

PhD. 36191

**Imagining Cambodia:
Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993 -)**

Astrid Noren-Nilsson
King's College
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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and International Studies, October 2012

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This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

Some of the material of the second chapter of this thesis will be published in Norén-Nilsson, Astrid, "Performance as (Re)Incarnation: The Sdech Kân Narrative", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (forthcoming, February 2013).

The dissertation does not exceed the limit of 80,000 words.

Imagining Cambodia: Competing Nationalisms in the Second Kingdom (1993 -)

Astrid Norén-Nilsson

This dissertation examines the national imaginations advanced by political party actors in the Kingdom of Cambodia (KOC, 1993 -). It explores three interrelated questions: What do different Cambodian political projects imagine the political contents of the nation to be? How do these competing imaginations bear on political party actors' claims to represent the nation? How do competing imaginations of the nation play out in contemporary Cambodian politics? This leads to a fourth question: How useful can attention to national imaginings be for understanding political developments in a post-conflict setting? In 1993, multi-party democratic elections were held and a constitutional monarchy reinstated in Cambodia, in the wake of more than two decades of civil war. Whilst the imperative of nation-building loomed larger than ever, the main political actors continued to advance radically different imaginations of the Cambodian nation, each laying claims to exclusively represent it. Taking Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined community' as a starting point, this thesis considers contemporary political contestation in Cambodia in terms of competing, unfinished, imagined communities. They are *competing* insofar as they are elite imaginations, each striving to disseminate a particular understanding of the nation, and *unfinished*, since they are continuously subject to practices of reimagination. This thesis proposes that these competing national imaginings formed a prominent dynamic inseparable from wider political contestation in the KOC. It is argued that to make the new democratic politics mean something, all political party actors turned to the nation as the most important part of the answer. Political actors redefined their political projects by rearticulating ideas of the political contents of the nation, and their own role in representing, embodying or defending it. This defined bids for political legitimacy. Key notions of the new political setting such as democracy, royalism and populism were articulated as part of the same process. The dissertation maps out the national imaginations advanced by political actors with an institutional base in Cambodia's main political parties competing electorally in the KOC. It examines these as three contending sets of political actors: the Cambodian People's Party, royalist parties, and democratic parties. From different angles, it explores conceptions of the contours and characteristics of the nation and how it is to be politically represented, entailing questions of the nature of democracy, constructions of the people, elected versus inherited leadership, embodiment, and, ultimately, continuity and change in such conceptualisations.

Acknowledgements

I am greatly honoured that three men who have defined Cambodian politics over the past few decades have agreed to contribute to this research: Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen, H.R.H. Norodom Ranariddh, and H.E. Sam Rainsy.

I am indebted to all the Cambodians who have shared their time and lives with me over the past ten years, changing the course of my life. Some of these are listed as interviewees in this thesis; I am hugely grateful to each and every one of them for taking part in this research. I am also grateful to the many others that have helped me during the course of this research, contributing in various ways. Particularly, there are many interviews that I had originally intended to include in this thesis but have been unable to due to constraints of space; these have been invaluable for informing my understanding of the topic at hand.

I am grateful to Heng Ham Kheng, for all our conversations; to Hong Rakin and family, for opening their arms to me; to Sisowath Ayravady, for our discussions; to Samdech Sisowath Pongneary Lolotte, for initiating me in Khmer Buddhism and Brahmanism; to Than Sothea, and Mony Chinda and family, for everything that we have shared; to Sam Sareth, and Sem Chhinita and family, for taking me in as an adopted family member.

In terms of academic support and guidance, I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Dr. Tomas Larsson, for carefully reading subsequent drafts of this thesis and providing discerning feedback; to Dr. Steve Heder, for continuous advice during the diverse stages of the research process; and to Prof. David Chandler, Dr. Ian Harris, and Dr. Ashley Thompson, for insightful comments on parts of this thesis.

I wish to thank the Gates Cambridge Trust, and King's College, Cambridge, for funding this research and for providing dynamic academic communities from which I have benefited greatly.

For their constant support, encouragement, sacrifices and love, I wish to thank my parents Åsa Norén and Bo G. Nilsson; for always looking after me and sharing every thought, my sister Ingrid Norén-Nilsson; and for instilling in me the value of academic work, my grandmother Thyra Norén.

Sothy Eng, Marta Östborn and Timor Sharan have supported me in completing this work. I also wish to thank those who made my Cambridge years unforgettably meaningful, particularly Humera Iqbal, Sandy To, Ching-Yu Soar Huang, Lindsay Scorgie, Kiki Yu, Sam Zhiguang Yin, Lu Gram, Murat Siviloglu, Hassan Akram, Francesco Messineo, Fabio Bolzonaro and Puli Fuwongcharoen.

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Introduction

Aims

What do different Cambodian political projects imagine the political contents of the nation to be? How do competing imaginings of the nation play out in contemporary Cambodian politics? How do these competing imaginings bear on political party actors' claims to represent the nation? By extension, how useful can attention to national imaginings be for understanding political developments in a post-conflict setting?

In 1991, several years of negotiations came to a close when four contending factions signed the Paris Peace Agreements (PPA), ending more than two decades of Cambodian civil war. Out of these four factions, the political parties that would come to dominate Cambodian politics in the resulting multi-party democratic system emerged. Caroline Hughes writes that the last phase of the prolonged civil war split Cambodia into two contending nations: one under the control of the Phnom Penh-based government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK, 1979–1989), and one under the control of the tripartite coalition resistance government, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK). These were divided geopolitically, in that each enjoyed the backing of contending Cold War power blocs; physically, by a border of landmines; as well as in imaginations, maintaining separate historiographies and future visions with both sides claiming to represent the genuine Khmer nation. On the brink of a new era in which the keywords were peace, national reconciliation and multi-party democracy, the imperative of Khmer unity emerged as paramount, whilst, with no secure imagining of the Cambodian nation, the outlines and character of the national community were unclear.¹

Two decades later, at the time of writing in September 2012, a conference has just concluded at Northern Illinois University, in which scholars from all disciplines were gathered to discuss the theme 'Imagining Cambodia'. Participants were invited to explore questions of what lies beyond a post-conflict nation, how new histories are

¹ Hughes (2009): 47–48.

being created and what new visions for the future are expressed. These questions are of key importance to a wide range of academic disciplines, yet their significance from a political perspective has yet to be adequately explored. Two decades on, political science scholarship has produced a solid corpus of analyses of how power politics has played out in post-PPA Cambodia. We now have the beginnings of an understanding of the workings of formal and informal institutions in relation to political party competition. Yet, a systematic analysis of how political competition is, and has been, anchored in more fundamental debates over the character of the national community has been missing.

Taking as a starting point Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined community', this dissertation explores the ways in which political party actors in the multi-party democratic system in the Kingdom of Cambodia (KOC, 1993–), the state instituted following the PPA, have advanced different imaginings of the nation. It proposes that, to make the new democratic politics mean something in post-PPA Cambodia, all political party actors turned to the nation as the most important part of the answer. Following the PPA, which were intended to unite the competing nations, the imperative of nation-building loomed larger than ever. Yet the main political actors, I argue, continued to advance radically different imaginings of the national community.

Considering the political dimensions of art, Ashley Thompson suggests that there is a crisis of representation in today's Cambodia.² Political representation, she charges, remains inseparable from artistic representation, so that the wartime destruction of art raises the question of what form the modern nation will take. This thesis argues that a crisis over the representation of the contemporary Cambodian nation has similarly permeated political party competition. In post-PPA Cambodia, political party actors continued to make different claims to represent the genuine Khmer nation, basing those claims on different imaginings thereof. In this sense, they continued to advance competing nations, whilst each laid claims that their imagining, alone, represented the true Cambodia. These competing national imaginings emerged as a prominent

² Thompson (2008): 202–3.

underlying dynamic structuring wider political contestation in the KOC. This dissertation lays out how claims to exclusive national representation formed a much more pervasive logic than acknowledged by previous scholarship – one that cuts across all political camps.

The 1991 Paris Peace Agreements and the resulting 1993 multi-party elections constituted but the latest turning point in Cambodian modern history, marked by discontinuity. Cambodia has gone through six successive post-independence regimes attempting to realise widely different political systems. With the introduction of a multi-party democratic system, the factions-turned-parties redefined their political projects to compete within the new framework. They did so by rearticulating, brushing up and patching up ideas of the political contents of the nation, and their own role in representing, embodying or defending it. This entailed renegotiations of the character and contours of the nation and its people, and the role and mandate of the national political leadership. Thereby, principal notions of the new political setting, such as democracy, royalism and populism, were articulated as part of the same process. Among these notions, that of democracy was key, since, within the nominally democratic framework, it provided a language that all national imaginings were partly phrased in.

The argument of this thesis can be summed up in the following points. This thesis proposes that competing imaginings and representations of the Cambodian nation formed a powerful underlying dynamic structuring wider political contestation in post-PPA Cambodia. The main political actors engaged in political party contestation in the KOC all vocally advanced different claims to represent the nation. They did so by means of, beside, and beyond their political party programs, in ways that entailed the symbolic and discursive contestation of the political contents of the nation. They sought to forge links between themselves and the nation, advancing claims that posited them as uniquely poised to realise the nation's aspirations. These competing bids for representation of the nation are crucial for understanding the trajectories of different political party actors, and for the making of key political notions in post-PPA Cambodia, and, thereby, inseparable from larger contemporary political developments. Finally, this thesis proposes that political legitimacy in the KOC was

no exception to the string of successive regimes in post-independence Cambodia, which all firmly tied legitimacy to representation of the political community of the nation. Whilst existing studies have focused on the performance-based aspects of KOC-era legitimacy, the following argument draws out how different bids for legitimacy are ultimately traceable to the political community of the nation.

Theoretical Framework

Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as an 'imagined community' fundamentally rewrote the research agenda for studies in nationalism. Applying constructivism to the study of the nation, *Imagined Communities* traces the origins of national consciousness to the modern industrial age of Western European Enlightenment. With the demise of hierarchical forms of social organisation associated with Christianity, economic change sparked the rise of scientific discoveries, rapid communication and capitalism, accompanied by the development of print-as-commodity, for which Anderson coins the joint term 'print-capitalism'. Print-capitalism helped create and disseminate national languages across territories previously lacking a shared identity. It also spread an idea of 'homogeneous, empty time' by creating a sense of the simultaneous activities of different persons within the same imagined community. In this way, economic factors helped spread universal, homogenous and 'horizontal-secular' notions of national space and time, enabling diverse groups of people to relate to each other as parts of a national community, homogenous in the sense of sharing a past, present and future within a common territory with fixed boundaries.

