnic group. I pose two questions:

- (1) Did the Khmer Rouge treat ethnic Khmer and Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea differently?
- (2) If so, what explains this disparity in treatment?

After extensive investigation, I have found that the Khmer Rouge's day-to-day treatment of the Khmer and Vietnamese population, at least in the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea, did not differ greatly. However, there were some episodes of disparate treatment, particularly in the areas of "Forced Uniformity," "Expulsion" and "Extermination," which I explain in greater depth in my paper. Finally, it appears that both ethnic and political factors were at play in these instances of disparate treatment. I support my argument by drawing on data from existing research, primary documents from the KR period, and my interviews with survivors of the KR regime.

I have organized my thesis into 4 chapters. The first chapter provides some background on the KR period and surveys the literature that has already been written on the topic. The second chapter discusses the parameters of my study and the methodology I employed in my data collection and analysis. In my third chapter, I present the results of the six categories of KR treatment that I analyzed. Finally, the fourth chapter extrapolates from my results to answer the 2 questions I've posed in the beginning of this paper, and discuss what my conclusions imply for the question of discrimination.

## Chapter 1

### Discrimination in the Context of Mass State Terror?

The Khmer Rouge operated a system of state terror that resulted in approximately 1.7 million deaths. The regime was only finally deposed when the Vietnamese army captured Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979. During its three and a half years of rule, the Khmer Rouge practiced widespread and systematic execution, arrest, and torture in order to transform Cambodian society into a communist utopia.<sup>1</sup> There were two components to the KR ideology. Firstly, the Khmer Rouge advocated the need to create a “pure” Khmer society.<sup>2</sup> This need for purification meant not only detaching from the past social order and norms, but also eliminating any aspect in society that was “borrowed from or influenced by foreign cultures.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the Khmer Rouge adhered to a Marxist political theory and incorporated elements from Mao Tse-tung’s, Vo Nguyen Giap’s, and Vladimir Lenin’s philosophies.<sup>4</sup> Their teachings inspired the Khmer Rouge to incorporate issues such as class conflict, “people’s war,” and “autonomous socialist development” into their Cambodian revolution.<sup>5</sup>

Once in power, the Khmer Rouge enacted a double-pronged plan to achieve its communist utopia. First, the regime reorganized, and often times destroyed, “many of Cambodia’s oldest and most enduring institutions: religion, the family, cities, natural villages, private property, land tenure, money, and the monarchy.”<sup>6</sup> “Then, they [the Khmer Rouge] sealed off the borders, collectivized property, and dismantled the country’s infrastructure:

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<sup>1</sup> Mydans, Seth. “Researchers Put Together Story of the Khmer Rouge.” *The New York Times*. 15 Sept. 2002. 1 August 2009. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Etcheson, Craig. *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984. Print, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Quinn, Kenneth M. “The Pattern and Scope of Violence.” *Cambodia 1975-1978*. Jackson, Karl. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989. Print, p. 192.



schools, places of worship, banks, businesses, post offices, and transportation.”<sup>7</sup> As the regime reorganized social and political institutions in Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge also sought to restructure the more personal facets of Cambodian society: the Khmer people’s minds. Pol Pot wanted people’s priorities to shift from selfish individualism to selfless collectivism.<sup>8</sup> However, his plans for such a pure and egalitarian society clashed with the reality of a socially unequal and culturally diverse Cambodian society. These opposing factors meant that the Khmer Rouge often had to take up violence in order to carry out its goals.

Terror permeated throughout all aspects of Cambodian society. People were constantly disappearing, told they were going to be “reeducated,” carted away, and never returned. Whole families and communities were massacred and people today can still identify mass grave sites. Although the high death toll may suggest that the Khmer Rouge went on a rampage and killed people in an indiscriminate and absurd manner, the KR system of terror did in fact follow some logic. Quinn writes:

In fact, the killing has a clear, distinct purpose—the systematic eradication of those persons who embodied or perpetuated the notion of individualism...[the Khmer Rouge] strove to teach each person that any deviation from the general party line—any selfish act—would result in the most severe punishment and probable death. Cambodian society was to become a giant agricultural factory with each person filling a distinct, specific function, like a small part of a machine.<sup>9</sup>

While nearly everyone experienced terror and suffering to some extent during the KR period, some people were certainly more susceptible to abuse by the regime. Those who were particularly vulnerable to KR mistreatment came from a variety of backgrounds and identified as Khmer as well as Vietnamese.

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<sup>7</sup> Beang, Pivoine, and Coughill, Wynne. *Vanished: Stories from Cambodia’s New People under Democratic Kampuchea*. Cambodia: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2006. Print, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Quinn, p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Khmer people who belonged to the “new” people group represented one of the largest groups that the Khmer Rouge targeted. New people were people who lived in the areas, mostly cities, that weren’t under KR control prior to April 17, 1975 (when the Khmer Rouge officially took control of Cambodia). For this reason, new people were also referred to as “April 17” people and looked down upon for “not join[ing] the revolution before April 1975.”<sup>10</sup> Because “new” was a general term for those living in urban areas, the new group consisted of a variety of people, including politicians, civil servants, soldiers and police from the Lon Nol regime, business people, doctors, nurses, teachers, students, workers, clergy, and homemakers.<sup>11</sup> The new group also included Khmer people who had been educated or militarily trained outside of Cambodia (e.g. in Vietnam). Despite people’s diverse backgrounds, the Khmer Rouge classified them in the new group because they all embodied characteristics that opposed the pure, egalitarian ideal that the regime envisioned for Democratic Kampuchea. Their label as “new” people juxtaposed them with the “old” or “base” people whom the Khmer Rouge identified as the true proletariat. The base people were people who had lived in the countryside and regions already under KR control since 1970.<sup>12</sup> The contrast between the two groups exploited the resentment that some rural residents harbored against urban dwellers, who they felt “looked down upon them, enjoyed a much easier life, and supported Lon Nol, who was responsible for the overthrowing of Sihanouk and the carpet bombing of the countryside.”<sup>13</sup>

To the Khmer Rouge, new people were not only tainted elements to the party’s revolution, but also a very real threat to the regime’s power. The Khmer Rouge identified professional teachers and students, or “intellectuals,” as corrupt and “one of the major threats to

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<sup>10</sup> Jackson, Karl. *Cambodia 1975-1978*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989. Print, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Beang and Cougill, Chapter Titles.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, p. 166n.

<sup>13</sup> Hinton, Alexander. “A Head for an Eye: Revenge in Cambodian Genocide.” *American Ethnologist*. 25(3):352-377, 1998, p. 12.

their continued rule and to the smooth transition to the new society they were imposing.”<sup>14</sup> New people did not adhere to the Khmer Rouge’s communist ideology, and their high numbers in the country meant that they could potentially overthrow Democratic Kampuchea’s new, precarious government.

Although many Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea, such as those from the cities, belonged to the “new” group, they also constituted a separate victim group themselves. The Khmer Rouge’s targeting of the Vietnamese must be understood within the broader context of Khmer-Vietnamese ethnic relations. The Khmer and Vietnamese people have historically held tense relations involving territorial, class and political conflicts dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The conflict began when Kampuchean and Vietnamese empire leaders practiced cruel acts of violence against the people of the other ethnicity. In one incident in 1751, the Khmer king commanded his subjects to carry out the mass murder of all Vietnamese people in Cambodia.<sup>16</sup> In another incident, Vietnam’s Nguyen Dynasty emperor Ming Mang supposedly “bur[ied] [Khmers] alive and allow[ed] only their heads to show to be used as a stand for their braziers.”<sup>17</sup> Kampuchea and Vietnam have also engaged in territorial disputes over the Vietnam Mekong Delta, a region Cambodians believe Vietnam stole from Kampuchea.<sup>18</sup> According to Hinton, such territorial disputes eventually led Khmer nationalists to render the Vietnamese as the “evil

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<sup>14</sup> Quinn, p. 187.

<sup>15</sup> Mak, Kanika. “Genocide and Irredentism under Democratic Kampuchea (1975-79).” *Yale Center for International and Area Studies. Genocide Studies Program. Working Paper No. 23*: 2004. Print, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Kiernan, Ben. “External and indigenous sources of Khmer Rouge ideology,” *The Cambodian Genocide Program at Yale University*. n.d. 1 Sept. 2008. <[www.yale.edu/cgp/Ideology\\_Sources.doc](http://www.yale.edu/cgp/Ideology_Sources.doc)>, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson, p. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Kiernan, Ben. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. Print, p. 58.

‘other.’”<sup>19</sup> “While both the Thai and the Vietnamese had ‘swallowed’ Cambodian lands, the Vietnamese were perceived as particularly dangerous.”<sup>20</sup>

The historical migration and settlement of Vietnamese people into Kampuchean territory also led to class tensions between Khmer and Vietnamese residents. Some Vietnamese people in Cambodia worked as financial lenders, an occupation that some Khmer people associated with the exploitation of the poor.<sup>21</sup> Many ethnic Vietnamese also served as prominent leaders in the government and army, which further deepened class divisions between the two groups.<sup>22</sup> The Vietnamese minority in Cambodia even faced state-sponsored massacre. In the years prior to KR rule, ethnic Vietnamese suffered several attacks at the hands of the Lon Nol government. From March through April 1970, Lon Nol executed pogroms that specifically targeted ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia and resulted in four thousand deaths.<sup>23</sup> According to Norodom Sihanouk, former king of Cambodia, “In 1969 there were more than 400,000 ethnic Vietnamese in Kampuchea. After [Lon Nol’s 1970] coup [that deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk], Lon Nol and his supporters eliminated or banished to South Vietnam at least half of these Yuons.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the Khmer-Vietnamese relationship was marred by distrust, hostility, and violence. For these reasons, the Vietnamese in Cambodia were often referred to as the “historic enemy.”<sup>25</sup>

The ethnic tensions between Khmer and Vietnamese people worsened as a border war broke out between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam in 1977. The CPK (Kampuchea Communist Party) and Vietnam’s ruling communist party, the Vietnam Workers’ Party (VWP), initially shared a strong alliance and mutual support. However, despite their initial potential for

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<sup>19</sup> Hinton, Alexander. *Why Did They Kill?* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Print, pp. 215-216.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Verdeja, Ernesto. “On Genocide: Five Contributing Factors,” *Contemporary Politics*. 8.1: March 2002. Print, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, p. 153.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.154.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Vickery, Michael. "Democratic Kampuchea—CIA to the Rescue," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. 14.4: 1842. Print, p. 9.

an Indochinese brotherhood, relations between the VWP and CPK deteriorated during the years of KR rule. Resentful of their Vietnamese “anh” (older brother) and his seemingly paternalistic agenda, the Khmer Rouge sought an independent revolution for Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>26</sup> Pol Pot fervently argued that the “interests of ‘Vietnamese brothers’ should not dominate in the determination of CPK policy.”<sup>27</sup> The Khmer Rouge’s plans for self-determination became clear to the Vietnamese in early 1977, when Pol Pot refused to attend a Cambodian-Vietnamese leaders’ meeting suggested by Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Hoang Van Loi.<sup>28</sup> Political strife soon turned into armed conflict in mid-1977, when minor border skirmishes between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam escalated into an all-out war. At that point, foreign relations between the two countries became increasingly combative.

The Khmer Rouge’s tensions with Vietnam abroad even created paranoia within its own party. Fearing Vietnamese infiltration into the CPK, the Khmer Rouge began to purge many of its “pro-Vietnamese” and suspected renegade party members.<sup>29</sup> Other victims included people “who had professional training, extensive residence overseas, or contracts with non-Khmers.”<sup>30</sup> The Khmer Rouge even conducted background checks on their current and incoming party members.<sup>31</sup> In a 1978 statement to the Communist Workers Party of Denmark, Khmer Rouge Deputy Secretary Nuon Chea explained that such extreme party cleansing was a top priority for the Khmer Rouge. Chea announced, “We are not worried about the external, military aggression. We worry most of all about the enemy inside.”<sup>32</sup> Paranoia reached a climax during the 1978

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<sup>26</sup> Mosyakov, Dmitry. *The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists: A history of their relations as told in the Soviet archives*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006, Print, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Chandler, David. *Voices from S-21*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Chea, Nuon. “CPK Statement of the Communist Party of Kampuchea to the Communist Workers Party of Denmark July 1978.” Speech. July 1978, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

Eastern Zone massacres. Prior to the massacres, Democratic Kampuchea was facing a losing battle with Vietnam along the border. The grim state of the affairs provoked Angkar to accuse the Eastern Zone officers of colluding with the Vietnamese. To punish the Eastern Zone officers for their betrayal, Angkar carried out a massive purge of the 1.5 million Eastern Zone people who were deemed to have “Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds.”<sup>33</sup> The purge resulted in countless arrests and deaths, as well as many KR cadres and officers fleeing to Vietnam. A document from the Khmer Rouge’s central security center, Tuol Sleng, “entitled ‘Daily List of Prisoners Held 20 April 1978’ shows that there were at least 437 cadres from the Eastern Zone being held prisoner at Tuol Sleng at that time. This was almost ten times more than the number of cadres from any other zone.”<sup>34</sup>

A combination of ethnic and political factors could have affected the Khmer Rouge’s policy and treatment towards the Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea. Stories of historical Vietnamese abuse were undoubtedly embedded in Cambodia’s national memory and certainly could have reemerged during KR rule. Although the Khmer Rouge’s war with Vietnam and cleansing within its own party didn’t directly involve the ethnic Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea, the political climate could have increased the Khmer Rouge’s distrust of the Vietnamese in general, with ethnic Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea being viewed as guilty by association. Vietnam’s close proximity to Democratic Kampuchea raised the stakes even more so by heightening the Khmer Rouge’s security concerns. These factors may have contributed to increasing KR paranoia about VWP spies in Democratic Kampuchea and exacerbated the already existing Khmer distrust towards the Vietnamese in the country. No other

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<sup>33</sup> Kiernan, Ben. “The Original Cambodia.” *New Internationalist*. (242): 1993. Print.

<sup>34</sup> Chigas, George. “Building a Case Against the Khmer Rouge: Evidence from the Tuol Sleng and Santebal Archives.” *Harvard Asia Quarterly*. Volume IV, No. 1. Winter 2000. 1 Sept. 2008. <<http://www.asiaquarterly.com/content/view/61/>>.

ethnic or social group targeted by the Khmer Rouge in the country faced such circumstances, and as such, the ethnic Vietnamese experience requires close examination.

Scholars have long debated whether the ethnic Vietnamese who remained in Democratic Kampuchea were treated any differently than other groups targeted by the Khmer Rouge and if so, whether the Khmer Rouge's rationale for abusing the Vietnamese was based on racial discrimination, political security concerns, neither or both. Kiernan believes that "There is no question that DK [Democratic Kampuchea] waged a campaign of genocide against ethnic Vietnamese. It is not true that 'virtually all' were expelled in 1975."<sup>35</sup> Duong also argues that the Khmer Rouge indeed enacted discriminatory policies against the Vietnamese, among other ethnic minorities in Democratic Kampuchea, though the "the degree to which they experienced it varied."<sup>36</sup>

Other scholars, however, have "disputed the existence of discriminatory policies towards ethnic minorities" such as the Vietnamese.<sup>37</sup> Chandler adds more weight to the role of politics during the KR period, charging that discrimination occurred more against political enemies than against ethnic Vietnamese.<sup>38</sup> Short also rejects the claim of discrimination, arguing that the Khmer Rouge did not set out to exterminate a 'national, ethnic, racial or religious group.'<sup>39</sup> "In Short's view, Pol Pot combined communist ideology not with genocidal racism, but with his

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<sup>35</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p. 460 in Mak, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Duong, Lhai. "Racial Discrimination by the Khmer Rouge Contributed to the Cambodian Genocide." *Contemporary Issues Companion: Genocide*. Ed. Christina Fisanick. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2007. Print, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Chandler, David. *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1993. Print.

<sup>39</sup> Kiernan, Ben. "Barbaric crimes of a mystical communism seen through its own eyes." *Times Higher Education*. 25 February 2005. 1 April 2010.

<<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=194372&sectioncode=22>>.

‘irrational...cultural heritage,’ including Buddhism, with its idealism and ‘demolition of the individual.’”<sup>40</sup>

On the question of what motivated the Khmer Rouge’s actions against ethnic Vietnamese, Kiernan argues that racism and nativism played central roles. Kiernan believes that the Khmer Rouge viewed the Khmer (the majority ethnic group in Cambodia) as the “pure” and superior ethnicity, leading to the ethnic cleansing and abuse of Vietnamese communities.<sup>41</sup> Other scholars attribute the KR mistreatment of the Vietnamese to the breakdown in diplomatic relations between the CPK and VWP. Vickery gives more weight to this political context, arguing that the primary drivers of the Khmer Rouge’s actions were political and security concerns rather than racism.<sup>42</sup> Mak proposes that the Khmer Rouge was driven by a mix of reasons related to both ethnic and political factors, writing that the Khmer Rouge wanted to “eliminate the Vietnamese people, language and culture from Cambodia as well as reclaim lost Khmer lands in Vietnam.”<sup>43</sup> The Khmer Rouge’s treatment of ethnic Vietnamese could have also been the result of an especially heinous village head, or zealous actions by local KR leaders. In fact, massacres of ethnic Vietnamese in 1976 “were often blamed on the excessive use of violence by local party officials when carrying out anti-Vietnamese directives.”<sup>44</sup>

The current debate over the KR treatment of ethnic Vietnamese reveals the contentious nature of the subject. Duong writes that one challenge related to this issue is “the complexity of delineating what constitutes racial discrimination.”<sup>45</sup> Many questions arise: Did the Khmer Rouge target ethnic Vietnamese based on their ethnicity or their image as a political threat, or a

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Westad, Odd Arne, and Quinn-Judge, Sophie. *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972-79*. London, England: Routledge, 2006. Print, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Vickery, Michael. *Cambodia, 1975-1982*. Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1984. Print.

<sup>43</sup> Mak, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Mak, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Duong, p. 1.



combination of both? Does a government's targeting of a group based on political factors (versus ethnic factors) change the nature of the atrocity? Does such political targeting qualify as racial discrimination because of its resulting impact on a specific ethnic group? Essentially, what are the boundaries of the term "genocide?" All of these questions matter significantly for understanding history and politics, as well as for the Cambodian people's pursuit of truth and reconciliation after such a tragedy.

## Chapter 2

### Research Methodology

This section will discuss the methodology of my data collection and data analysis. Before delving into these topics, I will begin by defining the parameters of my study. As mentioned in my introduction, this paper addresses two questions:

- (1) Did the Khmer Rouge treat ethnic Khmer and Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea differently?
- (2) If so, what explains this disparity in treatment?

I investigate these questions within the time frame of the “KR period,” which I define as the period in which the Khmer Rouge officially ruled Cambodia: April 17, 1975 to January 7, 1979. The definitions of “ethnic Khmer” and “ethnic Vietnamese” are important in order understand whom I’m referring to when I discuss the different groups affected by the Khmer Rouge’s policy and when I refer to my informants. Being ethnically Khmer means being mostly or completely of Khmer descent. I determined my informants’ ethnicities by asking about the ethnic identity of their parents. In contrast, I place someone in the ethnic Vietnamese category if he or she has any Vietnamese blood, as this was the minimalist criteria that the Khmer Rouge used in their targeting of the Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea. Whether someone is 1% or 100% Vietnamese, I refer to him or her as ethnically Vietnamese in my study. I apply the same rule that I use to identify “ethnic Vietnamese” to identify “ethnic Chinese” in my interview pool. When I refer to “ethnic Vietnamese” or “Vietnamese” in this paper, I am referring to the ethnic Vietnamese who lived in Cambodia during the KR period. At times I will refer to Vietnamese politicians, nationals or soldiers from Vietnam, but unless I note these specifics, I am referring to the Vietnamese population in Democratic Kampuchea. Because the concept of “treatment” is

quite broad, I break it down into six different types of actions that the Khmer Rouge took against the Khmer and Vietnamese populations in Democratic Kampuchea. I explain these categories in greater depth in my section on data analysis.

I collected data from a variety of sources. I examined documents from the KR period such as speeches and orders from top KR leaders, from which I was able to get an idea of the party's broad policies. I reviewed literature by leading scholars in the field in order to build on their previous research and collect information about the political context of the time. To investigate the Khmer Rouge's everyday treatment of the Vietnamese and Khmer, I was able to travel to Cambodia and conduct interviews with people who witnessed and experienced the regime first-hand. My interviews with survivors of the KR period and my literature review provide the bulk of my data.

The open-ended and “process-focused” nature of my research questions also led me to decide to pursue a case study. As I noted in the introduction, my research project is not only concerned with the question of whether the Vietnamese were treated differently, but it also asks, if there appeared to be disparate treatment, how the Vietnamese were treated differently and what accounts for the difference. The answers to these latter questions involve details about the political and social context that I could only ascertain through an in-depth study and understanding of a region. Indeed, “Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Soy, Sue. “The Case Study as a Research Model.” *Susan K. Soy Web Site*. Spring 1997. 1 April 2010. <<http://fiat.gslis.utexas.edu/~ssoy/usesusers/1391d1b.htm>>.

I decided to conduct a critical case study of what was then the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea, which you can view in Appendix 1. As I mentioned earlier, a border war between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam broke out in 1977. The war affected the Khmer Rouge in a number of ways, one of which was to increase paranoia about a possible Vietnamese invasion of the country. Considering the fact that the Eastern Zone was situated next to Vietnam and much of the fighting for the war took place along the border between the Eastern Zone and Vietnam, the region was arguably more apprehensive towards the Vietnamese than other regions that did not face the same level of threat. Moreover, the Eastern Zone was facing particular pressure and charges of collusion from central party leaders regarding its relations with Vietnam. It is conceivable that considering these circumstances, KR leaders in the Eastern Zone enacted different, perhaps harsher, policy or treatment towards the Vietnamese under their watch. A critical case study of the Eastern Zone allows me to study the treatment of the Vietnamese in the region where it was most likely that they had been singled out or treated differently. Conversely, if I don't see a difference in the KR treatment between the Vietnamese and Khmer, then it would be unlikely for me to see disparate treatment in other regions of Democratic Kampuchea. This idea of "strategic sampling" has been a widely established and accepted method of qualitative research.<sup>47</sup>

The Eastern Zone's proximity to Vietnam also meant that it was most likely to contain Vietnamese people living there during the KR period. Because I am studying the Vietnamese experience from a comparative perspective, it was essential that my case study contained both Khmer and Vietnamese residents. In this way, I could identify any variation in the KR treatment

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<sup>47</sup> Flyvbjerg, Bent. "Five misunderstandings about case-study research." From Clive Seale, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium, and David Silverman, eds., *Qualitative Research Practice*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004, pp. 420-434. 1 April 2010. <<http://flyvbjerg.plan.aau.dk/MSFiveMis9.0SageASPUBL.pdf>>.

of the different groups in the same context. Because most of the Vietnamese population was expelled from the country when the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975, it was not a given that any region in Democratic Kampuchea would contain a significant number of, if any, Vietnamese residents. The Eastern Zone offered the best chances for me to find villages in which both Khmer and Vietnamese people resided.

Finally, the Eastern Zone presented a viable case study for logistical reasons. Although conducting interviews with people who had lived in different regions of Democratic Kampuchea would have yielded more data on a larger scale, such a field project was beyond my time and financial resources. A case study of the Eastern Zone was not only appropriate to investigate my research questions but also feasible given my constraints. The NGO through which I conducted my research had also previously conducted research in the Eastern Zone, particularly Pochen Dam village, which contained four Vietnamese families during the KR period. The trust and connections that the staff had created in their past interaction with the villagers made it possible for me, despite being an outsider to the community, to ask villagers questions about such a personal and sensitive subject as the KR period. I also discovered that the four Vietnamese families in Pochen Dam had been long-established residents of the village. This meant that if the Vietnamese in the village were treated differently, it was probably not because they were considered unfamiliar with the local leaders or customs. If I found evidence of disparate treatment in this village, I could explore other factors that may have been at work.

My interview pool included people who had lived in Pochen Dam village and other areas in the Eastern Zone during the KR period. Potential informants had to fulfill certain criteria in order to participate in my study. Firstly, because my research project asks questions about the KR treatment of the Vietnamese compared to its treatment of the Khmer, informants must have

lived in a village in which there were both Vietnamese and Khmer residents and they must have some information about the KR treatment of both groups. Secondly, interview subjects must have been at least ten years old when the Khmer Rouge came to power on April 17, 1975. I set this age minimum as a way to ensure that the data I collected from informants was observed by someone who was relatively mentally competent and emotionally mature at the time. I provided each informant with a “gift,” totaling less than \$5, at the end of the interview for his or her participation in the study.

Given these criteria, I was able to conduct a total of 48 interviews with Khmer and somewhat ethnically Vietnamese and Chinese survivors. Appendix 2 shows the interview guide that I used in my interviews, and Appendix 3 shows the breakdown of my interview pool. I sought a diverse sample of KR survivors to interview in order to maximize the validity of the data I received. As such, I interviewed KR survivors of different genders, ages, ethnicities, and occupations during the KR period. While the majority of my informants were Khmer, I was able to interview some people of Vietnamese and Chinese descent. Most of my informants had also been “common people” (people who were not part of the official KR apparatus) during the KR period, but I was able to speak with some people who had previously served as KR cadres. At the end of every interview, I also asked my informants if they could suggest people whom I could interview, explicitly asking for someone who could offer a different perspective. I also sought informants from different locations in the Eastern Zone as another way to diversify my data sources. Although most of my informants resided in Prey Veng province during the KR period, I also spoke with people from Svay Rieng, Kampong Chhnang and Kandal province. These additional interviews allowed me to compare data across different villages in the Eastern Zone in order to identify anomalies as well as recurring patterns across the Eastern Zone.

I conducted my interviews with the aid of a Khmer-English translator, and every interview was audio recorded. Informants were told that I am an American university student conducting research on how the Khmer Rouge treated the Vietnamese and Khmer people in their village. Appendix 2 shows the list of questions that I used to guide my interview. I included 10 “essential questions” that I asked in all of my 50 interviews and added 4 more essential questions in my last 25 interviews. Because all of these questions entailed a yes or no or equally brief response, I was able to record my informants’ responses on a chart that I carried with me to each interview. My interview guide also included open-ended questions in order to allow informants to introduce issues that they saw most relevant or elaborate on their responses to the essential questions. I found that this semi-structured interview format allowed me to get a good balance of answers to direct questions as well as more questions that required greater explanation and detail.