For Anderson, the nation is an imagined community 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in minds of each lives the image of their communion'.³ Not only the nation, but, in fact, 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity-genuineness, but by the style in which they are

³ Anderson (1991): 6.

imagined'.⁴ Anderson emphasises the role of creative imagery, 'invented traditions' and symbols of tradition in the construction of modern nations.

This dissertation takes Anderson's *Imagined Communities* as its starting point, by pursuing a range of research directions that it has opened up. Firstly, Anderson demonstrates that the nation is a historical invention rather than a natural, pre-existing entity. All nations, according to Anderson, are imagined artefacts that bestow feelings of identity. Because all nations are imagined, it is the particular way in which they are imagined that becomes the key research question, rather than their objective 'genuineness'. Secondly, Anderson locates 'imagination' at the backdrop of economic, social and political conditions that enable people to conceive of themselves as part of an imagined community. Thus, imaginings of the nation are firmly rooted in a structural and material context. Thirdly, Anderson's argument suggests that the nation is real and imagined at the same time. This is because, once established, the imagined community instituted a new sense of self, space and time, thereby changing the parameters of action and making nationalism a real institutional and political agent.⁵ Whilst nations are constructed entities, they are, at the same time, also 'factually existing agents in the modern world order'.⁶

In spite of its analytical advantages, the notion of 'imagined community' has also provoked much criticism, not only in regards to Anderson's particular historical argument, but also in terms of more thoroughgoing problems and contradictions in Anderson's deployment of this notion. Because of this, and because this study addresses a different time frame than that addressed by Anderson, Anderson's framework is only applied to the present study with a range of modifications and qualifications.

Firstly, nationalism is not merely a historical phenomenon that succeeded in producing uniform imagined communities around the world. Whilst the historical emergence of nationalism is well theorised in the scholarship of nationalism, the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Roepstorff & Bubandt (2003): 16.

⁶ Ibid.: 18.

subsequent transformations of nationalism are generally neglected.⁷ Anderson's *Imagined Communities* addresses the colonial and immediate post-colonial time periods, exclusively. Applying his framework to contemporary nations therefore necessitates taking into account the different contexts and characteristics of nations that are long-established, in the sense that they have long been imagined as 'communities of equals based on a deep horizontal comradeship'. Around the world, these 'imagined communities' can be thought of as 'unfinished imagined communities'. They are 'unfinished imagined communities' in the sense that national membership is often contested and their boundaries thus subject to continuous contestation and negotiation.⁸ In many countries, even though nations are conceived of as horizontal communities, they are crosscut by categories of exclusion, often along ethno-racial lines. This points to the larger implication that imagined communities are necessarily 'unfinished', in the sense that they are continuously subject to practices of reimagination. Contemporary nations serve as a universal classificatory system in a world divided into nation states and are in this sense also a spatial, political and historical category of political and social life.⁹ Contemporary nations can therefore be said to exist in a dialectical relationship between their particular histories and the practice of imagination.¹⁰ Theorising contemporary nationalisms thus entails considering nations as entities with particular histories that are subject to continuous practices of imagination and reimagination. Whilst contemporary rival political projects often claim to represent one and the same nation, they imagine not only the contours but also the characteristics of the nation in widely different ways. Employing the notion of 'imagined community' to modern Austria, Zimelis concludes that it also applies to how nations are recreated. Austrian political parties reinvent 'imagined' communities through rival notions of Austrian 'nationalism' to compete electorally.¹¹ Zimelis's analysis underlines how 'imagination' of the nation in the contemporary period is necessarily a 'reimagination', and how this, in turn, produces many competing forms of contemporary 'nationalisms'.

⁷ Itzigsohn & vom Hau (2006): 193.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Roepstorff & Bubandt (2003): 16.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Zimelis (2010): 6.

Cambodia can be thought of as an 'unfinished imagined community' in both of these senses. Whilst Cambodia is a long-established nation, in the sense that the successive string of political projects ever since the emergence of national imaginings in the pre-independence era have imagined it as a community of equals based on a deep horizontal comradeship, the contours and characteristics of this 'imagined community' have been imagined and reimagined in sharply different ways. In contemporary Cambodia, membership in the national community and related questions of citizenship remain contested, particularly with reference to ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai minorities, whilst the communal and national identities of indigenous upland minorities and the Muslim Cham, generally viewed as bona fide Khmers, are subject to continuous negotiation.¹² On the national arena, competing reimaginings of the nation are today negotiated through party political contestation.

Conceptualising contemporary nations as 'unfinished' highlights thoroughgoing difficulties with the Andersonian assumption of 'nationalism' as an unproblematic agent of homogenisation. This assumption is evident in Anderson's notion of homogeneous empty time, in which he posits that the nation 'is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history', and that people, through this sense of 'calendrical' time, share a temporal dimension.¹³ Post-colonial theory has challenged the homogenous nature of the 'nation' by asking the question, 'whose imagined community?'¹⁴ It proposes difference in the articulation of nationalisms, by indicating historically and culturally specific dynamics in the postcolonial world. Anderson's notion of calendrical time has also been criticised in terms of its obfuscation of important processes of recollecting and retracing the past. Rather, the

¹² Edwards (1996); Jordens (1996); Hinton (2006); Poethig (2006); Ovesen & Trankell (2004); Amer (2006); and Ehrentraut (2011).

¹³ Anderson (1991): 26.

¹⁴ Chatterjee (1993): 220 challenges Anderson's conception of nationalism as composed of a set of basic tenets appropriated from Europe by the post-colonial world. He argues that, whilst anti-colonial nationalist movements shared the same discursive field as the colonialists, they insisted on a form of inner sovereignty and claimed their own 'essential' cultural identity. A similar critique of Anderson's account of Latin American nationalisms is delivered by Castro-Klarén & Chasteen (2003), who argue that 'diverse cultural influences shaped Latin American nationalisms'.

nation may be thought to move in salvational time, 'the time in which the past can be recovered and redeemed'.¹⁵ The recovery of the past is vital to any national project, as processes of reassessing, rereading, and reimagining the past are important preconditions for imagining alternative futures.

This suggests that national imaginings, whilst aspiring to create notions of homogeneity, make up contentious imaginings promoting difference. To approach these contentious imaginings, in turn, necessitates an extension of Anderson's original concept of 'imagined communities', shifting from passive to active procedural imagining.¹⁶ This shift entails reconsidering communities, 'not as homogenous entities or fictions, but as arenas of struggle, negotiation, and creation'.¹⁷ Tanabe suggests that Anderson's 'imagined community' of bounded, homogeneous, empty time and space is only half of the story. The 'imagined community', he asserts, still 'remains rather an ideal, or a *model* for a modern nation itself with an autonomous, sovereign form of political rationality, without addressing other moments of *imagining* where perpetual movements of the marginal integration of individuals and groups emerge'.¹⁸ This realisation has been readily translated into an interest in marginalised positions and strategies of response and resistance among othered populations.¹⁹

In Cambodia, successive brands of nationalism have successfully acted as Andersonian agents of homogenisation, in the sense that the successive string of political projects since independence have united around the Cambodian nation as a common identity. This has entailed a homogenisation of time and space insofar that all political projects purport to represent a Cambodian nation, with a roughly similar temporal and spatial frame. Yet, at the same time, national imaginings have made up contentious imaginings that, whilst not uprooting the Cambodian nation as the

¹⁵ Craig (2007): 38–39.

¹⁶ Roepstorff & Bubandt (2003): 16.

¹⁷ Tanabe (2008): 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 5.

¹⁹ Cp. how Homi Bhabha (1990): 308–9 argues that the assumption of homogeneous, empty time builds on how the 'arbitrary nature of the sign' separates language and reality, allowing Anderson to emphasise the mythical nature of the nation. Instead, he invites us to consider nations as 'narrative constructions', where contending national constituencies negotiate nationness and minority discourse speaks 'between times and places'.

ultimate object of allegiance, have shown the boundaries of nationalism as an agent of homogenisation. This is certainly the case at the 'margins' of the nation, where ethnic minority communal identities are negotiated, as a small body of literature suggests.²⁰ Contentious imaginings also play out at the centre stage of the national political scene, where different political actors tied to different political parties launch competing visions of the political contents of the nation. Whilst nations as 'imagined communities', understood as collectives with intersubjectively shared understandings of their common identity, all over the world are made up of groups with different ideas about appropriate political institutions and practices, in Cambodia, contestation goes beyond this to centre on the very fundamentals of how the nation should be conceived, its implications for political representation and practice, and which political project, in turn, shares in Cambodian identity. In this sense, political contestation can be understood to centre on the advancement of competing 'imagined communities'.

In contemporary Cambodia, all actors claim to represent the same, Cambodian nation, advancing competing imaginings that correspond to Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.²¹ Yet, in doing so, each of these actors claims to exclusively represent the true Cambodian nation. By the same token, political adversaries are 'othered' as false representatives of the Cambodian nation, not sharing in Cambodian identity and threatening its very survival.²² In this sense, rival bids for representation of the nation claim rival 'imagined communities', which make alternative conceptualisations out as non-Cambodian. This perspective certainly challenges the homogenising aspect of nationalism. Rather than a shared 'imagined community', we find competing ones, denying the shared nationality of rival bids. This reframes Chatterjee's question, 'whose imagined community?', bringing attention to the role of alternative elite imaginations.²³ In this context, it is useful to follow Tanabe's

²⁰ Bourdier (2006); Hammer, ed. (2009); Guérin, Hardy, Nguyen & Stan-Tan (2003).

²¹ Anderson (1991): 7.

²² Cp. how Hughes (2002b): 168 charges that the rhetorical portrayal of political opponents as threats to the survival of the nation, alongside the attempted manipulation of democratic processes and institutions, is the major strategy by which Cambodian political parties seek to gain advantage over one another.

²³ Chatterjee (1993): 220.

invitation to chart active procedural imaginings, reconsidering communities as 'arenas of struggle, negotiation, and creation'. In these arenas, the nation moves forward in 'salvational' time, as the past is constantly reimagined in order to negotiate alternative futures.

This thesis proposes to consider contemporary political contestation in Cambodia in terms of competing, unfinished, imagined communities. They are *competing* imagined communities insofar as they are elite imaginings, each striving to become hegemonic and gain popular acceptance in order to cement a particular understanding of the true characteristics and contours of the nation. They are *unfinished* insofar as they are continuously subject to practices of reimagination of their particular histories. This underlines the role of political elites in reimagining the nation for political gain within a multi-party democratic framework where electoral victory is the main objective of political action. Anderson's 'imagined community' referred to the emergence of a homogenous vision in society, shared in equal part by all its members, who were thereby tied together in horizontal notions of equality. Today, whilst such a notion of a Cambodian nation as an overarching identity that unites the general public in a national society prevails, a prominent dynamic is how political actors, through different strategies, equal this nation exclusively with particular political projects, whilst denying, or questioning, the shared nationality of their political adversaries, thereby advancing rival 'imagined communities'. This is a study of these elite alleged, supposed, and desired versions of the Khmer nation. It thus approaches the question of the making of the nation from a different perspective than the study of nation-building as political practice and public policy, which takes an interest in the state-led process of building national identity to promote social cohesion within the state;²⁴ it also takes a different approach from the study of the making of the nation at its margins, which primarily examines majority-minority interactions.²⁵ Given the limitations of space, it also omits questions of the making and role of transnational identities, which, whilst shared across the political spectrum,

²⁴ See, for example, Bloom (1990): 55.

²⁵ Cp. Amer (2006); Bourdier (2006); Hammer, ed. (2009); Guérin, Hardy; Nguyen & Stan-Tan (2003); Edwards (1996); Jordens (1996); Hinton (2006); Poethig (2006); Ovesen & Trankell (2004); and Ehrentraut (2011).

were dynamics most strongly associated with the former tripartite resistance.²⁶ In line with the framework set out by Anderson, this dissertation examines both discursive strategies in defining the nation and the material context within which discursive strategies operate – an often overlooked aspect of Anderson’s work.²⁷ It outlines how these different imaginings and reimaginings of the nation reflect different possibilities and constraints pertaining to the different political identities they invoke and the historical discursive baggage they carry. Rather than making a strictly textual analysis, I also include other elements of discourse, such as public speech, art, performance and myths. Finally, whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the level of public acceptance and social penetration of these different logics, this argument does, to some limited extent, shed light on the viability of these different bids.

Setting and Context

On 23 October 1991, the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements (PPA) ended civil war between the State of Cambodia (SOC) and the tripartite coalition government, the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK); the last phase of more than two decades of conflict. The People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK, 1979–1989), renamed the SOC in 1989, had been a single-party state under the Kampuchean People’s Revolutionary Party (KPRP), renamed the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) in 1991, controlling the bulk of Cambodian territory. The tripartite coalition government, formed in 1982 between the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge), the anti-communist Kampuchean People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF), and the royalist Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC), had been based on the Thai–Cambodian border, controlling a strip of territory along the border as well as enclaves scattered across the heartland. It had represented Cambodia at the UN since 1982. Following the PPA, Cambodia became subject to one of the largest peacebuilding missions in the history of the UN, known as the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC, 1991–93). This ended PRK-era

²⁶ See Poethig (2006).

²⁷ Wollman & Spencer (2007): 8–9.

isolation, when the PRK had found itself on the Soviet–Vietnamese side of the Cold War divide, whilst the tripartite government in turn was backed up by China, the US and ASEAN. International intervention through a variety of international actors has since been continuously implicated in outlining the contours of the domestic polity itself, and domestic strategies of state- and party-building.²⁸

One month after the signing of the PPA, deposed monarch Sihanouk returned to Cambodia to head a Supreme National Council to oversee the transition to a multi-party democratic system prepared for by the agreements. The wide-reaching changes that followed the PPA have often been summed up as a triple transition: from war to peace, from a socialist People's Republic to a multi-party democracy, and from a planned economy to a free market economy.²⁹ In May 1993, general elections formally introduced multi-party democracy. Whilst maintaining bitter enmity, the different political factions coming out of civil war now became electoral competitors competing through political party vehicles. The exception was the Khmer Rouge, who boycotted the 1993 elections and rejected its results.³⁰ Royalist party FUNCINPEC won a surprise victory with 45% of the votes, whilst the CPP arrived second with 38% of votes. A quadripartite coalition government was formed between FUNCINPEC, the CPP, and two smaller parties of limited importance: the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) coming out of the KPRLF, and MOULINAKA. Despite FUNCINPEC's narrow win, a fifty–fifty power-sharing formula between FUNCINPEC and the CPP was put in place introducing two prime ministers, two deputy prime ministers, and equal representation in all ministries.³¹ The same year, a new constitution was adopted that set out liberal democracy and pluralism as the political principles of the nation. A constitutional monarchy was reinstated and the

²⁸ Hughes (2002c): 85. Hughes (2002c): 87–111 divides international engagement into four time periods: international interest in a peace process from the late 1980s to 1993; less direct international engagement with the coalition government whilst maintaining monitoring, trade and aid policies 1993–97; direct intervention through diplomacy, conditionality and monitoring following the 1997 July events 1997–98; and a final period since 1998, in which international engagement again has operated on the level of diplomacy, negotiations and aid policies, rather than addressing larger questions of the legitimacy of the government.

²⁹ Hughes (2002c): 1.

³⁰ They subsequently established the Provisional Government of National Union and National Salvation of Cambodia (PGNUNSC) in 1994, which was dissolved in 1998 when the movement disintegrated.

³¹ Roberts (2002): 523–25.

SOC changed its name to the Kingdom of Cambodia (KOC), often referred to as the Second Kingdom – to distinguish it from the first kingdom, which had been abolished by the Khmer Republic in 1970.³² Sihanouk ascended the throne, and the national motto, 'nation, religion, king', was reinstated. A few years into the coalition government, the events of 5–6 July 1997 permanently altered the political landscape in favour of the CPP. A de facto coup by then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen (of the CPP) ousting First Prime Minister Norodom Ranariddh (of the FUNCINPEC), clipped the wings of political royalists and cemented the CPP's strong grip over the Cambodian political scene, cutting short what some had read as an incipient transition to a genuine democracy. The following period was marked by the steady decay of FUNCINPEC, as it entered into successive coalition governments with the CPP in 1998, 2003, and 2008 as the junior partner. Meanwhile, the BLDP was split by infighting and dissolved in 1997. In its place, the main party to represent an anti-Vietnamese, anti-communist alternative was the Khmer Nation Party (KNP), founded in 1995 by Sam Rainsy and, after 1998, known as the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). In 2007, the SRP was joined by the Human Rights Party (HRP) to form an opposition to the CPP. Despite constituting a powerful force up through the 2008 elections, the SRP has since been significantly weakened and, at the time of writing, the opposition poses no serious challenges to the CPP.

In this political framework, liberal democracy nominally provides the format and language of political contestation and the constitutional monarchy delineates the political space. Yet, the overwhelming dominance of the CPP over Cambodian political realities, reconfirmed by the 1997 events, compromises, if not contradicts, both. Second Kingdom Cambodia can be characterised as an electoral democracy, where elections are the main arena of political competition, yet have their own limitations.³³ Heder calls it an 'electoral system with many un-free and un-fair

³² The first kingdom refers to the first post-Independence state under Norodom Sihanouk, which was also known as the Kingdom of Cambodia, *Preah Reach Anachak Kampuchea* (1953–1970). The Cambodian monarchy traces its roots in the Angkorean kings from the foundation of the Khmer Empire in year 802. The absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional monarchy in 1947. In 1970, the monarchy was abolished by the Khmer Republic.

³³ Karbaum (2011) argues that, since 1993, 'Hun Sen has consolidated an autocratic regime in which elections are the only way political competition plays out, and even that competition is

aspects', which he suggests, together with the CPP's monopoly of force, control of the courts, performance legitimacy and patronage resources, as well as Hun Sen's benefactions to society, electorally marginalise the opposition.³⁴ Levitsky and Way refer to the contemporary Cambodian regime as 'competitive authoritarianism', which they define as 'civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents'.³⁵ These regimes are 'competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents', through measures such as electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources and varying degrees of harassment and state power.³⁶ As the internationally sponsored peace-building project turned into a democracy-building one, the international community was increasingly 'Othered' by the incumbent CPP and claimed as an ally by the opposition.³⁷ Meanwhile, the CPP has made it clear that the sustention of the constitutional monarchy depends on its readiness to accommodate the ruling interest, and repeatedly threatened to abolish the monarchy at times when the monarchy has seemed unwilling to comply with this.

limited'. Citing evidence from Southeast Asia, Dan Slater (2008) suggests that competitive national elections amid robust mass mobilisation act as a spur for enhancing state infrastructural power through catalysing the construction of mass ruling parties, energising state registration of marginal populations and compelling central state authorities to expand their coercive monopoly into areas previously controlled by local strongmen or militias. All three mechanisms can arguably be identified in Cambodia.

³⁴ Heder (2012): 113.

³⁵ Levitsky & Way (2010): 5. This is a useful concept because, as noted by the authors (p. 16), other subtypes of authoritarianism, referring to non-democracies with multiparty elections, such as electoral authoritarianism (Schedler 2006) or semi-authoritarianism (Carothers 2000; Ottaway 2003), refer to both competitive and noncompetitive authoritarian regimes, whilst 'competitiveness is a substantively important regime characteristic that affects the behavior and expectations of political actors'. Levitsky & Way (2010): 22, 328–38 classify Cambodia's trajectory from 1990 to 2008 under 'stable authoritarianism', in which 'authoritarian incumbents or their chosen successors remained in power for at least three presidential/parliamentary terms following the establishment of competitive authoritarian rule'.

³⁶ Levitsky & Way (2010): 5.

³⁷ Cp. Brown and Timberman, eds. (1998); Hughes (2002a); Heder & Ledgerwood, eds. (1996); and Lizée (1999).

What political systems are domestic political actors trying to realise in this context, so rife with contradiction and conflict? The Second Kingdom defies easy categorisation, despite the apparent simplicity of overall dynamics that have unidirectionally concentrated power in the CPP, and the hands of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Scholarship from a political perspective has predominantly concentrated the enquiry into contemporary politics on a strict focus on power politics. Other scholars have examined the changing political economy bound up with this elusive transition, where state and social structures have undergone fundamental changes, yet, ultimately, have served to strengthen the power of the same elite. The rhetoric of the dominant CPP has, to observers, appeared as little more than a thinly veiled disguise of the clinging to power by the same elite.³⁸ Opposition royalist and self-identified democratic projects have been understood primarily to expound a reactive rhetoric to the context set out by CPP manoeuvrings, and dismissed as representing shallow populism.³⁹ The hollowness in political rhetoric that this has been taken to indicate has eclipsed interest in closer study of contemporary political discourse. Meanwhile, 'ideology' has been shown to be an eroded, meaningless concept, by extension rendering the question of political imaginations superfluous, or, at best, peripheral.⁴⁰

This thesis proposes to reassess these debates, showing how political party actors engaged in a discursive contestation over the outline and character of the nation and its political contents, which, in turn, bore on ideas of national leadership and the nature and manner of political representation. This discursive contestation was not disconnected rhetoric, but intrinsically bound up with post-PPA political competition. It took place through a wide range of discursive means: in public speech, political writing, scholarship and art. These claims to representation selectively assembled components from available discursive material from earlier, post-independence regimes and contemporary global discourses, providing resources as well as constraints to addressing immediate political exigencies. These claims to representation and their internal cohesion were, in turn, bound up with the appeal and

³⁸ Heder (2007): 159.