My data analysis occurred in two stages. The first stage dealt with the 14 essential questions that I had asked informants, which can be viewed in Appendix 4. Because I had recorded informant responses to these questions during our interviews, I was able to analyze this data without having to go through my audio tape of interviews. I transferred the data from my record to an Excel Sheet, identifying how many informants were asked a question and what each informant’s response was. I then conducted quantitative analysis of the responses to each of the 14 essential questions and took note of any significant trends or statistics. In Appendix 5, I provide a chart showing how my informants answered each of the essential questions, also noting the number of informants to whom I did not have a chance to pose a question. After the chart, I also include a pie graph showing what percentage of those who were asked the essential question responded “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know.”

The second stage of my data analysis dealt with the more detailed information that comprised the body of my interviews. I transcribed my interview audio tapes onto Word documents, coded the transcripts, and interpreted that data along with data from my other sources. I initially read through all my interview transcripts and took note of the different ways that the Khmer Rouge imposed its control on the Khmer and Vietnamese population. These notes allowed me to create a typology of six different mechanisms of KR abuse and analyze my research question asking about “treatment” in a more systematic way. I adopted this method of analysis from Duong, who researched four categories KR abuse against ethnic minorities:

- (1) Imposition of uniformity
- (2) Expulsion
- (3) Extermination, and
- (4) Other forms of discrimination.<sup>48</sup>

According to Duong, the imposition of uniformity entailed “‘forced Khmerization,’ requiring minorities to abandon aspects of their distinct culture and to become ‘Khmer.’<sup>49</sup> To facilitate this imposition of uniformity, the Khmer Rouge implemented policies that banned portions of cultures, such as minority languages and all religions, and they dispersed sectors of the population.”<sup>50</sup> Expulsion entailed the forced physical removal of people from Democratic Kampuchea, and extermination included killings of individuals and massacres of whole communities. Duong describes the last category of “Other forms of discrimination” as “all other types of discrimination. Examples include cases in which the Khmer Rouge prohibited members of all three minorities from holding political or military power.”<sup>51</sup>

Using Duong’s work as a starting point, I outlined six categories of KR abuse that I used as my initial open codes in my data analysis:

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<sup>48</sup> Duong, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Becker, Elizabeth. *When the War Was Over* (New York: Public Affairs, 1986), 243 in Duong, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Duong, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Paragraph cited from Duong, pp. 5-6.



- (1) Verbal Abuse
- (2) Forced Uniformity
- (3) Material Deprivation
- (4) Expulsion
- (5) Reeducation, Detainment
- (6) Disappearance, Extermination

Although Duong's paper focuses on how the Khmer Rouge used forced uniformity, expulsion, extermination, and discrimination against ethnic minorities, evidence suggests that the same methods of abuse were also used against Khmer people who had been classified as new people. Such categories of analysis will thus be useful in my comparative study of the KR treatment towards the Vietnamese and Khmer.

I retained three of Duong's categories: (1) Imposition of uniformity (which I call "Forced Uniformity"), (2) Expulsion, and (3) Extermination. I define "Forced Uniformity" and "Expulsion" similarly as Duong, but I broaden the parameters of her "Extermination" category to also include incidences of people disappearing. Because one of the Khmer Rouge's primary methods of control was to kill people in secret rather than in public, people living under the regime understood that when the Khmer Rouge used the guise of "reeducation" or "relocation" to make people disappear, it was most likely that they were killed. As a reflection of this common knowledge, my informants often used the terms "disappeared" and "killed" interchangeably in our interviews. Because many of my informants had experienced reeducation and detainment first-hand and were able to return to their village after a temporary period of time, I assume that those who were taken away under such claims and did not return to their village were subject to a different type of treatment, which I assume was most likely extermination.

In addition to these three categories, I omit "Other forms of discrimination" to include 3 more specific categories. Firstly, I include the category of "Verbal Abuse." The Khmer Rouge

utilized verbal abuse as one of its primary methods of control. Verbal abuse included hate speech or propaganda that condemned certain groups of people and perhaps even incited violence against them. The Khmer Rouge employed such verbal abuse in official contexts such as public speeches, radio announcements, and policy directives, as well as in informal contexts such as everyday conversation. I also include the category “Material Deprivation” for analysis. The Khmer Rouge deprived the Cambodian population of many things during its reign. Some of the policies entailed the deprivation of intangible things such as an ethnic group’s language or way of living. Because these intangible losses are covered by the discussion on “Forced Uniformity,” the “Material Deprivation” category only addresses KR treatment that resulted in the deprivation of physical goods, namely food and clothes. Lastly, I designate “Reeducation, Detainment” as a category for analysis. This category includes incidents in which people were detained by the Khmer Rouge for a temporary period of time, after which they returned to their village. This could also include incidents in which people were taken away for reeducation. Other potential categories of analysis include temporary physical abuse such as beatings and forced labor. Because my initial review of these areas did not yield significant results, I will reserve them for more in-depth investigation in the future. In the interest of clarity, I organized the discussion of my typology in Chapter 3 starting with the category that caused the least immediate physical impact (i.e. “Verbal Abuse”) to the category that caused the most immediate physical impact (i.e. “Extermination”).

After my initial review, I was able to go through my interview transcripts again and code them according to the different categories of KR abuse that I defined in my typology. I kept each interview transcript in its original form, and coded the transcript by copying and pasting different entries from the transcript onto a separate Word document that contained all of the entries

belonging to a single code (e.g. “Extermination”). When data from the transcript corresponded with a category, as defined in my typology, I copied and pasted it onto the appropriate code document. When an entry could fit in more than one category, I filed it in all of the applicable categories (e.g. when an informant said that the Khmer Rouge announced at a meeting that the “yuon enemy” would be exterminated, I categorized the entry in both the “Verbal Abuse” and “Extermination” categories). When I completed these codes, I then went through the coded material and took note of patterns and recurring themes within each category of treatment. During this process, I continually worked between coded entries and the transcript from which they were originally excerpted. Working back and forth between the part and whole helped me not lose sight of the context in which certain KR practices took place, which enhanced my interpretation of the coded data. I also sought to maximize the validity of my findings by checking my data with existing research. Just as I referred back and forth between the part and whole of the coded data, I also worked back and forth between my interview data and my document data and secondary research. This process allowed me to verify data and identify discrepancies between different sources of data. The themes and recurring patterns that emerged from these codes provide the basis of my thesis.

Throughout my data collection and analysis process, I employed data source triangulation in order to maximize the validity of my findings. I tested the data I collected from my interviews with data from primary documents and existing research. Even within my interviews, I utilized data source triangulation. I interviewed survivors from different locations within the Eastern Zone and from different backgrounds. As can be seen in Appendix 3, I interviewed people of different genders and ages. My interview pool also included former KR cadres as well as common people. By cross-checking data from different sources and contexts, I feel confident

that my data and research findings have undergone rigorous examination. I will spend the rest of this paper presenting my findings and discussing their significance.

## Chapter 3

### Results

This chapter will present the results of my data analysis. As mentioned earlier, my analysis included data from a variety of sources, including existing research, primary documents, interview transcripts, and informant responses to my 14 essential questions. I have organized this section in the order of my typology of “treatment,” starting with the category that caused the least immediate physical impact (i.e. “Verbal Abuse”) to the category that caused the most immediate physical impact (i.e. “Extermination”). Under each category of abuse, I designate the subcategories of “Ethnic Khmer” and “Ethnic Vietnamese,” within which I discuss each ethnic group’s experience. My data analysis revealed that comparison of the Vietnamese population with the whole Khmer population was not appropriate given the fact that the Khmer population was divided into different groups that the Khmer Rouge favored (i.e. the base people) and disfavored (i.e. the new people). This delineation was a constant theme in my data analysis, and as such, this chapter generally compares the Vietnamese experience with the experience of new people because both groups were similarly disfavored by the Khmer Rouge.

By organizing my results in this way, I hope to provide a logical comparison and clear structure to analyze KR treatment. In some categories, one of the two groups may not be represented. For example, only ethnic Vietnamese were subject to a large-scale expulsion policy, and thus, there will only be one subcategory (i.e. “Ethnic Vietnamese”) under the “Expulsion” category.

#### **(1) Verbal Abuse**

## *Ethnic Khmer*

Verbal abuse was the promulgation of hate speech or propaganda that vilified people or incited violence against certain groups of people. Such verbal abuse appeared in official party documents and speeches, as well as in everyday conversation.

In general, nearly all Khmer people were subject to verbal abuse to the extent that they faced KR rebukes regarding their work production or loyalty to the revolution. Aside from this general trend, however, the Khmer people who were in the new group were particularly vulnerable to KR verbal abuse. As previously discussed, the rural-urban divide represented one of the most heated issues in Cambodian society. When the Khmer Rouge came to power, it exploited this division and increased antagonism by broadcasting hate speech that dramatized the struggle of the countryside peasant and negatively depicted the upper class, city dwellers. In one instance, the Khmer Rouge broadcasted a message over the radio characterizing the lives of base people as:

Our brothers and sisters lived a most miserable life, enduring all manner of hardships....They never had enough food, never were happy and never had an opportunity to receive [an education]. Our brothers and sisters were looked down upon, regarded as animals.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to the plight of the base people, new people were portrayed as corrupt and evil.

Hinton sums up the Khmer Rouge's verbal abuse against new people by saying:

Cities were portrayed as corrupt and immoral centers of undue foreign influence. On the one hand, rich city people were reported to spend their time living in luxurious houses, eating well, sipping cognac, and visiting prostitutes (the 'cognac and concubine circuit') while the peasants toiled in the countryside producing their 'fruit.' On the other hand, Phnom Penh was said to be filled with 'American lackeys' and to contain a disproportionately large number of ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese (Kiernan 1996:5). City people were not only capitalist

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<sup>52</sup> FBIS 1976:H1 in Hinton, Alexander. *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*. Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. Print, p. 12.

exploiters, but also not ‘real Khmer.’ They were, rather, a hated enemy who should be ‘crushed’ (*kamtech khmang*) by ‘class ardor and fury.’<sup>53</sup>

New people were also regularly admonished in village meetings and everyday life, according to informants. In these instances, the Khmer Rouge accused new people of being capitalist exploiters, lazy, useless workers, and U.S. imperialists. Informants also mentioned that the Khmer Rouge used the term “new person” as an insult against people whom cadres felt were lazy or disobedient, regardless of whether the people fit the definition of being “new.”

By characterizing base people as victims and “new” people as exploiters and tools of foreign imperialism, the Khmer Rouge effectively pitted the poor against the rich and recruited countryside peasants and marginalized groups to join the KR revolution. One cadre described remembered his political education under the regime consisting “of [the Khmer Rouge] telling us to be seized with painful anger against the oppressor class. They [The Khmer Rouge] spoke about this all the time.”<sup>54</sup> As a result of such brainwashing, the Khmer Rouge was able to mold young, fervent, impressionable people into “fanatics” of the revolution willing to carry out the terrorist deeds of Angkar.<sup>55</sup>

### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

Like new people, ethnic Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea were also subject to verbal abuse at the Khmer Rouge’s personal will and discretion. KR verbal abuse against the Vietnamese often referred to past disputes involving Khmer and Vietnamese people and the border war taking place at that time. The 1978 publication of *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Vietnamese Acts of Aggression and Annexation Against Kampuchea* represents a prime

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<sup>53</sup> Hinton, *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

example.<sup>56</sup> *Black Paper* was one of the Khmer Rouge's propaganda materials published to elucidate the historical and recent conflict between the Kampuchea and Vietnam and air the regime's grievances against Vietnam. In *Black Paper*, the Khmer Rouge claimed the Vietnamese "always had the ambition to annex and swallow Kampuchea, and to exterminate the nation of Kampuchea,"<sup>57</sup> alluding to past Vietnamese annexations of Khmer territory such as Prey Nokor (now Ho Chi Minh City) and Kampuchea Krom in 1620. *Black Paper* also argued that the border war taking place between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam was just another example of Vietnamese aggression and encroachment upon Khmer land.<sup>58</sup> As the border conflict worsened, KR propaganda and hate speech against the Vietnamese such as in *Black Paper* intensified. In May 1978, the Khmer Rouge made a radio announcement urging "Khmers to kill thirty Vietnamese [soldiers] for every fallen Cambodian."<sup>59</sup>

Informants also remember an increasing number and frequency of disparaging references to the Vietnamese in village meetings and even on the KR radio after 1977. According to informants, the Khmer Rouge commonly used terms characterizing the Vietnamese as the historical enemy or aggressor, referring to them as: "yuon enemy," "historical enemy" and "yuon who swallow Khmer territory." The Eastern Zone Khmer Rouge also regularly brought up past Vietnamese abuses. The Khmer Rouge condemned the Vietnamese for historically using Khmer people's heads as stands for their "braziers" and for the period between 1800 and 1845 known as "Tae Ong," in which the Vietnamese supposedly cut open Khmer people's stomachs and filled them with grass when invading Cambodia. It appears that the Khmer Rouge used these

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<sup>56</sup> Thion, Serge. Mahder, William. "The Ingratitude of the Crocodiles The 1978 Cambodian Black Paper," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. 12: 1980. Print.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Black Paper: Facts and Evidences of the Acts of Aggression and Annexation of Vietnam against Kampuchea*. Phnom Penh: Department of Press and Information of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Democratic Kampuchea, 1978. Print, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Mak, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Kiernan, *The Third Indochina War*, p. 190.



references as a way to incite fear and hate against the Vietnamese. When the Khmer Rouge in Pochen Dam village was preparing to relocate villagers from Prey Veng to Pursat province, informants from the village remembered the Khmer Rouge warning the people of an imminent Vietnamese invasion and suggesting that the Vietnamese would repeat “Tae Ong” if they successfully invaded. By inciting fear among villagers, the Khmer Rouge from Pochen Dam was able to secure the people’s cooperation during the relocation process. Informants also said that the Khmer Rouge admonished the Vietnamese when discussing the border war.