³⁹ Hughes (2001c): 301–3.

⁴⁰ Slocomb (2006).

trajectories of different political party actors. As such, they were entwined with larger political developments.

Identity Politics – Politicised Identities and the Post-PPA Nation

The 1993 advent of a multi-party democratic system changed the format and language of political contestation, reflecting how it now centred on winning elections. Political actors were now electoral contenders competing through political party vehicles within a nominally liberal democratic framework. In their manifestos and campaign materials, political parties launched lists of 'principles' they purported to represent, which commonly included democracy, human rights, and social justice. Yet these references to principles often overlapped between parties and seemed void of meaning – to the point that they served to obfuscate, rather than clarify, policy differences for voters.⁴¹ This scenario baffled observers, who expected that political actors competing in elections would have phrased their programs in the language of ideology. Joakim Öjendal and Mona Lilja note that 'the idea that the existence of competing party ideologies is one of the cornerstones of liberal democracy does not seem to have taken root in Cambodian society'.⁴² In an oft-quoted Asia Foundation survey from 2003, only 28% of respondents considered political parties' policies, views and ideology as motives for voting, whilst, in terms of policy differences between the parties, 44% of respondents said they did not know if there were differences between parties, 11% said there were no differences and 16% said there were differences but were unable to specify them.⁴³

If not evident in the policies and principles flaunted in their campaign materials, then the electoral competitors in the new multi-party system did, however, retain important differences based on the perpetuation, and exacerbation, of identity-based conflict. This conformed to a larger trend, observed in a range of democratisating contexts in the wake of the Cold War, whereby emerging political parties functioned as

⁴¹ Un (2005): 222.

⁴² Öjendal & Lilja (2009c): 303.

⁴³ Asia Foundation (2003); Öjendal & Lilja (2009c): 303; and Un (2005): 222.

'outgrowths of intra-elite contestation'.⁴⁴ Democratic transition in these contexts was therefore conducive to continued domination of the political process by political elites, which mobilised along the lines of politicised identity. Multiparty elections, as a consequence, served to exacerbate conflicts of identity rather than ameliorate conflicts of interest. Caroline Hughes identifies how 'in Cambodia, political parties inclined towards a 'politics of charismatic leadership and mobilisation around politicised identities, rather than a politics of representation' and the articulation of competitive policy platforms or policy agendas'.⁴⁵ Hughes locates this in the continued attachment to civil war strategies and identities of the 1980s, which the parties refused to change to a political conflict over pragmatic issues and grassroots concerns. The emergence of a multi-party environment did not transform the civil war conflict over fundamentals into a political conflict over issues, whereby each party acknowledged the others as legitimate political forces. Cambodian political parties, she argues, sought to gain advantage over one another by means of two main strategies: the attempted manipulation of democratic processes and institutions, and the rhetorical portrayal of opponents as a threat to the survival of the Cambodian nation, rather than mere illegitimate participants in politics.⁴⁶

This thesis reassesses the promotion of identity-based conflict by political party actors. Identity-based conflict was, I argue, located in the advancing of competing imaginings of the Cambodian nation, each making out the own party or party leader as the nation's genuine representative. Responding to a crisis of national representation, the full range of political party actors offered different solutions, which entailed the forging of exclusive links between themselves and the nation. These competing imaginings and articulations of the Cambodian nation thus formed a powerful underlying dynamic structuring wider political contestation in the multiparty system. The two strategies suggested by Hughes were ultimately rooted in larger narratives of the Cambodian nation. In this way, the main political party actors advanced contending nations.

⁴⁴ Hughes (2002b): 166.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 167.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 167-68.

Moreover, political actors did, this thesis lays out, communicate these different articulations of the nation to the electorate. Although their references to 'principles' might appear hollow, political actors did communicate vital information to the electorate about the different political systems they envisaged, manifest and anchored in their identities, through a variety of means. Whilst this sometimes took place by means of party programs and manifestos, it perhaps more importantly took place outside and beyond these. Hughes notes how the behavior and rhetoric of political parties often communicated messages that contradicted the letter of campaign material, writing that 'The mismatch between the letter of campaign materials and the behaviour and rhetoric of political parties was so wide as to render political manifestos irrelevant to the election campaign, reflecting the subordination of policy debates to intra-elite struggles focused on identities that linger from the civil war years.'⁴⁷ This dissertation traces and interprets the messages communicated through a full range of measures beyond party manifestos, and to varying degrees both explicitly and implicitly, which included public discourse, political writings, and artistic production. Rather than promoting identities simply inherited from the civil war years, however, these messages were tied to changing political imaginings and attempts to imbue morphing political identities with meaning to accommodate the changing social and political context following the end of the Cold War.

These identities, I suggest, focused precisely on a politics of representation. This was certainly not a politics of representation in the sense that Hughes refers to, above, in terms of 'inserting pragmatic grassroots concerns into elite political agendas'.⁴⁸ Rather, these were elite bids to represent the nation through a range of measures that equalled a particular political identity with exclusive representation of the nation's aspirations. This distinction explains the otherwise mind-boggling discrepancy between the failure of political actors to represent actual grassroots concerns on the one hand, and their insistent claims to representation on the other. This paradox was clearly observed in the royalist FUNCINPEC party. Whilst FUNCINPEC did very little 'to establish a clear relationship of representation with its rural campaigners and supporters', at the same time, 'the party portrayed itself as possessed of a right to rule

⁴⁷ Ibid.: 170.

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 166-67.

by virtue of its status as the embodiment of the natural aspirations of "traditional" Cambodians for a monarchical system', claims that were made by attempting to mobilise voters around a party identity of 'royalism'.⁴⁹ The belief of the political elite in their own exclusive ability to represent the nation confirmed an elite attitude to politics observed to be based on the 'co-optation of the broader population into elite-determined political trajectories', rather than a turning of political parties into organs to represent grassroots-level social forces.⁵⁰ Yet, at the same time, it was also a testament to how central claims to representation of the nation, as defined by the elite, remained in the exercise of politics. Meanwhile, the power of the political elite to define the Cambodian political trajectory makes the dynamics of its purported representation of the nation all the more important for the analysis of contemporary political developments.

This thesis traces the transformation of these political identities, bound up with different national imaginings in Cambodia's Second Kingdom, following the changing context after the end of civil war. Cambodian political discourse distinguishes between the CPP, royalist parties, and democratic parties, and this is also how political actors self-define. The main divide between these three main political identities in Second Kingdom electoral politics is different conceptions of how to relate to the nation. The CPP, to fill the vacuum after abandoning a half-hearted socialist identity, turned to a brand of populism that equated the party with the people, and with Prime Minister Hun Sen making claims to legitimate national leadership through renegotiating historical ideas of kingship. Self-identified royalists turned to represent the nation through different strategies of embodiment. Self-identified democrats purported to represent a victimised nation, tracing local grievances as microcosms of the ailing nation. Articulating these political identities in relation to the nation meant staking the boundaries of what it meant to be a royalist, democrat, and so on, in a process of co-constitution between such political identities and the nation. This, in turn, went hand in hand with the making of the contested categories of democracy, legitimate leadership, and the mandate of the reinstated monarchy.

⁴⁹ Hughes (2002c): 118–19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 126.

This gives a picture of a metamorphosis of identities inherited from the civil war era. Hughes specifies the 'politicised identities' lingering from the civil war years as 'an association of FUNCINPEC and the SRP with instability, anarchy, and the genocide of the "*Khmer Rouge*" on the part of the CPP, and the casting of the CPP as traitors and "Vietnamese puppets" on the part of FUNCINPEC and the SRP.⁵¹ Whilst these civil war-inherited identities have continued to be propagated in the two decades following the PPA, they have also been accompanied by the emergence of novel, and more complex, political imaginings and attempts to imbue political identities with a range of different meanings. The CPP changed from a civil war era socialist identity to a post-socialist identity entailing a complex mix of contemporary and historical legitimisations, merging historical ideas of kingship with contemporary ideas of social mobility and meritocracy. The end of the Cold War-induced coalition between democrats and royalists also resulted in the transformation of resistance identities, with a renewed emphasis on separate royalist and democratic identities. A democratic identity was defined and claimed in very different ways by the SRP and FUNCINPEC, but also by the CPP, and was for all three parties rooted in national imaginings. The 'reshaping of pro-democratic party identities' was thus much more complex than previously suggested, involving more actors, and more tension both between and within FUNCINPEC and the SRP. Hughes describes FUNCINPEC as having two core identities: one resistance/democratic opposition identity, and one royalist identity focused on celebrating the Sangkum legacy.⁵² The following discussion traces a tension between these two identities, concluding that they did not coexist easily. In fact, these very different visions, as well as the particular reinvention of royalist identity as Sangkum legacy, became increasingly used as a conscious attempt to justify closer cooperation with the CPP, and was also hijacked by the CPP to this effect. It contributed to the breakdown of FUNCINPEC, and, more generally, precluded the possibility of serious cooperation between FUNCINPEC and the SRP. It is therefore one example of how these identities were inseparable from larger political developments in the KOC.

⁵¹ Hughes (2002b): 171.

⁵² Hughes (2001c): 307.

These transforming identities and the national imaginings they were tied to were fragmented by tensions, contradictions and conflicts. Some were internal to the projects they advanced. For the CPP and Hun Sen, this tension centred on the mandate and nature of legitimate leadership in a post-socialist context, whilst building on their revolutionary legitimacy of the recent past. For royalists, their central dilemma was how to reconcile the constitutional monarchy with political royalism. Democrats, in turn, struggled to represent a nation not yet really existing, but rather in becoming, representing the will of the people that they imagined to be clouded by false consciousness. These political identities were also destabilised by external challenges, each unsettled from outside the boundaries of the own group. The collapsing of boundaries between political identity categories, and the rearticulation and hijacking of such identity categories, were bound up with wider political contestation. The CPP and Prime Minister Hun Sen were challenged in their national leadership role by the opposition's denunciation of them as national traitors, making out their national leadership as symptomatic of a nation turned upside down. The crisis of defining 'royalism' left room for the CPP claims to take over the royalist identity. Whilst a democratic identity was primarily claimed by the self-identified democratic opposition, (spearheaded by the SRP), they were challenged by rival claims to democratic identity by the CPP and political royalists.

These identities were employed to promote political parties in political, including electoral, competition. Studying them therefore helps illuminate the trajectories of different political parties. These identities were, however, not confined to political party identity as such, in the sense that they were not necessarily articulated in a strictly party political way. For example, one set of political parties appealed to a royalist identity, which transcended that of the individual party. Moreover, royalist identity also entailed references to the institution of the monarchy outside the political party. That the unit of identity transcended a strict party political division contributed to their susceptibility to being claimed and hijacked by actors from rival political parties.