Of significance is the fact that in these public announcements, the Khmer Rouge referred to the Vietnamese not as “Vietnamese” but as “yuon.” As mentioned earlier, some of the common KR references to the Vietnamese included “yuon enemy” and “yuon who swallow Khmer territory.” The same terms appeared in *Black Paper* and KR documents such as prisoner confessions at S-21 and KR correspondences. The definition and meaning of the word “yuon” are contentious issues for both Cambodian people and scholars. Some people assert that the word “yuon” is a derogatory, even racist, term applied to the Vietnamese. In a September 2002 article in the Washington Times, Roberts wrote that the word means “savages.” Others, however, have disputed this claim, arguing that “yuon” originally derived “from ‘yuonan,’ the Chinese word for Vietnam” and simply translates to “Vietnamese.” The term “yuon,” however, does appear to have been used in a derogatory manner by the Lon Nol regime in its violent campaigns against the Vietnamese in Cambodia. This was also arguably the case during the KR regime, as evidenced by the way in the Khmer Rouge spoke of the “yuon” in publications such as *Black Paper*.<sup>60</sup> Thus, even if the word “yuon” was not historically used as a derogatory term, the context in which it was used in the KR period and Lon Nol period appears to have given the term

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<sup>60</sup> Paragraph cited from Touch, Bora. “Khmer Language and the Term ‘Yuan.’” *Khmer Institute*. n.d. 1 April 2010. <<http://www.khmerinstitute.org/musings/mu4.html#10>>.

some derogatory overtones. Some former KR cadres also remembered the Khmer Rouge using the term “ah yuon” in meetings to refer to the Vietnamese, and the addition of “ah” before the word “yuon” was definitely was a sign of disrespect.<sup>61</sup>

The Khmer Rouge’s verbal abuse appears to have been used similarly against the Vietnamese and new people. In both cases, the Khmer Rouge employed rhetoric that cast new and Vietnamese people as the “other,” who were meant to be feared and hated. Such rhetoric manifested in all aspects of life, from public speeches, to village meetings, to everyday conversation. Like the Khmer Rouge did with the “new” people, KR officers in the Eastern Zone also accused people of being Vietnamese spies, or “yuon head with Khmer body,” when they made mistakes, regardless of whether the people accused were actually Vietnamese. The Khmer Rouge thus associated wrongdoing with being Vietnamese, as it did with being a “new” person.

## **(2) Forced Uniformity**

### *Ethnic Khmer*

Forced uniformity occurred when the Khmer Rouge forced people to conform to a certain lifestyle or ethnic identity. This involved “requiring minorities to abandon aspects of their distinct culture and to become ‘Khmer.’”<sup>62</sup> To facilitate this imposition of uniformity, the Khmer Rouge implemented policies that banned portions of cultures, such as minority languages and all religions, and they dispersed sectors of the population.”<sup>63</sup> Forced uniformity was also imposed on Khmer new people. Although most “new” people were already Khmer, the Khmer Rouge did

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Becker, Elizabeth. *When the War Was Over*. New York: Public Affairs, 1986, p. 243 in Duong, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Duong, p. 5.

impose a certain ideology and lifestyle upon them that was designed to create a homogenous identity like the “forced Khmerization” policy the KR imposed on the Vietnamese.

One example of forced uniformity against Khmer people was the forced evacuation of new people from cities and towns across Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge initiated the mass exodus of city dwellers just hours after it took control of the country, “alternating between ‘inviting’ the inhabitants to leave (saying that the Americans were going to bomb them) and forcing people at gunpoint.”<sup>64</sup> After three days of evacuation, the Khmer Rouge was able to expel approximately three million people from cities and towns across Democratic Kampuchea into the countryside.<sup>65</sup> KR leaders made public announcements claiming that the evacuation was necessary because of a national state of emergency including food shortages to the cities and an imminent American bombing of the cities.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the appearance of being an emergency response, the evacuation of cities was in fact a pre-planned and strategic decision made by Angkar. Evidence shows that Pol Pot designed the city evacuations as a way to force new people to take up the lifestyle of the base people. As discussed earlier, one of the major objectives of the revolution was to transform Cambodia into an egalitarian, agrarian utopia with the toiling farmer as the true proletariat. At the same time, the Khmer Rouge identified cities as centers of exploitation and corruption, and following this logic, city-dwellers or new people, as somehow tainted.

Although they were tainted, new people could still be saved. Once new people moved to the communes, the Khmer Rouge forced them to take on the same field workload as the base people, sometimes even heavier workloads. “‘New’ people were used as labor to clear new

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<sup>64</sup> Beang and Cougill, p. 9

<sup>65</sup> Ledgerwood, Judy. “Cambodia Since April 1975.” *Cambodian Recent History and Contemporary Society: An Introductory Course*. n.d. 1 Sept. 2008. <<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/khmer/ledgerwood/Part2.htm>>.

<sup>66</sup> Quinn, p. 181.

agricultural land from malaria-infested forests, to dig vast irrigation projects, and to grow rice along-side peasants.”<sup>67</sup> One KR cadre explained, “People can be reformed, but not cities. By sweating to clear land, sowing and harvesting crops, men will learn the real value of things. Man has to know that he is born again from a grain of rice.” This quote espouses the idea that working as a farmer could somehow reform new people. Believing that new people *needed* to be reformed and *acting* on that belief by trying to impose a universal farmer’s lifestyle onto them are two ways in which the Khmer Rouge imposed uniformity on new people. Whether or not the Khmer Rouge intended to reform new people or merely wanted to empty the cities, the end result was the same: the forced relocation of millions of people in order to disconnect them from their original lifestyles and force them into an unwanted lifestyle.<sup>68</sup>

### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

Like new people, ethnic Vietnamese were also forced to assimilate to the dominant Khmer culture and agrarian lifestyle. Both groups experienced pressure to adopt the base people’s workload and communal way of living. In many cases, ethnic Vietnamese resided in the cities, with a census reporting that Vietnamese people made up 28% of Phnom Penh’s population in 1962,<sup>69</sup> and faced the same physical and mental challenges to transitioning to the new KR culture as the new people.

However, because the Khmer Rouge’s policies of homogenization were generally targeted at ethnic minorities, KR imposition of uniformity on the Vietnamese and Khmer differed. Unlike the new people, ethnic Vietnamese faced the additional pressure to shed their ethnic identity. Mak explains:

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<sup>67</sup> Ledgerwood.

<sup>68</sup> Paragraph cited from Quinn, pp. 181-183.

<sup>69</sup> Jackson, p. 153.

“Once in power in 1975, the Khmer Rouge instituted a policy that outlawed all ethnic minorities. According to one party member from the Eastern Zone, all minority nationalities were mixed together. ‘There was only one race – the Khmer...from liberation in 1975.’<sup>70</sup> Punishment was meted out to those who violated rules against speaking any languages other than Khmer; distinctive clothing or other markers of ethnicity were also strictly forbidden. This policy of forced assimilation continued into the next year, as exemplified by statements made by top party officials in mid-1976. At a meeting composed of ethnic groups in the Eastern Zone, officials proclaimed: ‘Now we are in 1976, we have to go by a different plan...There are to be no Chams or Chinese or Vietnamese. Everyone is to join the same, single Khmer nationality.’<sup>71,72</sup>

With the ban on the Vietnamese language, culture, and any other indicators of a separate ethnic identity, ethnic Vietnamese were subjected to heavy burdens. Fearing reprisal, Vietnamese people stopped speaking their language and thus, could not pass on their language and part of their culture to their children.

The policy of forced uniformity not only prevented ethnic Vietnamese from expressing their ethnic identity, but also dealt punishments to those who rebelled or could not fit the mold. Informants said that Vietnamese who didn’t know how to speak Khmer were more susceptible of being singled out and targeted for abuse by the KR. Moreover, Vietnamese who did know how to speak fluent Khmer but spoke the language with a different accent also stood out during the homogenization campaign and were more susceptible to KR abuse. Informants also said that the Khmer Rouge often identified people as Vietnamese merely by looking at their faces or lighter skin color. Because these were physical attributes, the Vietnamese faced distinct challenges in discarding them as the Khmer Rouge wanted them to do. The Vietnamese thus appears to have faced unique challenges during the uniformity campaign due to their distinctive physical, cultural and linguistic traits.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Ouch Bun Chhoeun, Region 21 Party Committee, in Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, p. 265.

<sup>71</sup> Kiernan, *Pol Pot Regime*, p. 276.

<sup>72</sup> Mak, pp. 9-10.

### **(3) Material Deprivation**

#### *Ethnic Khmer*

In addition to limiting people's language and lifestyles, the Khmer Rouge also deprived people of material goods, particularly food and clothes. Like they did in practicing verbal abuse, KR cadres in the Eastern Zone often used their personal discretion in deciding whom they would deprive of material goods. Informants said that, as time passed and especially later in the KR period, there was a general lack of material goods such as food in their village. In cases where such materials were available, KR cadres usually deprived them from people whom the cadres did not personally like or whom they believed slacked off in work. Aside from this general trend, however, there were certain groups of people that were regularly denied material goods by the Khmer Rouge in the Eastern Zone.

Informants said that new people were often given the last preference for food, clothes, and other material goods such as working equipment during the KR period. Some informants said that in their villages, base people were able to eat rice, whereas new people had to eat gruel or porridge. When the Khmer Rouge gave out clothes and equipment, base people got the first pick and new people were only given the materials if there were any left over. Some informants also mentioned that new people lived in homes that were in relatively worse condition than the houses of the base people.

#### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

The Vietnamese in the Eastern Zone were in a similar position as new people. When informants were asked if they thought the Vietnamese and Khmer people faced different living conditions (e.g. if the groups were given different amounts of food), 92% responded "No."

Informants said that, like new people, Vietnamese people were given last preference for materials such as clothes and food. A Vietnamese informant also mentioned that she was assigned to live in a separate village from where she originally lived with the base people. She said that dozens of other families of mixed ethnicities (Vietnamese and Khmer) were also forced to live in this isolated village. A Khmer informant who was married to a Vietnamese man claimed that KR medics denied her children medical treatment because they said that they did not treat “yuon children.” Her child later died. Although no informant mentioned the Khmer Rouge depriving new people of medical care, it appears that in most cases of material deprivation, the KR treatment of the new and Vietnamese people were similar in the Eastern Zone.

#### **(4) Expulsion**

##### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

Expulsion is defined as the forced physical removal of people from Democratic Kampuchea. Although the Khmer Rouge pushed “new” people from their city residences to dispersed regions throughout Cambodia, the ethnic Vietnamese represented the only group that was forced to leave the country.

When the Khmer Rouge came to power in April 1975, it orchestrated the mass purge of over 150,000 ethnic Vietnamese from Cambodia.<sup>73</sup> The purge brought thousands of Vietnamese refugees into the Dong Thap, An Giang, and Tay Ninh provinces.<sup>74</sup> By September 1975, the

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<sup>73</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p. 296.

<sup>74</sup> Chanda, Nayan. *Brother Enemy: The War after the War*. New York: Collier Books, 1986. Print, p. 16.

regime had successfully rounded up most of the Vietnamese living in Cambodia and deported them to Vietnam. In *Black Paper*, Angkar rationalized their purge of the Vietnamese people by writing that “Vietnamese nationals had secretly infiltrated into Kampuchea and [were] living in hiding [among] the population.”<sup>75</sup> Amer sets the Vietnamese population after the 1975 purge at 30,000, whereas Hinton and Kiernan believe that only 10,000 Vietnamese remained in the country.<sup>76</sup> The few Vietnamese left in Democratic Kampuchea most likely remained in the country because they wanted to stay with their Khmer spouses or didn’t want to leave the country where they had grown up their whole lives.<sup>77</sup>

Contrary to previous scholarship contending that the Khmer Rouge closed its borders in 1975, some informants asserted that the Khmer Rouge carried out another purge of Vietnamese people from the country around 1976 or 1977. These informants included both Khmer and Vietnamese survivors, some of whom claimed they had experienced the purge first-hand. According to informants, the Khmer Rouge announced in their village meeting in 1976 or 1977 that the remaining Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea would be sent back to Vietnam via ship in exchange for salt. The Khmer Rouge apparently collected the names of Vietnamese people from the village that would be sent back to Vietnam on the ship. One Vietnamese informant who claimed he went on the ship said that a KR officer accompanied the people, making multiple stops along the way to pick up more Vietnamese. The informant did not experience any physical abuse by the Khmer Rouge during the voyage and said that upon arrival, he was ordered to speak Vietnamese to Vietnamese officers in order to enter Vietnam.

Informants from other villages corroborated the claim that the Khmer Rouge made an

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<sup>75</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, p. 219.

<sup>76</sup> Amer, Ramses. “The Ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia: A Minority at Risk?” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. 16.2 (1994): 210-238. Print, p. 219.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart-Fox, Martin. *The Murderous Revolution: Life & Death in Pol Pot's Kampuchea* Chippendale, N.S.W: APCOL, 1985. Print, p. 34.



announcement about deporting the Vietnamese sometime in the middle of the KR period, but because they feared it was a trap and did not come forward as Vietnamese, they did not know if the Khmer Rouge actually shipped the people back to Vietnam.