Moreover, many identities were individual in nature. This testifies to the continuously personalised character of legitimate leadership in the Second Kingdom, with

individual 'strongmen' trumping political parties as mobilisers of opinion.⁵³ Indeed, contemporary claims to legitimate power are often made through appealing to the legitimacy pertaining to individual identities, would-be archetypes that fuse different, yet interconnected, aspects of power in one identity. Steve Heder (1995) identifies three 'claims of qualification to rule' in post-independence Cambodia, namely *sdech*, 'king' or 'prince', confined to the royal family; *neak cheh-doeng*, a person with higher education; and *neak tâ-sou*, a person who has taken part in armed struggle.⁵⁴ The adoption of such identities provided a manner for actors to negotiate the meanings such models of legitimacy evoked, reconfiguring them in their favour. Yet these 'personal legitimisations' were also employed to further the particular political party that individual political actors were associated with, whilst not laying claims to constitute a political party identity per se. This tension between personal legitimisations and those of the collective party can be seen to underlie the contemporary Cambodian political landscape. I illustrate this in the second chapter on a narrative promoted by Hun Sen, which was essentially a very personal attempt at legitimisation, whilst certainly also a claim to legitimacy on the part of the CPP. Appeals of this kind of personalised legitimacy were made forcefully by Hun Sen as a consequence of his attempts to personalise power. In the third chapter, I explore the difficulty of transferring legitimacy tied to the person of Sihanouk to his son, Norodom Ranariddh, and the FUNCINPEC party. The dwindling credibility of appeals to 'incarnate' or 'embodied' power by political royalists, which resonate with the historical legitimisation of royals, it is argued, is nothing short of a crisis resulting from how royal power is converted from something incarnate to belonging to the institution of the monarchy.

Legitimacy Building and the Post-PPA Nation

The different national imaginings advanced by party political actors were intrinsically linked to a search for political legitimacy. Thoroughgoing political change in Southeast Asia in the wake of the Cold War has made the question of legitimacy paramount in the region. Yet political scientists have been relatively reluctant to use

⁵³ Hughes (2000): 121.

⁵⁴ Heder (1995): 425–29.

the concept of legitimacy when analysing regional political developments, reflecting problems of definition and measurement. In the most influential piece of work in recent years on political legitimacy in Southeast Asia, Muthiah Alagappa rightly outlines a picture of the contestation of legitimacy as defining much of Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, in the post-colonial period.⁵⁵ He suggests that the key elements of legitimacy are shared norms and values; conformity with established rules for acquiring power; proper and effective use of power; and consent of the governed.⁵⁶ According to Alagappa, countries with weak, contested political systems and a low level of institutionalisation do not generally emphasise procedural elements to confer legitimacy. Instead, the emphasis in political legitimisation shifts to normative elements, concerned with 'prescribed goals or values for society on the basis of which the incumbent power holders seek to construct a normative framework', and performance elements, concerned 'less with the use of power within the law and more with its effective use for promotion of the collective welfare'. In addition, authority may also be claimed 'on the basis of charisma, a politically defining moment, and international support'.⁵⁷

Cambodia conforms to this pattern. CPP legitimisation is heavily performance based, and the party routinely refers to its achievements in providing domestic infrastructure in terms of roads, hospitals and schools.⁵⁸ Although the CPP emphasises elections in its bid to legitimise, which would appear to be a procedural element, this emphasis has also been shown to be anchored in a performance-based claim, as elections are appealed to in terms of how they demonstrate the CPP's capacity to organise them.⁵⁹ The CPP has also framed its electioneering practices of gift-giving by alluding to shared cultural symbols of the meritorious benefactor, situating them in larger political imaginings that are heavily normative.⁶⁰ Political contestation continues to centre on a reinvented civil war-era conflict over fundamentals, turned into a conflict over the implementation of procedures. The opposition contests the implementation

⁵⁵ Alagappa (1995a): 3.

⁵⁶ Alagappa (1995b): 15.

⁵⁷ Alagappa (1995c): 31.

⁵⁸ Hughes (2006).

⁵⁹ Hughes (2009).

⁶⁰ Hughes (2006).

of procedures set forth by the PPA and the 1993 Constitution, including elections, thereby crippling the appeal of procedural elements in bestowing legitimacy.⁶¹ Hun Sen, Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy are all known to be charismatic leaders. FUNCINPEC and the SRP have continuously portrayed themselves as 'the favored allies of Western governments' in order to harness domestic confidence and support.⁶² The CPP under Hun Sen, meanwhile, while maintaining reasonably good relations with the US, has cemented a strong relationship with Vietnam and, increasingly, China.⁶³

The relative efficacy of these contemporary bids for political legitimacy remains debated. As the basic ingredients for procedural democratic legitimacy have been in place since 1993, this has been understood to bestow the CPP with a degree of external (international) legitimacy, whilst there is no scholarly consensus on whether this has also bestowed internal (domestic) legitimacy.⁶⁴ Though the holding of elections has come to be viewed by international policymakers as a hallmark of internal legitimacy, the Cambodian opposition strategies of continuously challenging subsequent elections suggest that the reality is more complex. Some charge that the CPP-led government's use of political violence, widespread corruption and exploitation of natural resources has led to an internal legitimacy crisis.⁶⁵ Perhaps as a response to such a crisis, the CPP has engaged in a number of efforts to build internal legitimacy. In a recent volume, a number of authors explore the CPP state's efforts to build legitimacy from the perspective of the construction and reconstruction of social and political institutions. Kheang Un finds that embedded corruption, nepotism, patronage politics and government interference engender a negative popular perception toward government institutions, particularly the judiciary branch. Yet, he argues, the ruling party uses the judiciary, through showcases of ad hoc judicial reform, to legitimise their actions.⁶⁶ Laura McGrew finds that the bringing of the Khmer Rouge to internationally recognised trials has constituted one state strategy for both internal and external legitimacy.⁶⁷ Kim Sedara and Joakim Öjendal argue that

⁶¹ Hughes (2002b): 167–68.

⁶² Hughes (2002a): 552.

⁶³ Heder (2012): 105–8.

⁶⁴ Hughes (2009): 33.

⁶⁵ Kim (2009): 7–8.

⁶⁶ Un (2009): 90–95.

⁶⁷ McGrew (2009).

decentralisation and local elections have introduced a new rationale for local government, whereby the local state increasingly gains acceptance as a legitimate authority.⁶⁸ Sophal Ear, conceptualising political legitimacy to include the rule of law, working institutions and popular consent, and operationalising it through examining development outcomes, concludes that there has been progress in both internal and external legitimacy tied to the use of aid post-UNTAC; Ear finds it 'debatable', however, how much internal legitimacy was successfully achieved with this aid.⁶⁹ John Marston, discussing NGO movements linked to Buddhism, dissident monks, and two religious figures as challengers to state legitimacy, finds an ambiguous relationship between religion and social legitimacy.⁷⁰ In sum, the extent of the incumbent regime's internal legitimacy is unclear, whilst there are increasing indications of its ongoing legitimacy-seeking through a range of strategies.

Following Barker, Alagappa defines political legitimacy as 'the belief in the rightfulness of a state, in its authority to issue commands, so that the commands are obeyed not simply out of fear or self-interest, but because they are believed to have moral authority, because subjects believe that they ought to obey'.⁷¹ He argues that the objects of legitimation are usually three associated institutions of the state, namely: the nation state, concerned with expressing political identity; the regime, the type of government; and the government, the actual control or exercise of state power.⁷² According to Alagappa, the legitimation of the nation state rests on shared identity, regime legitimation on shared norms and values, and government legitimation on conformity with established rules and performance.⁷³ Nonetheless, attempts to legitimise successive Cambodian regimes and governments consistently refer back to the shared identity on which the legitimation of the nation state is based. In this context, it may be instructive to consider the nation, as an object of legitimacy, as the larger frame of reference suggested by Anderson, which, supplanting earlier 'cultural systems', offers a new overarching framework for linking fraternity, power

⁶⁸ Kim & Ojendal (2009): 115, 122.

⁶⁹ Ear (2009): 173.

⁷⁰ Marston (2009): 225.

⁷¹ Alagappa (1995a): 2; following Barker (1990): 11.

⁷² Alagappa (1995b): 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 30.

and time.⁷⁴ As the framework defining, in turn, also regime and government legitimations, the impetus to define national imaginings is all the more pronounced. The Cambodian post-independence regimes, in their successive string, each attempted to build their legitimacy on representation of the political community of the nation. Since the 1947 emergence of the first Cambodian political party, the Democratic Party, Hughes finds the bottom line of bids for internal legitimacy to be conceptions of community. From the Sangkum Reastr Niyum onwards (1955–), successive regimes' attempts to promote their own legitimacy have been heavily based on claims to defend a *national imagining* of the community. In creating this sense of nationhood, imaginings have been paramount, as national identity has generally lacked administrative shape and has only been manifest in 'hazy visions' of 'Khmerness'.⁷⁵ These claims have continuously been contested by rival political projects.⁷⁶ Power holders and the political opposition, alike, have continuously made claims to legitimacy, mainly by purporting to represent the nation, confirming that modern nationalisms do not exclusively belong to rulers.⁷⁷

This dissertation outlines how, in contemporary Cambodia, bids for internal legitimacy, to a hitherto neglected extent, continue to centre on claims to represent the nation – transplanted onto the arena of multi-party liberal democracy. Bids to internal legitimacy, of the regime and its opponents alike, have in the contemporary setting, similar to preceding decades, been directly linked to national imaginings. The mixed procedural and performance-based bids for legitimacy as those outlined above are ultimately traceable to representation of the nation.⁷⁸ Rather than a battle of political ideologies or policy platforms, contemporary political contestation can be understood as a conflict over *representation of the nation*, tied up with wider power dynamics and structures. The contemporary period can be understood, in this sense, as an era of identity politics, integrally bound up with power politics machinations,

⁷⁴ Anderson (1991): 12–22 situates the origin of nationalism in the decline of a divinely-ordained dynastic realm, its legitimacy eroded by Enlightenment and Revolution, which called for a new foundation of legitimacy in time provided by the nation.

⁷⁵ Hughes (2009): 34–40.

⁷⁶ Gyallay-Pap (2007): 72.

⁷⁷ White (2005): 16.

⁷⁸ In support of this, Hughes (2009): 54 finds that the CPP, since 1993, has used elections to promote the idea that the party represents the only viable incarnation of a national Khmer political community.

though not simply reducible to a component of it. These imaginings provide a necessary prism to qualify Cambodian party political contestation. The complex inventions selectively pick up and employ evolving notions of power and legitimacy, interacting with reinvented 'traditional' notions as well as earlier strings of reinventions.

Attention to the importance of national imaginings for domestic legitimisations entails reassessing the role of democratic legitimisations in contemporary Cambodia. Understanding Cambodia's social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts to be unreceptive to Western-style democracy, current scholarship is rife with arguments that democracy, consequently, does not form a basis for legitimate leadership in any straightforward way.⁷⁹ The body of scholarship examining contemporary democratic practice and discourse has predominantly sought to establish the causes for the failure of liberal democracy to consolidate in the Cambodian context, and how to classify the system that has now emerged.⁸⁰ These accounts share an understanding that Cambodian political actors pay lip service to the notion of democracy to please the international audience, whilst, in practice, exhibiting distinctly undemocratic, illiberal tendencies. Incumbent CPP is understood to have made a rhetorical commitment to liberal democracy to placate the international community, whilst, in practice, deviating from it at will.⁸¹ The SRP and FUNCINPEC, meanwhile, have been argued to employ a democratic opposition identity abroad, in contradistinction from a nationalist resistance identity flaunted as the primary identity at home.⁸² Democratic legitimisations in contemporary Cambodia are thus predominantly understood as external in nature, oriented towards an international audience. Exasperation with how parts of the democratic package have been established and others not has led Öjendal and Lilja to suggest that contemporary Cambodia finds itself 'beyond democracy', in the sense that 'democracy and democratisation have been exhausted as concepts that

⁷⁹ Kim (2007); Mabbett & Chandler (1995); Un (2005); Hughes (2006); Mehmet (1997); Blunt & Turner (2005); and St John (2005).

⁸⁰ E.g. Brown & Timberman, eds. (1998); Karbaum (2011); Croissant (2008); Peou (2000); Roberts (2001); Sanderson & Maley (1998); and Un (2005; 2006).

⁸¹ Cp. Heder (2007b): 161–62; Peou (2000); Sanderson & Maley (1998); and Springer (2010)

⁸² Hughes (2001c): 311–12.

can be used with any precision to analyse political change and social development in Cambodia'.⁸³

This dissertation reframes this dilemma by outlining how notions of democracy, contrary to assumptions, have been central to the domestic legitimising discourses of the full range of contending political party actors. Whilst not defined along liberal democratic lines, democracy has provided the language for domestic political imaginings, tied up with national ones. This no doubt reflects how the process of imbuing politics with meaning has meant imbuing democracy with meaning, given that the present era is nominally democratic. The nation has been a central part of the answer to how this is to be achieved. National and democratic imaginings have thus evolved in tandem. This allows the relationship between democratic imaginings and the nation in contemporary Cambodian political discourse to be reassessed, along with the role of democratic discourses therein. In this analysis, I take my lead from a body of literature that has shown how a variety of interpretations of the essence of democracy are bound up with the histories and contexts of each society, providing resources as well as constraints to political models and 'reform trajectories'.⁸⁴ Rather than measuring local realities against predefined concepts of democracy, this literature maps out national democratic imaginings to earn a fine-grained understanding of domestic realities, and assesses this within the relationship of legitimacy and political change. This framework constitutes a formidable tool for illuminating shades and dimensions of the current process of democratisation, as called for by Öjendal and Lilja.⁸⁵ Applied to contemporary Cambodia, this prism exposes how political party actors advanced different visions of the organisation of the polity and popular representation framed in the language of distinctly national forms of democracy and presented as such to the domestic population. References to democracy were not merely the externally motivated charade that the current

⁸³ Öjendal & Lilja (2009b): 2.

⁸⁴ This suggests that each society has democracy 'sui generis', or, as Benedict Anderson (1990): 148 puts it, 'We fall into nominalism when we identify socialism and democracy as things that Are – they are only what we make them'. Acknowledging this, a diverse body of work has set out to map society-specific discourses of democracy in the Southeast Asian region (cp. Anderson (1990; 1988); and Connors (2003)); in Asia (Kane & Patapan (2008)); and in communist and post-communist societies (cp. Dryzek & Holmes, eds. (2002); and Lei (1996)).

⁸⁵ Öjendal & Lilja (2009b): 2.

literature would have us believe. On the contrary, a larger, discursive contestation to establish a hegemonic and relevant definition of what democracy would mean in the particular context of the Cambodian trajectory took place in post-PPA Cambodia.

Can these discourses be characterised as the localisation of demands for democratisation? Democracy was implanted in Cambodia in the early 1990s as part of a global drive for democratisation, often referred to as the 'Third Wave'.⁸⁶ On its wake, Ójendal and Lilja write that 'the old is being affected by liberal democratic discourse and local variations emerging'. They charge that 'the outcome is unlikely to match the high ideals of the newborn democracy that guided the UNTAC intervention and subsequent reconstruction support. Instead, we see something else emerging. It is as yet unclear exactly what it is, but it is certainly more open-ended and less linear than what is typically anticipated in the reconstruction discourse.'⁸⁷ The discourses I describe here are part of that 'something else emerging'. They took place in a larger historical context of globalisation, entailing the spread of a global liberal democratic discourse, and, inevitably, responded to and interacted with the specific changes induced in national governance practices associated with this.⁸⁸ Strikingly, though, these discourses are not most aptly characterised as the outcome of a process of localisation of a global liberal democratic discourse. Certainly, they were not located in a separate realm untouched by liberal democratic discourse. In some ways, concerns pertaining to the liberal democratic agenda can be convincingly argued to have influenced these domestic discourses, or to have found resonance in them. This is most evident in the appeals to meritocracy in Hun Sen's discourse, and the identification by self-identified democrats and some royalists with a liberal democratic identity. Yet, contestation over the meaning of democracy revolved primarily around notions of leadership and political organisation, in ways that reassessed embodied, hereditary and elected leadership – questions deeply embedded in Cambodian historical and political context. Political party discourses debated these in interaction with each other, engaging in debates that, whilst not self-contained, went beyond the parameters of a global liberal democratic discourse.

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ójendal (2005): 345.

Whilst this points to the importance of a close study of Cambodian historical and cultural realities, it does not support the widespread tendency within current scholarship to write off contemporary conceptions and realities of Cambodian democracy in terms of general notions of Cambodian 'political culture'. Cambodian elites have been understood to build on historically inherited absolutist notions of power, so that contemporary political culture, hierarchical, absolutist and patronage-oriented, is seen to be evolving within the framework of such a 'traditional' concept of power.⁸⁹ This dissertation problematises the assumption of straightforward dichotomisations between the modern and traditional legitimations these accounts build on, by giving evidence of how so-called 'traditional' notions and concepts are employed by contemporary actors, yet are marked by contradictions and paradoxes, and are the subject of reinvention and contestation. This calls for a much more precise, historicised account of national and democratic imaginations, suggesting that contemporary bids for legitimacy are better understood in the specific historical context of the entanglement of notions of democracy and national identity since independence.

These discourses of the nation as the end point of political action, and democracy as its means, engaged with historical Cambodian models of leadership, and the moral and religious conceptualisations attached to them. It is therefore vital to include culturally, religiously and historically embedded notions in this analysis.⁹⁰ As the historical model of leadership, the institution of the monarchy, underpinned by its own distinct set of legitimisations, provides a case in point. The reconfiguration of legitimacy through changing conceptualisations of historical kingship, identified in the wider Southeast Asian region, also took place in contemporary Cambodia. Employing national vocabularies and analytical tools derived from specific cultural and religious contexts, the regional literature has charted an apparent post-Cold War 'retraditionalisation', whereby ideas of kingship have resurfaced. In Laos, a communist People's Republic attempting to transform its public face, the party-state has increasingly tried to boost its credibility by reference to resurging ideas of

⁸⁹ Mehmet (1997): 676; Kim (2007): 4; St John (2005): 415; Mabbett & Chandler (1995); Blunt & Turner (2005); and Gainsborough (2012).

⁹⁰ Equally, from a Khmer studies perspective, scholars have warned of studying Cambodian political culture through application of the vocabulary and tools of political science, only. Gyallay-Pap (2007): 72–75.

kingship.⁹¹ In post-*đổi mới* Vietnam, similarly a remaining communist regime, but a society with historical ideas of kingship derived from a Sino–Vietnamese rather than a Theravada Buddhist tradition, the *đổi mới* state has begun to explore ancestor worship as a foundation for nationalism.⁹² Jellema describes how the Đê Temple in northern Vietnam, devoted to the eight kings of the Lý Dynasty (1010–1225), enjoys increasing attention from party and state leaders who ‘remember the debt’ all Vietnamese owe to the Lý kings. She reads it as a shift sparked by a communist party legitimacy crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, from the state’s previous defensive martial ideology to a ‘kinetic nationalism’ able to coalesce disparate people around the goal of national development.⁹³ In Thailand, the veneration of reigning king Bhumibol Aduljadej is mirrored by a cult around historical king Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), drawing on expectations of what Buddhist kingship can do for the benefit of the nation, whilst also facing a counter narrative that points to how the king as a human is fallible by nature.⁹⁴ Also in Cambodia, this dissertation shows, political legitimation has been renegotiated in important ways around culturally embedded ideas of kingship, and charting reconfigurations of the relationship between the nation, kingship and ideas of Buddhism is essential for unmasking bids for political legitimation in the contemporary context.⁹⁵ Though it shares family similarities with its neighbours, the Cambodian case is unique in the region, in the sense that this renegotiation has taken place within the framework of a reinstated constitutional monarchy. Moreover, in Cambodia, at a difference from the one-party states of Laos and Vietnam, different meanings of kingship and legitimate leadership were offered by different political actors competing in the multi-party democratic system and became an essential part of party political contestation.

Political legitimacy is an inherently moral concept. Alagappa, for one, understands political legitimacy as the belief by the governed that the ruler is morally right and

⁹¹ Evans (1998: 2002); and Grabowsky & Tappe (2011).

⁹² Taylor (2007): 8.

⁹³ Jellema (2007).

⁹⁴ Stengs (2009).