Whether or not the second purge of Vietnamese occurred, the first purge shows how expulsion was one area in which the Vietnamese were clearly singled out:

Perhaps if the regime had forced other groups to leave, then the presence of racial discrimination would have been less convincing, since everyone would have been subject to equal treatment. Instead, the Khmer Rouge allowed other minorities to stay within the borders and in some cases did not harm them if they had undergone ‘Khmerization.’ In contrast, the regime did not give the Vietnamese the option to remain.<sup>78</sup>

Some Vietnamese informants agreed that they were not compelled to leave Democratic Kampuchea only because they hid their ethnic identities. It thus appears that expulsion was one way in which the ethnic Vietnamese were treated differently than the Khmer.

## **(5) Reeducation, Detainment**

### *Ethnic Khmer*

As the title suggests, this category addresses the Khmer Rouge’s practice of taking people to be reeducated, arrested, or detained away from their village for a temporary period of time. Unlike the “Disappearance, Extermination” category, the people involved in this category returned to their villages after being detained. Many Khmer people were subject to such temporary detainment. As was the case in most other categories of abuse, KR cadres were able to exercise a lot of discretion in deciding whom to put into custody. Informants said that the Khmer

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<sup>78</sup> Duong, pp. 10-11.

Rouge sent people who performed poorly in their work or were disobedient to be reeducated. This general rule could affect anyone in the village, but it most often applied to new people, as they were less adept at farming and communal living and there was already much suspicion regarding their loyalty to the revolution. According to informants, new people were regularly sent to reeducation camps, where they were taught about work ethic and the Khmer Rouge's "party line."

### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

Vietnamese people were also subject to temporary arrest, reeducation and detainment. Several Vietnamese survivors recalled being detained by the Khmer Rouge. One Vietnamese woman said that her family and she were taken from their village and brought to a security center, where they were chained to wooden posts. She claimed that she was taken to the security center because the Khmer Rouge knew she was part Vietnamese, but she mentioned that new people were also detained at the same location. Another Vietnamese woman said that her family was taken from their village and held at a pagoda security center for two days. There, the Khmer Rouge asked her family members and her if they could speak Vietnamese, which they could not do having been born and raised in Cambodia. When they were allowed to return to their village, the informant said that people from her village told her that while she was gone, the Khmer Rouge had conducted an investigation of her family, asking villagers if they knew whether her family was Vietnamese, to which the villagers denied. The informant's brother corroborated her story, adding that he noticed that there were only Vietnamese families detained at the pagoda

with their family. He believed that the Khmer Rouge finally released his family and him because they could not speak Vietnamese.

Although many informants claimed that everyone was equally susceptible to reeducation if they made mistakes in their work or disobeyed KR leaders, others asserted that reeducation was reserved only for base people who had made minor mistakes. New people and Vietnamese people were not granted reeducation and instead, when they were taken away, they most often never returned. In any case, it appears that the KR practice of temporary detainment did not differ significantly between the Vietnamese and Khmer new people.

## **(6) Disappearance, Extermination**

### *Ethnic Khmer*

Extermination is defined as the killing and massacre of individuals and whole communities. As I mentioned earlier, I also include instances of people disappearing as extermination. Although it is true that disappearance during the KR period did not necessarily entail extermination, the overwhelming consensus among former Cambodian common people, former KR cadres, and scholars of the KR regime is that people who were taken away by the Khmer Rouge and never returned were most likely killed.

Many new people were victims of the Khmer Rouge's extermination campaign. The extermination of new people came in different stages. Immediately following its overthrow of the Lon Nol government, the Khmer Rouge marked for death "senior officials and military officers of the Lon Nol government (as well as in many cases their families)," and months later,

directed its violence against “lower military personnel,” as well as “teachers, highly educated persons, and professionals such as doctors and engineers.” As new people poured out from the cities, KR soldiers collected the identities and personal histories of the refugees. Some KR officers posted signs along the route, “requiring all professional people to register along with military personnel.”<sup>79</sup> Others made announcements over loudspeakers at train stations stops, calling “all specialists to step forward: doctors, students, architects, school teachers, students, technicians and skilled workers of all kinds.”<sup>80</sup> “Urbanites being evacuated out of the cities were asked to give background information about their former occupations. Many who told the truth were taken away to be killed. Up to two hundred thousand people may have been killed during this first wave of DK killing.”<sup>81</sup>

The Khmer Rouge also indirectly caused the deaths of new people during its mass evacuations of cities. The final death toll from the forced evacuations reached the hundreds of thousands, with some scholars estimating as high as four hundred thousand.<sup>82</sup> The “aged and infirm” populations were especially vulnerable.<sup>83</sup> “Patients in hospitals in the middle of operations were forced to leave, and to die. Women in labor were made to get up and walk and their new babies died in the scorching sun. A whole infant ward at the Calmette Hospital was abandoned when the Khmer Rouge forced the staff to leave. The ward became a mass grave.”<sup>84</sup> Most people died during their journey from the cities to the countryside due to “heat, lack of food and water, and absence of medical assistance.”<sup>85</sup> In one instance, “an estimated 100,000

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<sup>79</sup> Quinn, p. 187.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Thion 1993:166 in Hinton, “A Head for an Eye: Revenge in Cambodian Genocide.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>84</sup> Stanton, Gregory. “Blue Scarves and Yellow Stars: Classification and Symbolization in the Cambodian Genocide.” *The Cambodian Genocide Project*, 1987. n.d. 1 Sept. 2008. <<http://www.genocidewatch.org/bluescarves.htm>>.

<sup>85</sup> Quinn, p. 183.

people died in a single cholera epidemic that broke out southwest of Phnom Penh 15 days after the exodus.”<sup>86</sup>

The new people who survived the first wave of deaths were then forced to live and work in the countryside, as discussed in the “Forced Uniformity” section. Forcing new people to take on the same workload as base people also indirectly caused many deaths among the population. Coming from the cities, new people were not familiar to the physical and mental rigor of agrarian life, and many died due to harsh living and working conditions. As mentioned in the “Material Deprivation” section, the Khmer Rouge also sometimes restricted food supply to new people, which exacerbated their health and ability to work, thereby making them even more susceptible to KR abuse. Thus, the forced imposition of farm labor on new people not only caused deaths through physical exhaustion but also through the increased likelihood of poor labor production and KR punishment. For these reasons, by the end of the KR period, “the death tolls among the new people were among the highest in Democratic Kampuchea.”<sup>87</sup>

Starting in late 1975, the Khmer Rouge enacted a “Purification Campaign” with the purpose of “identifying and eliminating individuals with any attachment to the former regime, including government employees, anyone who had served in the Lon Nol military down to the rank of private, and all students and teachers and all their families.” The campaign was repeated in 1977 and 1978, “each time seeking out people at the lower levels of society with any connection to the old regime.”<sup>88</sup> In order to carry out these campaigns, the Khmer Rouge claimed that new people were as worthless as animals. Such dehumanization allowed the Khmer Rouge to rationalize their abuse of new people<sup>89</sup> and gave rise to the KR slogan to new people: ““To

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Beang and Cougill, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Quinn, p. 190 & p. 194.

<sup>89</sup> Hinton, “A Head for an Eye: Revenge in Cambodian Genocide,” p. 15.

keep you is no gain; to destroy you is no loss" [tuk min chomnengh yok chenh min khat].”<sup>90</sup> As a result, new people were “killed more readily than ‘old’ people.”<sup>91</sup>

The Khmer Rouge’s extermination methods also came in different forms. Once the Khmer Rouge identified someone for execution, the person and often his or her family were either immediately murdered or held in detention, where they were questioned, tortured, or murdered, or all three. One detainee remembers spending months in detention with 397 other “specialists” who had honestly reported their occupations to the KR during the background collection process and were subsequently shipped to detention in order to be evaluated:

He [The KR survivor] described a Khmer Rouge ‘trick,’ which they often repeated in other parts of the country. In an effort to make people relax and not feel threatened, they would provide plenty of food and even have a banquet of sorts. After that, people were asked about their ideas on how to make the new society better. Those teachers and students criticizing Angkar for all of the new hardships were later tied up and taken away, either to prison or to be executed. Numerous other sources confirmed executions of students and teachers alike.<sup>92</sup>

Often in the prisons, “Hundreds of thousands of the ‘new’ people...were taken out, shackled, to dig their own mass graves. Then the Khmer Rouge soldiers beat them to death with iron bars and hoes or buried them alive [because] A Khmer Rouge extermination prison directive ordered, ‘Bullets are not to be wasted.’”<sup>93</sup> When the Khmer Rouge’s campaign against intellectuals was underway, countless students and teachers disappeared, most likely murdered in masses. In one incident, “[20 former students of Sisophon High School] were taken into a field...and killed with a blow from a stave at the back of the head. Their hands were tied behind their back with a strip of red cloth. No official explanation was given.”<sup>94</sup> Pho Chanta, a KR survivor, recalls the Khmer Rouge transferring dead bodies from two taxis onto the side of the field. They had claimed the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> Quinn, p. 187.

<sup>93</sup> Stanton.

<sup>94</sup> Quinn, p. 188.

dead people were “corrupt customs and immigration officers who had been punished,” but while burying the dead bodies, Chanta realized one of the victims was in fact his former Cambodian language teacher.<sup>95</sup>

The objectives of the “Purification Campaign” effectively coincided with the forced uniformity goals of the Khmer Rouge. Extermination practices, and the general harsher treatment of new people compared to base people, provided both the incentive and punishment to coerce new people into assimilating to the agrarian lifestyle. Those who were targeted for extermination would most likely die, which meant one less tainted person in Democratic Kampuchea. At the same time, those in the communes who witnessed or heard rumors about someone’s death would come away with such extreme fear for their own lives that they would be much more likely to conform to and be obedient under the KR’s social and political order.

### *Ethnic Vietnamese*

The Khmer Rouge was also responsible for the disappearance and extermination of ethnic Vietnamese. The regime sanctioned the execution of whole Vietnamese communities and families. “In 1976, new massacres of ethnic Vietnamese began” and were characterized by “the excessive use of violence by local party officials.”<sup>96</sup> Though the increased violence against Vietnamese was carried out at the local level, “the [KR] regime’s leaders nonetheless were implicated in both their inaction (which expressed tacit approval) as well as occasional acts of violence that set a powerful example for their subordinates.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Mak, p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

In April 1977, a formal KR policy was enacted that entailed the arrest of anyone who was Vietnamese by blood or association, whether it meant someone who was ethnically Vietnamese, or an ethnic Khmer who knew how to speak Vietnamese or was trained in Vietnam.<sup>98</sup> Most of those arrested “were then turned over to state security forces and the majority killed.”<sup>99</sup> In one massacre at Kompong Chhnang Province in mid May 1977, about 420 Vietnamese adults and children were murdered.<sup>100</sup> In another massacre at Kratie in 1978, the Khmer Rouge targeted anyone with Vietnamese blood, family members, or any Vietnamese association.<sup>101</sup> The Khmer Rouge even commanded Khmer husbands to kill their Vietnamese wives.<sup>102</sup> On May 10, 1978, in the context of the border war between Democratic Kampuchea and Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge made a public radio announcement imploring every Cambodian to “kill 30 Vietnamese” in the name of “Cambodian territory and the Cambodian race.”<sup>103</sup> This radio broadcast not only incited mass violence against ethnic Vietnamese but even called for Cambodians to purge ethnic Khmer in Democratic Kampuchea who was associated with or influenced by Vietnam.<sup>104</sup>

Informants generally referred to 1977, or the middle of the KR period, as the turning point in the Khmer Rouge’s treatment of the Vietnamese in the Eastern Zone. Prior to this year, the Vietnamese had been treated similarly to other people. However, according to informants, starting around 1976 or 1977, the Khmer Rouge began collecting the Vietnamese in their village. Informants said that when KR cadres took the Vietnamese away, they used a variety of different excuses, such as reeducation, relocation, work, and arrest. People were generally transported from the village by horsecart and never returned. Informants who attested to the disappearance of

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<sup>98</sup> Duong, p. 10.

<sup>99</sup> Mak, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime*, p. 297.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 424.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 296.

<sup>103</sup> Mak, pp. 11-12.

<sup>104</sup> Tarr, Chou Meng. “The Vietnamese Minority in Cambodia.” *Race & Class*. 34.2: 1992. Print, p. 2.



Vietnamese people in their villages said that by the end of 1977 or 1978, most if not all of the Vietnamese had disappeared.

Although a few Vietnamese did survive the KR period, they represent the exception and not the rule. In fact, the overwhelming majority of informants expressed the personal opinion that, if Khmer Rouge knew someone was Vietnamese, he or she would disappear or be killed without question. Of the 27 informants whom I asked whether it was dangerous to be Vietnamese during the KR period, 92% responded yes. When I asked the few ethnic Vietnamese how they survived, they responded in a variety of ways: they successfully hid their ethnic identity from the Khmer Rouge in their village; they were protected by their local village chief or KR leader; and in one case, an informant said that the Khmer Rouge did not care that he was Vietnamese, because he was a base person and a good worker. It appears that the Khmer Rouge in the Eastern Zone practiced execution and disappearance against both Khmer new people and Vietnamese people, with significant death tolls and some survivors on both sides.