⁹⁵ Gyallay-Pap (2007) has outlined the modern Cambodian conception of political order as an allotropy formed by conjoining the modern Western concept of the nation with indigenous notions of Buddhist kingship and the sangha to create a civic religion of loyalty to the Cambodian state. Rather than to the *state*, this thesis makes the case that loyalty to the *nation* is the central idea that notions of kingship and Buddhism are modelled around.

that the people have a corresponding obligation to obey their ruler's commands.⁹⁶ The nationalist discourses here explored as projects for establishing legitimate power can also be understood as projects through which the moral order in the KOC has been negotiated, producing the national space as a moral geography. In line with how the spatial organisation of Southeast Asian polities emerged intertwined with the moral order, the creation of the nation state necessitated new conceptualisations of the moral community.⁹⁷ In today's Cambodia, earlier notions of power and moral order have been overturned by large-scale upheavals over the two decades preceding the PPA, provoking much scholarly interest in the ongoing reshaping of moral words these upheavals have necessitated. The bulk of this scholarship explores the remaking of the 'moral geology' of contemporary Cambodia from the perspective of the revival of Cambodian Buddhism, often from a grassroots, rural perspective.⁹⁸ Whilst these studies, to varying extent, place religious revival in its political context, by contrast, studies that take elite bids to reconfigure the contemporary moral order as the direct object of study are few.⁹⁹ This dissertation aims to correct this bias, by demonstrating how the political elite vocally engaged in attempts to reshape and define Cambodian moral geography. Cambodian party political actors, through articulating their national visions, were crucial bidders taking part in the remaking of Cambodian moral worlds.

Partly as a consequence of its inherent moral dimension, legitimacy is an intrinsically ambiguous and contested concept that can be thought to only ever be partially

⁹⁶ Alagappa (1995): 29.

⁹⁷ In the classical Southeast Asian states, the spatial organisation of the state linked religion and geography, allowing them to co-determine each other. See, for example, Heine-Geldern (1956); Tambiah (1976); and Condominas (1978). The emergence of national thinking entailed a consequential restructuring of the moral nature of social and individual identities. See Hansen (2004; 2007); and Edwards (2004; 2007).

⁹⁸ This includes ethnographies of contemporary religion (Guthrie (2004)); contemporary millenarian movements and their nationalist overtones (Marston (2004)); the reconstruction of village Buddhism (Ledgerwood (2008a); and Satoru (2008)); wider perceptions of moral order at the village level (Zucker (2008)); rural efforts to re-create moral order through re-establishing pagodas and consecrating pagoda boundaries and the increasing politicisation of the local, Buddhist world (Kent (2007)); monks' political involvement (Heng (2008)); and the politicisation of the sangha (Harris (2001)).

⁹⁹ Important exceptions are Ledgerwood (2008b), who analyses the 1990 water festival as an attempt by the CPP to reassert a particular social and political order; Edwards (2008b), who explores government strategies to redefine morality through policing social ethics; and Hughes (2006), who explores the moral economy of gift-giving by political actors.

possessed.¹⁰⁰ This is all the more pronounced in Cambodia, given the nature of historical and contemporary Cambodian conceptualisations of power, which merge it with moral considerations. In historical Cambodian imaginations, moral, spiritual and political power were fused, based on Buddhist notions of merit and karmic law that underlay Buddhist kingship. The interplay between merit, wealth and power was, and still is, reflected in language.¹⁰¹ The word denoting political power, *omnach*, carries connotations of these different historical sources or indicators of power, such as *barami* (spiritual, charismatic power), *bon* (merit) and *mean* (wealth).¹⁰² Other Khmer words for 'power' imply different shades of moral and religious authority, including *athipol* (influence) and *barami*. These historical conceptualisations of legitimate leadership contain their own ambiguities and paradoxes. The structural incompatibility between worldly leadership and Buddhist values represents an age-old stand-off in Buddhist thinking on kingship.¹⁰³ Such ambiguities were also perceived in popular understandings. Discussing the nineteenth century Cambodian polity, which underwent large-scale upheavals in a manner not dissimilar from recent history, David Chandler suggests that, in the eyes of the population, the relationship between wealth, power and merit was considered problematic, producing gaps in the narrative underpinning social order as high rank followed from meritorious, yet unverifiable, behaviour in another life. There were 'gaps that open between what ought to happen in the world, what often happens, and the "normal"'.¹⁰⁴ Following Chandler's exploration of the dichotomy between the orderly and the disorderly as the realms of *srok* (human settlements) and *prei* (the forests), these notions have become the loci of a debate on an indigenous moral geography.¹⁰⁵ Edwards, following Chandler's hints towards the highly ambiguous nature of the *prei*, suggests this to be a 'complex dialectical terrain' rather than a 'bipolar moral geography', 'where notions of civilized or wild contract, expand and shape-shift in relation or reaction to violations of moral or societal norms'. Edwards invites us to think of the borderlands

¹⁰⁰ White (2005): 3.

¹⁰¹ The Khmer term for 'merit', *bon*, appears in compounds such as *bon-omnach* ('power', 'authority') and *bon-sak* ('rank'). Edwards (2007): 69.

¹⁰² Jacobsen (2008): 6.

¹⁰³ Cp. Harris (2008).

¹⁰⁴ Chandler (2008): 45. Cp. Hansen (2008): 47.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards (2008a): 143.

as zones of transformation.¹⁰⁶ This suggests that the possession of *selothor* (moral power) was never unequivocal or undisputed. This ambiguity is only intensified by the blurring of intimacy and hierarchy in the Cambodian context, which has as its consequence that 'the closer and more intimate a relationship [...] the more absolute the relationship of authority'.¹⁰⁷ Manifest in the close association between notions of patronage and motherhood, this blurring is also present in patron-client relations, permeating Cambodian social and political life, which are framed in terms of kinship. Being invested and merged with apparent intimacy, relations of authority and hierarchy can only with difficulty be assessed in terms of the extent of legitimacy they carry for the involved parties. Such ambiguities are arguably present in the important role of physical power or strength, *kámleang*, as an ingredient of contemporary political power.¹⁰⁸ Linking the threat of violence with a promise of protection, it radicalises the intimacy/hierarchy nexus, making attempts to distil shades of legitimacy problematic. There are therefore fundamental difficulties in measuring legitimacy, whilst it cannot be thought to be possessed in any total sense. This dissertation, tracing how moral claims to power were reinvented in the Second Kingdom, explores how different political actors attempted to utilise such ambiguities in their own favour, making their own particular interpretation of the moral right to rule hegemonic in contemporary society. Manipulating these ambiguities for political gain was therefore an integral part of political contestation. Yet also, precisely because of the contested nature of moral legitimacy, their ability to convince and of their interpretation to gain large-scale social acceptance is more problematically assessed. Whilst a contestation to redraw the moral geography of the nation will be outlined, whether, in the end, these bids will be seen to be invested with moral legitimacy can have no straightforward answer.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 143, 152.

¹⁰⁷ Erik Davis (2008): 226 writes that mothers and patrons are both capable of either properly supporting those who serve them or behaving cruelly and thoughtlessly toward them in ways that *break all bounds of human morality*.

¹⁰⁸ Hughes (2000): 137.

Cambodian Nationalism in Perspective – Historical Givens

The concept and vocabulary of the nation was brought to Cambodia by French observers during the French protectorate (1863–1953). According to Penny Edwards, the concept of ‘nation’ according to the French understanding only reached Cambodian elite consciousness by the first decades of the twentieth century. It was translated into the vernacular as *cheat*, a term derived from the Pali word *jāti*, meaning ‘birth’. The nineteenth century usage of this term was as a ‘moral and cosmological term that literally had to do with one’s birth’, and, at the turn of the last century, ‘encompassed a multiplicity of concepts, including ethnic identity and social status’.¹⁰⁹ In the first decades of the twentieth century, to be firmly established by the 1930s, secular literati and the *sangha* (Buddhist monkhood) increasingly used *cheat* to denote both race and nation, in line with how French discourse at the time used ‘race’ and ‘nation’ interchangeably.¹¹⁰ Around this time, Edwards identifies a ‘shift in focus from royal ancestry to national genealogy’, and to ethnicity as the main locus of identity. Race and nation competed with and sometimes defeated royalty as the ‘primary object of loyalty’.¹¹¹ This was paralleled by a shift in the meaning of *sasana*, which was broadened from its turn of the century meaning of ‘religion’, to ‘encompass notions of race and ethnicity’. The formula ‘nation, religion, king’ (*cheat, sasana, mohaksatr*), which first appeared in Khmer usage in the 1930s, established these three notions as the central notions of the polity, whilst arranging them in seeming equilibrium. Among these, the nation came to define political legitimacy-seeking henceforth, as any ensuing nationalist project, including all post-independence regimes, needed to articulate its relation to kingship and the *sangha* either in support or opposition.¹¹² The historical precursors to the formula ‘nation, religion, king’, the notions ‘*sdech, sangha, srok*’, had denoted slightly different meanings from their modern counterparts. Yet these older political forms were important for political reinventions under a nationalist mantle, confirming Anderson’s insistence that nationalisms need to be understood in relation to the older political

¹⁰⁹ Edwards (2007): 13.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 13; 15.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*: 15.

¹¹² Gyallay-Pap (2007): 72.

forms, pre-modern and early modern kingdoms and empires, out of which they emerge.¹¹³

The Cambodian case illustrates Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined community' particularly well, in contradistinction to other conceptualisations, which treat the nation as a political ideology,¹¹⁴ a primordial category,¹¹⁵ a political principle that follows from industrialisation¹¹⁶ or that emphasise the ethnic origins of modern nationalisms.¹¹⁷ Anderson charges that nationalism as a category is closer to the phenomena of kinship and religion, than to political doctrines such as liberalism and fascism.¹¹⁸ He writes that part of the difficulty of theorising nationalism is the tendency to 'hypostatize the existence of Nationalism-with-a-big-N (rather as one might Age-with-a-capital-A) and then to classify "it" as *an* ideology.'¹¹⁹ The 'imagined community' is a tacitly shared cultural script, rather than *an* ideology. Yet, at the same time, as nationalism came to replace earlier hierarchical orderings of society, ideologies became essential for reinventing the political order so that modern nations came to be built on philosophical bases. Anderson writes that, 'if everyone has an age, Age is merely an analytical expression', the relevant point for our present purposes being that everyone, indeed, must have an age. Whilst not reducible to an ideology per se, nationalism, therefore, requires an ideological basis to exist. The close intertwining of nationalist thought and ideology, making a separation of the two difficult, is a recurring theme in modern Cambodia. Cambodian modern history is characterised by discontinuity, with six regimes following each other since national independence was achieved in 1953. A second distinguishing trait of modern Cambodia is how the string of post-independence political projects advocating vastly different political systems all claimed to represent particularly national imaginations. 'Nationalism', in very different guises, runs like a red thread through Cambodian modern history. Although this is widespread in modern societies, in Cambodia it is central. Barnett writes about

¹¹³ Anderson (1991): 19–22; and Anderson (2001): 33.

¹¹⁴ Cp. Freedon (2002); and Finlayson (1998).

¹¹⁵ Geertz (1973); and van den Berghe (1979).

¹¹⁶ Gellner (1983).

¹¹⁷ Cp. Armstrong (1982); Connor (1994); Hutchinson (1987); and Smith (1986).