Although Khmer new people and Vietnamese people were both extremely vulnerable to extermination by the Khmer Rouge, there were some aspects of the Vietnamese experience that differed from the Khmer experience. Firstly, informants from Pochen Dam noted a pattern in how their local Khmer Rouge collected Vietnamese families, all of which consisted of Khmer and Vietnamese spouses. Informants said that they observed the Khmer Rouge collecting the mother and children of a family if the mother was Vietnamese but only the father of the family if father was Vietnamese. Informants observed this pattern in the Khmer Rouge's collection of all four Vietnamese families in Pochen Dam, and said that KR cadres did not make such a distinction when they collected other people from the village. Informants from other villages, however, said that the Khmer Rouge in their village collected only the Vietnamese parent (and

not his or her children), and still other informants said that KR cadres collected the entire family if they found out that even one member was Vietnamese. All of these patterns were observed by informants and never publicly announced as a policy of the Khmer Rouge. The pattern observed in Pochen Dam village, though it raises a possible distinction between the Khmer and Vietnamese experience, requires more investigation.

There is more evidence of difference in the Vietnamese and Khmer people's experiences in the terms of each ethnic group's ability to evade KR extermination. The Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea had few personal means to evade execution. As was discussed in the "Forced Uniformity" section, some ethnic Vietnamese possessed obvious physical differences from ethnic Khmer people, such as lighter skin and different accents when speaking Khmer. Such physical conditions were more difficult to hide than something intangible such as the new people's class status or previous employment. Vietnamese people's ethnic difference, thus, made it more likely that they would be identified by the Khmer Rouge and more easily exterminated.

The degree to which the Khmer Rouge sought to eliminate the Vietnamese also differed from its campaign against new people. KR public announcements displaying a "willingness to kill fellow Khmer [associated with Vietnam] reveals the determination of the Khmer Rouge to eliminate any remote traces of the Vietnamese in their country."<sup>105</sup> Informants also asserted that if the Khmer Rouge found out someone was Vietnamese, he or she would surely be killed. These examples illustrate how "ethnic Vietnamese who remained in Cambodia suffered more of an immediate threat to their livelihood because the policies enacted towards them did not tolerate even their mere physical existence."<sup>106</sup> Duong elaborates on this point by writing that "The regime did not give ethnic Vietnamese the option to relinquish their ethnic identity as a

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<sup>105</sup> Duong, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

mechanism for survival. One Khmer Rouge cadre stated, ‘If a person was ethnic Vietnamese, it was certain that they wouldn’t survive. Once they were discovered, that was it.’”<sup>107</sup>

Lastly, the KR extermination practices exacted different impacts on the Khmer and Vietnamese populations. Although a few Vietnamese survived, the overwhelming majority of the population of remaining Vietnamese died by the end of the KR period, so much so that some scholars even proposed that the entire population was annihilated.<sup>108</sup> Although Khmer and new people suffered extremely high numbers of deaths, the extermination of those groups did not have the same proportional impact on their populations. Mak writes about how the organized nature of the Khmer Rouge’s extermination campaign against the Vietnamese and the resulting death toll among the population differentiates the Vietnamese case:

“Compared to other groups, the ethnic Vietnamese population was completely exterminated – it is estimated that 100% of the country’s remaining ethnic Vietnamese population, or 10,000-20,000 people, died between 1975 and 1979. In contrast, 40% of the ethnic Lao, Thai, and Cham populations died – obviously a significant loss, but not proportionately comparable.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, while the DK also initiated irredentist campaigns against Thailand and Laos, its aggression against Vietnam was the most fervent.<sup>110</sup> Numerous documents and decrees on Khmer-Vietnamese relations illustrate DK’s targeted and well-planned campaign.”<sup>111</sup>

For these different reasons, the Vietnamese and Khmer populations faced different treatment in terms of extermination and disappearance.

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<sup>107</sup> Duong, p. 10-11.

<sup>108</sup> Kiernan, Ben. Recovering History and Justice in Cambodia

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 458.

<sup>110</sup> Kiernan, 369 in Mak, pp. 3-4.

<sup>111</sup> Mak, pp. 3-4.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion

My research has provided some answers to the questions I posed in the beginning of my paper:

- (1) Did the Khmer Rouge treat ethnic Khmer and Vietnamese in Democratic Kampuchea differently?
- (2) If so, what explains this disparity in treatment?

From the data, we can see a clear difference between the KR treatment of ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer base people, which is expected considering the fact that the Khmer Rouge favored base people above all other groups. However, differences in the KR treatment of the Vietnamese and Khmer people in a similarly undesirable position (i.e. the “new” people) are not so clear-cut. When comparing the Vietnamese and Khmer new people, I have found the Khmer Rouge’s day-to-day treatment of the two groups, at least in the Eastern Zone, did not differ significantly. However, it appears that disparate treatment did occur in the areas of “Forced Uniformity,” “Expulsion,” and “Extermination.”

Evidence from the “Verbal Abuse,” “Material Deprivation” and “Reeducation, Detainment” categories don’t reveal significant differences in treatment between the Vietnamese and Khmer new people. Both groups were the subjects and recipients of hate speech, given less food and clothes than base people, and vulnerable to detainment by the Khmer Rouge. Informant responses to essential questions also support this claim. When asked if the Khmer Rouge treated ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer people differently in their village (EQ3), 67% of informants responded “No.” While this is not an overwhelming majority, we can gather that at least the KR

treatment of the two groups was not vastly different, or else more people would have responded “Yes.” As cited in the “Material Deprivation” category, 92% of informants did not believe that the Khmer Rouge imposed different living conditions on the Vietnamese and Khmer residents in their village (EQ11). Most informants also did not believe that there were differences in working conditions, with 88% of informants responding “No” to EQ12. The data suggests that there weren’t overt differences between the Khmer Rouge’s general, day-to-day treatment of Vietnamese and Khmer people.

However, the data does reveal some episodes of disparate treatment in the areas of “Forced Uniformity,” “Expulsion,” and “Extermination.” As mentioned earlier, 67% of informants did not believe that ethnic Vietnamese and Khmer people were treated differently in their village (EQ 3). We would expect that the 21%, or the 10 informants who responded “Yes” were Vietnamese themselves, as people often believe that they were treated differently or worse by the Khmer Rouge. However, only 3 of the 10 informants who responded “Yes” were somewhat ethnically Vietnamese, and 2 of those 3 were only a quarter Vietnamese. We would not expect to hear from a Khmer person that the Vietnamese were treated differently than the Khmer, so the fact that the majority who responded “Yes” to EQ3 was ethnically Khmer demands attention.

Although a majority of informants denied any difference in the KR treatment of the Khmer and Vietnamese, examination of the interview transcripts reveals some evidence of disparate treatment. Differences in the “Forced Uniformity” and “Expulsion” categories were clear: the Vietnamese were forced to shed their language and claim to their ethnic identity, which the new people, being predominantly Khmer, did not; the Khmer Rouge also carried out official campaigns to remove the Vietnamese from Democratic Kampuchea, which it did not do to

Khmer or new people. The nature of the extermination campaigns against the two groups also differed, as well as the impact that extermination had on each group's greater population.

In these episodes of disparate treatment, both ethnic and political factors were at play. As soon as the Khmer Rouge took power, it publicly announced that there was to be only a Khmer race and began the regime's pursuit for an ethnically pure Democratic Kampuchea. Most informants remembered hearing KR leaders in village meetings and everyday conversation repeatedly call the Vietnamese the "historical enemy" and refer to Vietnam's past exploitation and abuse of Khmer people such as in the "Tae Ong" incident. Informants also attested to the Khmer Rouge's almost exclusive use of word "yuon" to refer to Vietnamese people. Although the word may have not originated as hate speech, the way in which it was used during the KR period, as evidenced by *Black Paper*, loaded the term with at least a disrespectful tone towards the Vietnamese, which was very likely known to those who employed the term. Such rhetoric provides evidence of the fact that the Khmer Rouge was quite fixated on promoting ethnic cleansing and invoking ethnic resentment. This explains the regime's policies and practices of banning the Vietnamese language and culture, and even physically removing Vietnamese people from the country. Ethnic identity also played a role in the Khmer Rouge's extermination of the Vietnamese, with some Khmer Rouge carrying out massacres of whole Vietnamese communities without any "signs of provocation aside from race."<sup>112</sup>

It appears that the regime was also influenced by political factors such as its antagonism with the VWP and the border war that resulted from the breakdown in their political relationship. We see evidence of such political motivations particularly in the regime's expulsion and extermination policies. In the context of the regional war, security became a top priority for the

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<sup>112</sup> Duong, p. 11.

DK government. In *Black Paper*, the Khmer Rouge rationalized its purge of the Vietnamese from the country by writing that “Vietnamese nationals had secretly infiltrated into Kampuchea and [were] living in hiding [among] the population.”<sup>113</sup> Informant responses and chronological records show that as diplomatic relations between the two countries worsened, the Khmer Rouge’s extermination of ethnic Vietnamese became more frequent, violent, explicit, and widespread.<sup>114</sup> Informants consistently cited 1977 or around 1977, when the border war began, as the year that the Khmer Rouge increased hate speech about the Vietnamese and began collecting the Vietnamese in their villages. This claim is further supported by several public announcements in 1977 and 1978 inciting violence against the Vietnamese in order to defend Cambodia.

These findings indicate that the Vietnamese, at least in the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea, were subject to discriminatory treatment, both in terms of KR policy deliberately singling them out and in terms of KR policy indirectly imposing a different impact on them. Although more research needs to be done to investigate the KR treatment of the Vietnamese in other regions of Democratic Kampuchea and compared to other groups of victims, this paper has sought to move the scholarship towards a better, more nuanced understanding of the subject. If anything, this paper has shown that discrimination does not always involve clear-cut, widespread differences; in fact, the Khmer Rouge’s discrimination against the Vietnamese occurred in episodes of disparate treatment and was intricately intertwined with both historical and contemporary ethnic and political issues. Hopefully future research will further disentangle the complex dynamics involved in the KR treatment of the Vietnamese minority in Democratic Kampuchea.

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<sup>113</sup> Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*, p. 219.

<sup>114</sup> Hinton, p. 219 in Duong, p. 10.

Appendix 1

Map of Democratic Kampuchea, 1976



\*Region circled in black was the Eastern Zone of Democratic Kampuchea

Source: DC-Cam website, Mapping Project

<http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Mapping1976.htm>



## Appendix 2

### Interview Guide

#### *\*Interview Protocol\**

##### *Background*

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Age Now
4. Birthday
5. Ethnicity
6. Location during Khmer Rouge period
  - a. How long did you live there?
  - b. How many people lived there?
  - c. What were their different ethnicities?
  - d. How many people of each ethnicity?
7. What was your job before the Khmer Rouge period?
8. What was your job during the Khmer Rouge period?

##### *Analysis*

1. How did the Khmer Rouge treat people in \_\_\_\_\_?
2. Did the Khmer Rouge treat different people differently in \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Did the Khmer Rouge target Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?
  - a. If yes, do you know why the Khmer Rouge targeted Vietnamese people?
  - b. Were other groups of people targeted?
  - c. If yes, do you know why the Khmer Rouge targeted those groups of people?
4. Do you think the Khmer Rouge treated Vietnamese and Khmer people differently in \_\_\_\_\_?
5. Did the Khmer Rouge treat everyone in \_\_\_\_\_ the same throughout the three years they ruled?
  - a. If no, what year did a change occur?
6. Was there an official or special policy related to Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Was there an official or special policy related to Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
8. Was the policy towards Vietnamese people different than the policy towards Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
9. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Vietnamese people?
  - a. Did the Khmer Rouge talk about Vietnamese people in the same way throughout the three years they ruled?
10. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Khmer people?

- a. Did the Khmer Rouge talk about Vietnamese people in the same way throughout the three years they ruled?
11. Did the Khmer Rouge talk about Vietnamese people differently than they talked about Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
12. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different living conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
13. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different working conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
14. Was it dangerous to be Vietnamese?
  - a. Was it dangerous to be any other thing?
15. Do you know if this was the case in other parts of Cambodia?
  - a. If yes, where?
  - b. How do you know?

*Additional Information*

1. Do you know of a place where many Vietnamese people lived in Cambodia during the KR period?
2. Do you know any Vietnamese people who survived the KR period?
3. Is there anyone you would recommend I speak with? (someone who knows about the how ethnic Vietnamese people were treated)

Appendix 3

Interview Pool

<b>Category</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Number of Informants</b>
Gender	Male	25
	Female	23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>
Age in 1975	10-15	6
	16-25	18
	26-35	14
	36-45	9
	46-55	1
	Total	48
Ethnicity	Full Khmer	30
	Full Chinese	0
	Full Vietnamese	4
	Mixed Chinese-Khmer	5
	Mixed Khmer-Vietnamese	4
	Mixed Chinese-Vietnamese	2
	Mixed Chinese-Khmer-Vietnamese	2
	Unknown	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>
Occupation in KR Period	Common Person (Farmer)	32
	KR Cadre	8
	Unknown	8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>
Location in KR Period (Village in Eastern Zone)	Pochen Dam	16
	Svay Antor	5
	Boeng Kakk	1
	Preah Teayea	1
	Samphorng Chey	1
	Chke Long	1
	Vihea Luong	1
	Sdok Kraol	1
	Kampong Os	1
	Kok Penh	1
	Porpork	1
	Chacak I	4
	Raka Sok	3
	Thlav	3

	Prey Kduoch (Ba Phnom)	2
	Prey Kduoch (Preh Sdech)	2
	Chachak Cheung	2
	Ba Phnom	1
	Prasot	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>

## Appendix 4

### 14 Essential Questions

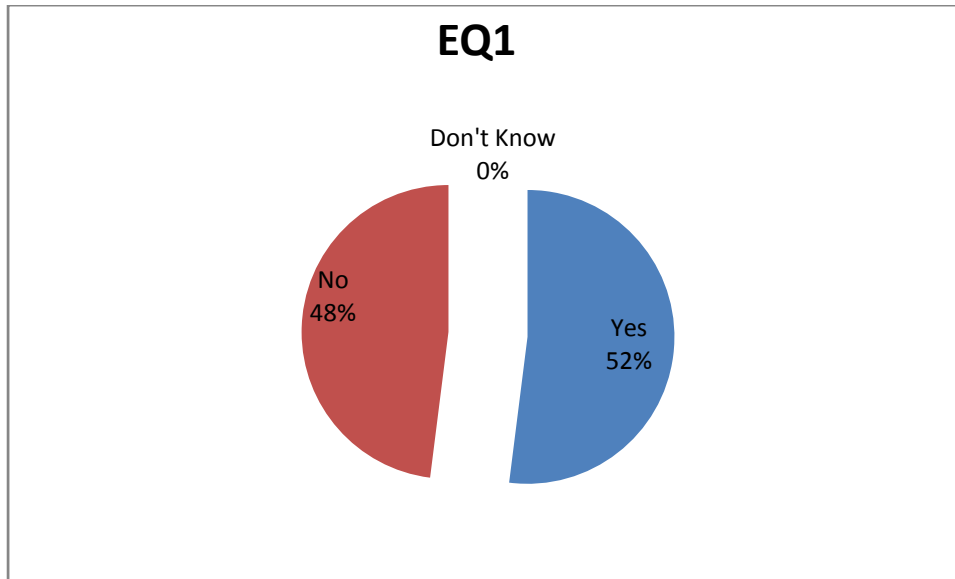
1. Do you think the Khmer Rouge treated different people differently?
2. Did the Khmer Rouge target Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?
3. Do you think the Khmer Rouge treated Vietnamese and Khmer people differently in \_\_\_\_\_?
4. Did the Khmer Rouge treat everyone in \_\_\_\_\_ the same throughout the three years they ruled?
5. Was there an official or special policy related to Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Was there an official or special policy related to Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Was the policy towards Vietnamese people different than the policy towards Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
8. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Vietnamese people?
9. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Khmer people?
10. Did the Khmer Rouge talk about Vietnamese people differently than they talked about Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
11. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different living conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
12. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different working conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?
13. Was it dangerous to be Vietnamese?
14. Was it dangerous to be any other thing?

Appendix 5

Analysis of 14 Essential Questions

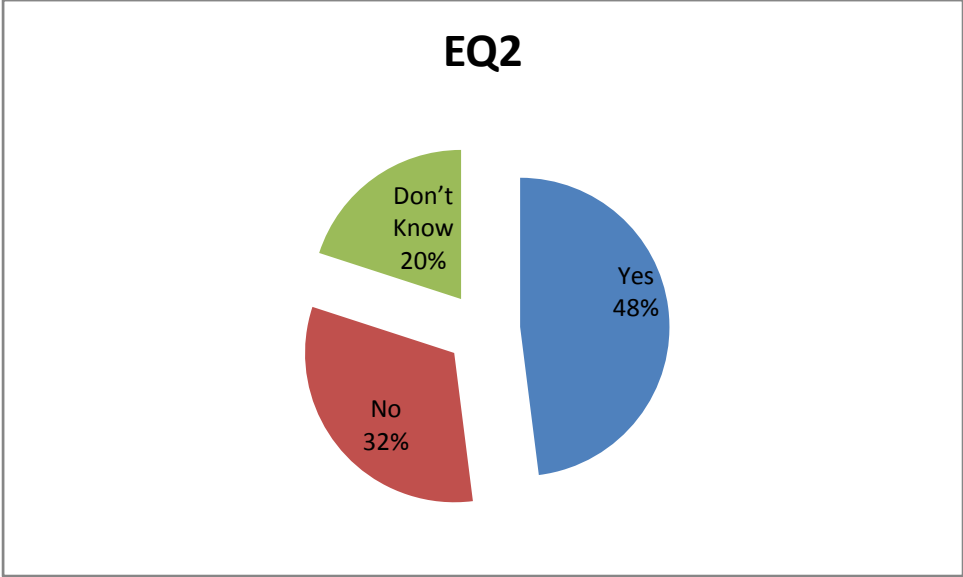
1. Do you think the Khmer Rouge treated different people differently?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	13	25
No	12	25
Don't Know	0	25
Question Not Asked	23	48
Total	48	



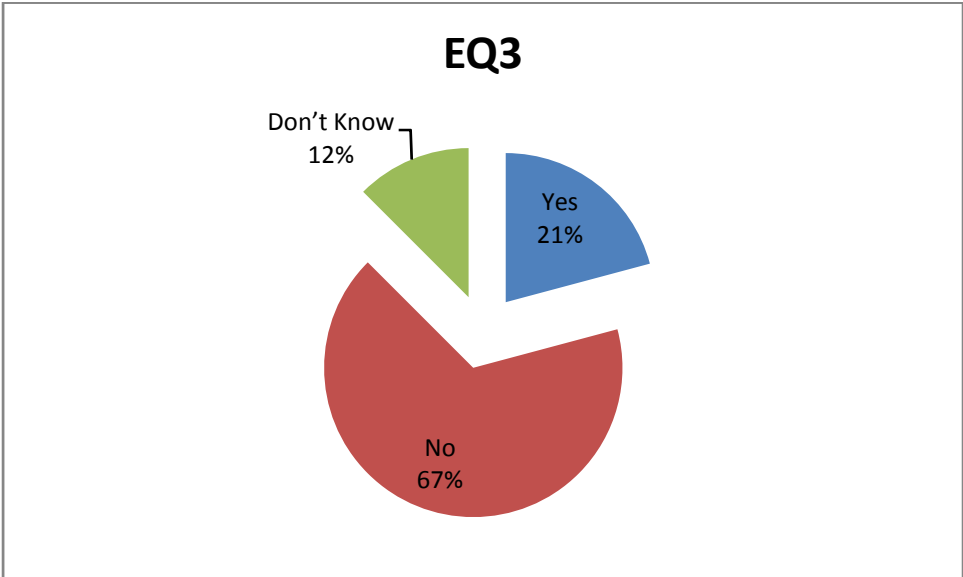
2. Did the Khmer Rouge target Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	12	25
No	8	25
Don't Know	5	25
Question Not Asked	23	48
Total	48	



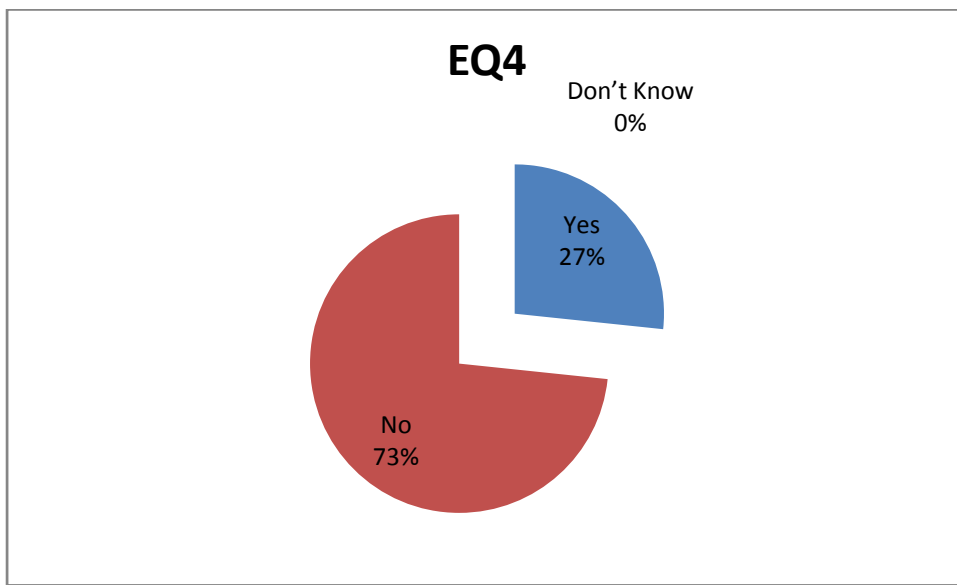
3. Do you think the Khmer Rouge treated Vietnamese and Khmer people differently in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	10	48
No	32	48
Don't Know	6	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	



4. Did the Khmer Rouge treat everyone in \_\_\_\_\_ the same throughout the three years they ruled?

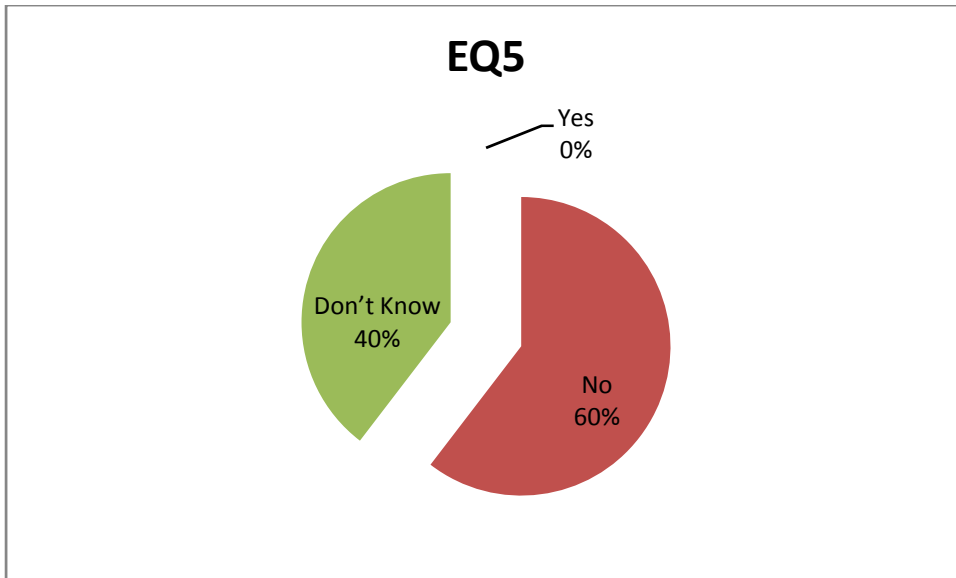
Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	12	45
No	33	45
Don't Know	0	45
Question Not Asked	3	48
Total	48	



5. Was there an official or special policy related to Vietnamese people in \_\_\_\_\_?

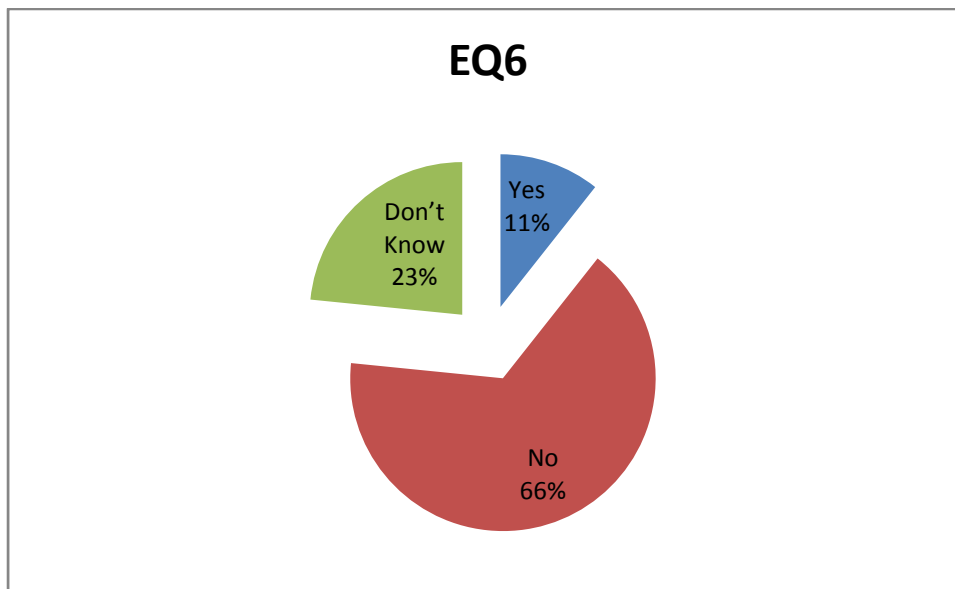
Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	0	48
No	29	48
Don't Know	19	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	





6. Was there an official or special policy related to Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	5	47
No	31	47
Don't Know	11	47
Question Not Asked	1	48
Total	48	



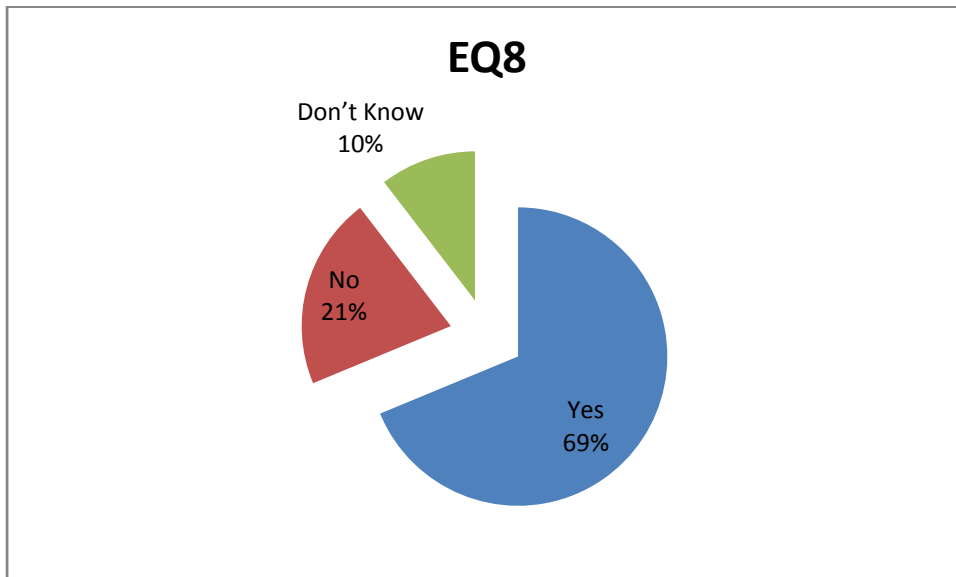
7. Was the policy towards Vietnamese people different than the policy towards Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?\*

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	/	/
No	/	/
Don't Know	/	/
Question Not Applicable	48	48
Question Not Asked	/	/
Total	48	

\*Graph not appropriate to display the responses to this essential question.

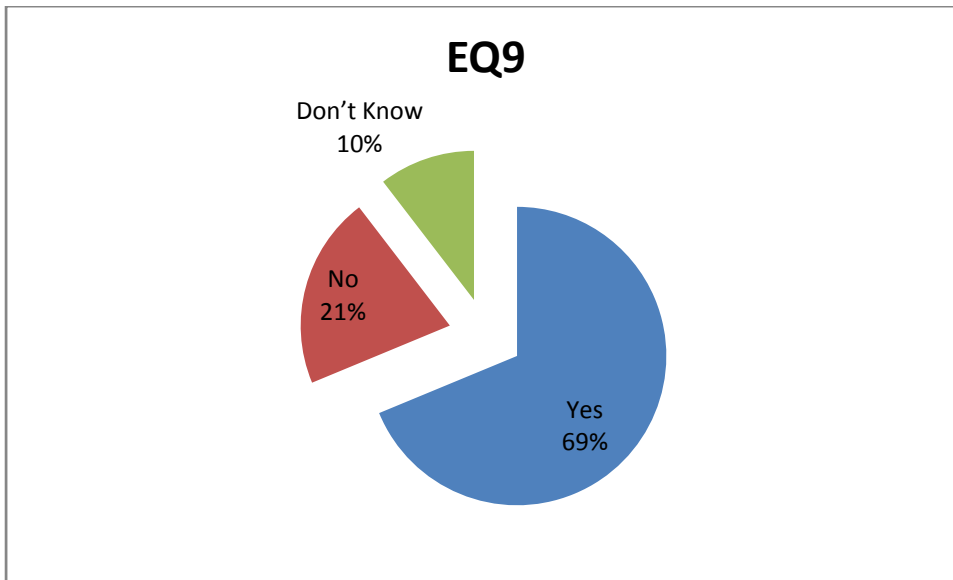
8. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Vietnamese people?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	33	48
No	10	48
Don't Know	5	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	



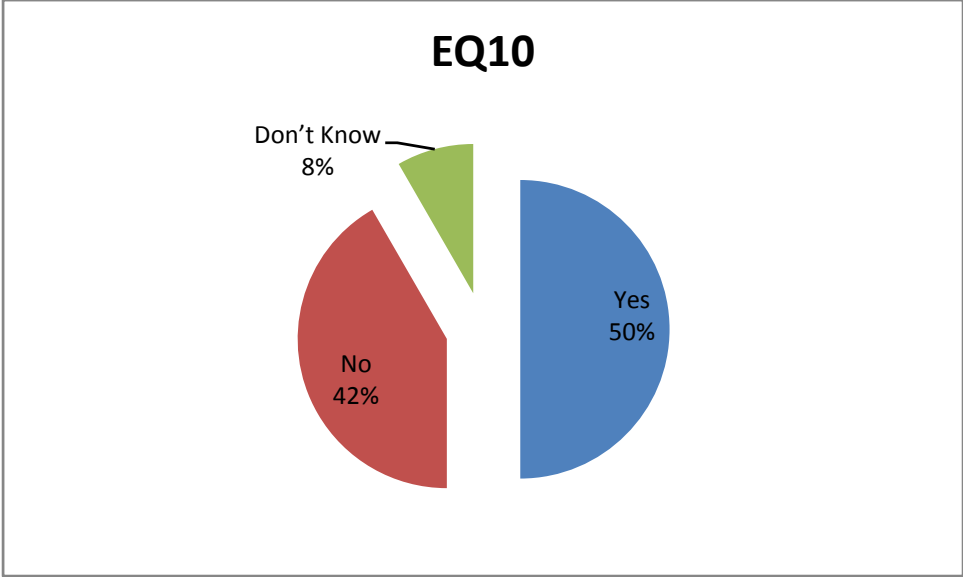
9. Did the Khmer Rouge in \_\_\_\_\_ ever talk about Khmer people?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	33	48
No	10	48
Don't Know	5	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	



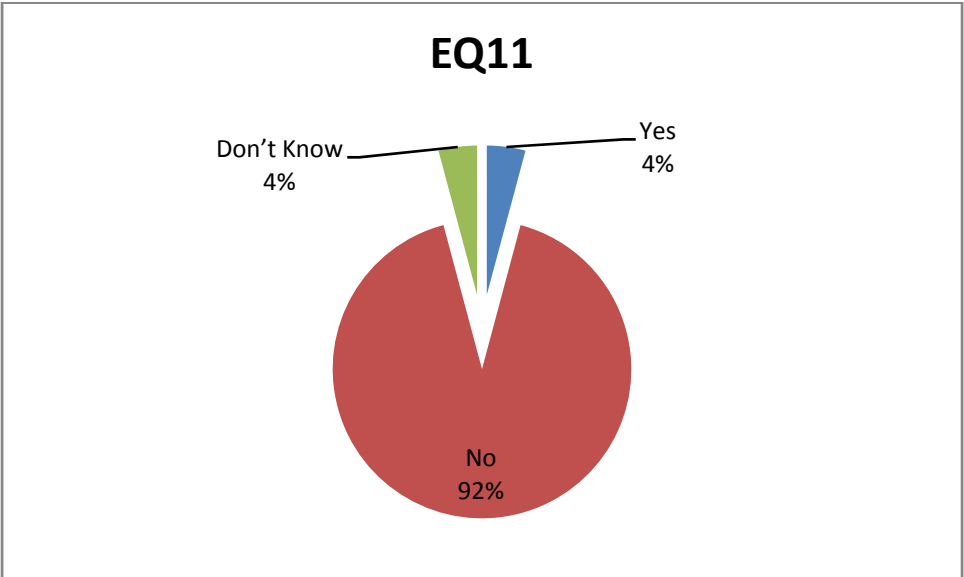
10. Did the Khmer Rouge talk about Vietnamese people differently than they talked about Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	12	24
No	10	24
Don't Know	2	24
Question Not Applicable	21	48
Question Not Asked	3	27
Total	48	



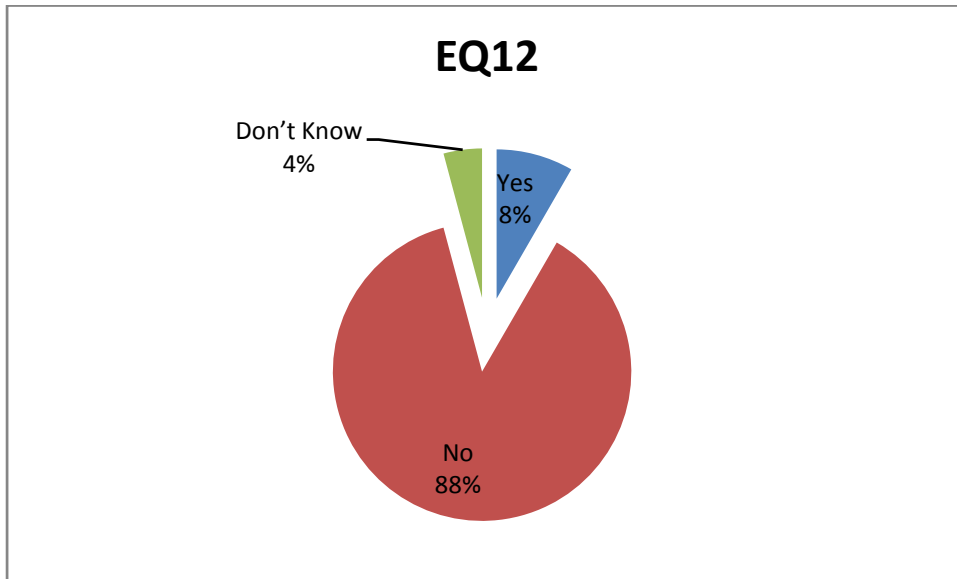
11. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different living conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	2	48
No	44	48
Don't Know	2	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	



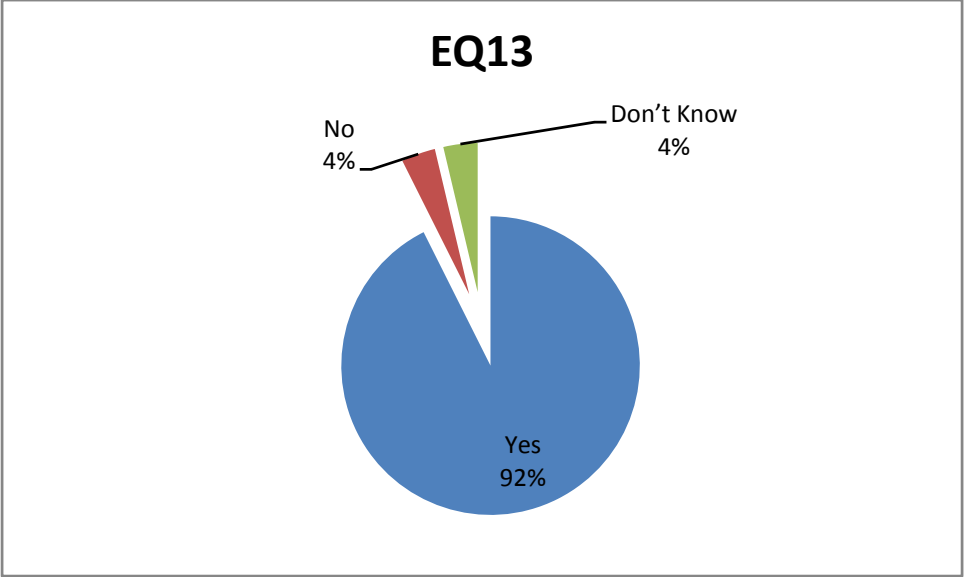
12. Do you think Vietnamese people faced different working conditions than Khmer people in \_\_\_\_\_?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	4	48
No	42	48
Don't Know	2	48
Question Not Asked	0	48
Total	48	



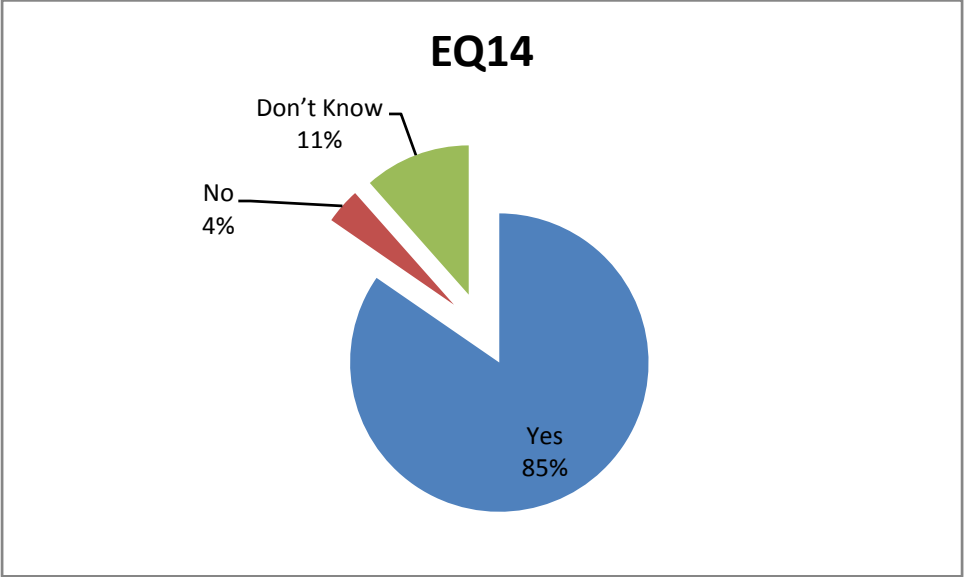
13. Was it dangerous to be Vietnamese?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	25	27
No	1	27
Don't Know	1	27
Question Not Asked	21	48
Total	48	



14. Was it dangerous to be any other person?

Response	Number of Informants	Total Informants
Yes	22	26
No	1	26
Don't Know	3	26
Question Not Asked	22	48
Total	48	



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