¹¹⁸ Anderson (1991): 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the pertaining notion that the very identity of the nation is under threat, that 'there can be few countries where the theme has been accorded such weight'.¹²⁰ National imaginings were important animators of all competing political projects and their self-professed ideologies, and were said to motivate Sihanouk's Buddhist Socialism, guiding his *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (People's National Community), 1955–1970,¹²¹ and Lon Nol's Mon-Khmerism, guiding the Khmer Republic, 1970–1975,¹²² as well as those of their opponents. The political thinking of the Khmer Rouge, climaxing in their regime of Democratic Kampuchea, 1975–1979, conflated the party with the nation and the nation with the 'base people'.¹²³ Heder argues that the regime's goal was the assimilation of all nationalities into a 'classless Kampuchean people', and that the discrimination of certain ethnic minorities was based on an analysis of the association of class stratification with certain ethnic groups. The racism and genocide of Democratic Kampuchea was thus a manifestation of a tendency intrinsic to Marxist–Leninist ideology.¹²⁴ For Kiernan, the Khmer Rouge were motivated by a racist and totalitarian ideology that attempted the Khmerisation of the nation as its final objective.¹²⁵ After the demise of Democratic Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge movement rerouted to an 'end of socialism', and increasingly portrayed nationalism, defined as the mobilisation and victory of the base people, as the underlying rationale of the revolution.¹²⁶ All these successive projects also put forth different ideas of how Theravada Buddhism and kingship related to the nation.¹²⁷

Contemporary appeals to nationalism relate back in important ways to dynamics from the period of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), 1979–1989. The PRK made claims to legitimacy primarily through appeals to an intense sense of national threat via continual reminders that the regime constituted the only bulwark against the

¹²⁰ Barnett (1990): 101.

¹²¹ Over the late 1950s and 1960s, Sihanouk developed Buddhist Socialism in a series of writings published in journals such as *Sangkum, Kambuja* and *Réalités Cambodgiennes*. See, for example, 'Notre Socialisme Buddhique' in *Kambuja*, November 1965. Cp Harris (2005): 147; Chandler (1991): 87; Kershaw (2001): 55; and Osborne (1994): 135.

¹²² Lon Nol (1974); and Corfield (1994).

¹²³ Marston (2002).

¹²⁴ Heder (1997): 109, 112, 146; and Heder (2005): 39.

¹²⁵ Kiernan (1996).

¹²⁶ Ashley (1992): 23.

¹²⁷ Harris (2005: 2007).

'return of the Khmer Rouge'. Although most Cambodians initially welcomed the invasion, there was soon widespread suspicion of what came to be seen in terms of Vietnamese annexation. Particularly, the K5 project, in which the PRK state mobilised Cambodian civilians to lay mines along the Thai border, as well as the conscription of a Cambodian army to prepare for the Vietnamese troop withdrawal, were hugely unpopular and brought further loss of legitimacy.¹²⁸ Slocomb concludes that,

Despite all of its achievements, the PRK was not genuinely popular. At the same time, despite the overwhelming presence of Vietnamese troops and advisers, neither was it unpopular [...] The majority of people remained indifferent to efforts which attempted to engage them in revolutionary restructuring, and evaded when they could the new state's best efforts to co-opt them into schemes for the construction and defense of the country.¹²⁹

Hughes, on the other hand, argues that the open links of the PRK to Vietnam, internal displacement, and the splitting of Cambodia into two contending nations, were so grave as to cause an internal legitimacy crisis.¹³⁰ Certainly the PRK era left a lasting imprint in terms of the sense of urgency it bestowed on conceptualising the national community in the Second Kingdom. The question of how the 'nation' was to be conceptualised emerged from the war 'significantly problematized'. The outlines and character of the national community were unclear, manifest in an 'obsessive questioning within Cambodian political discourse of the ethnic origins of individuals, and exact location of borders', reflecting 'difficulties in creating any secure imagining of the Cambodian nation' or definition of the people.¹³¹ Yet, the imperative of Khmer unity was felt more powerfully than ever before.

This formed the backdrop to dynamics in Cambodia's Second Kingdom. In line with earlier patterns, national imaginings animated and fed into a wide range of political projects. Yet, how these have consistently informed party politics has not been

¹²⁸ Gottesman (2003): 223–37.

¹²⁹ Slocomb (2003): 262.

¹³⁰ Hughes (2009): 47.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*: 47–48.

thoroughly examined. Several existing studies of contemporary nationalist discourses examine their role in particular events or over more limited time periods, including the UNTAC period 1992–1993 (Edwards 1996), the persecution of Vietnamese communities immediately thereafter (Jordens 1996), the 2003 anti-Thai riots (Hinton 2006) and the 1997 dual citizenship debate (Poethig 2006). Additionally, aspects of competing constructions of the nation by contemporary political parties have been explored by Caroline Hughes in a series of articles (2001a; 2001b; 2005; 2006; 2009). Understood in the context of a wider resurgence of populism in Southeast Asia, she has given the nationalist discourse of the political opposition particular attention (Hughes 2001a; Hughes 2001b; Hughes 2002a; 2002b), and, to a lesser extent, the discourse of the incumbent CPP (Hughes 2009). Shifting the focus directly to national imaginings, this dissertation shows systematically how all political parties advanced competing constructions of the nation. This perspective enables the tracing out of patterns and tensions within each competing imagining, and how larger debates thereby emerged between the political parties. In so doing, this study reassesses the relationship between some of the categories examined by Hughes, such as the relationship between democratic and national imaginings.¹³² By expanding the perspective to the full range of the main political party actors, this thesis exposes hitherto neglected dimensions of contestation taking place between them in a partly different language than theorised by previous scholarship, as these negotiated ideas of the nation and its representation through notions of embodiment, genealogy, and elected leadership.

Ideology, the Nation and the Building Blocks of Contemporary Khmer Political Discourse

Nationalism is not an ideology per se. For Anderson, as discussed above, nationalism cannot be reduced to an Ideology with a capital I. Yet nationalism requires an ideological basis to exist. The close intertwining between nationalist thought and ideology is a recurring theme in modern Cambodia, where successive political projects attempting to realise widely different political systems have paired their national imaginings with more or less genuinely held ideological beliefs. This reflects

¹³² Cp. Hughes (2001a); Hughes (2001b); and Hughes (2002a).

how the introduction of modern nationalist imaginings was accompanied by the spread of universal political ideologies as standardised building blocks of modern political discourse. Benedict Anderson writes about how the 'planetary spread of nationalism' was accompanied by the spread of a 'profoundly standardised conception of politics'.¹³³ This shift necessitated its own discursive bases, which, as a rule, were created through the translation of key concepts of an emerging universal political discourse into vernaculars. The very notion of 'politics' conceptualised as a separate domain, together with concepts such as 'ideology' that this novel domain then entailed, were coined as neologisms not long after the birth of Cambodian nationalism, in line with a pattern common to many Asian and African societies.¹³⁴ The emergence of modern Khmer political discourse thus went hand in hand with imagining it as pertaining to the realm of *politics*, as a distinct domain of the *nation*.¹³⁵

Yet, ever since the emergence of national thinking, the very notion of ideology has been a contested category in Cambodia, which has been understood and employed differently by Cambodian political actors than their Western counterparts. Contemporary actors also employ other categories to articulate political imaginings, such as historical ideas of embodiment, enmeshed in competing historical ideas of representation, which have persisted and been reinvented by political actors. This dissertation shows a contemporary contestation over the very categories used to define political vision and national representation, positing the doctrinal against the incarnate. This challenges Anderson's insistence on the homogenising force of modern political discourse, taking place in a universal language of ideology. By examining these ambiguities, this dissertation offers a reinterpretation of Cambodian political thought and the notion of 'ideology' in the contemporary setting.

¹³³ Anderson (1998): 29.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*: 32.

¹³⁵ For Anderson (1998): 32, two provisions enabled the imagination of 'politics' as a distinctly demarcated domain of life. Firstly, 'social practices and institutions need to be set up which could not be cloaked in earlier vocabularies pertaining to cosmologically and religiously sustained kingship'. Secondly, the world had to 'be understood as one', so that 'politics' was something taking place everywhere at the same time, albeit in the context of different social and political systems.

Part of the difficulty in discussing political imaginings in the contemporary Cambodian context relates to the inadequacy of employing 'political ideology' in an unproblematised manner. This, in turn, is indicative of more fundamental problems of applying 'ideology' as an axis of analysis, anchored in historical ambiguities derived from how 'ideology' is an imported concept. In neighbouring Thailand, Michelle Tan finds that the term 'ideology' has 'never found equivalents in Thai across its various incarnations'.¹³⁶ She explores the word *udomkân* as a problematic translation of political 'ideology' and finds that, rather than the domestication of this term, there has been an ideology of it. Thailand, which can be thought to be marked by the absence of ideology, resulting in what Tan refers to as a contemporary 'pre-/post-ideological' predicament, differs sharply from the Cambodian case, which has rather seen an excess thereof. Yet Tan's warning against cross-country comparisons of 'coding political factions along universal standards of coherence, contrast or temporal stability' is also pertinent to the Cambodian context. In Cambodia, similar to Thailand, political standpoints since the spread of Western political discourse have had to be coded into the language of ideological belief, whilst not always corresponding to Western mainstream understanding of the notion in terms of coherence, contrast or temporal stability. In Khmer, the standard translation of 'ideology' is *monokom vichea*, from Sanskrit and Pali (Sanskrit, *mono*'idea', 'mind'; Pali, *kom (gama)*'associated'; Sanskrit, *vichea*'knowledge').¹³⁷ Similar meanings are regularly transmitted through the suffix *-niyum* (Sanskrit: 'to tend to'), translated as '-ism'; *litthi*, 'beliefs'; and *tusana*, 'vision' or 'viewpoint'. The suffix *-niyum* was first used in this fashion by early nationalists to produce concepts for political self-identification that could readily be translated as '-isms', and thereby readily identified as more or less coherent ideologies. Penny Edwards discusses a 1938 editorial in the journal *Nagaravatta*, linked to early Buddhist nationalism, which

¹³⁶ Tan (2012): 32.

¹³⁷ Keng Vannsak (1964): 336 proposed 'ideology' to be translated as *mono nimman vichya* (from Sanskrit, *mono*'idea', *nimman*'formation', *vichea*'knowledge'). It has not been popularly used or known. (Touch Bora, personal communication, 26 Feb. 2012.) In Thai, apart from *idom kar*, two other terms, very similar to Khmer counterparts, are used for ideology: *mono keti vichya* and *lathi kwam chheu*. Khmer *outdom kote* shares a similar etymology to Thai *udomkân*, but has largely maintained the meaning of 'ideal' or 'idealism' rather than the conflation between idea and ideal that Tan identifies in the Thai context. Cp. Sar (1970); Hun (1967); and Ministry of Education (1973).

explains the journal's name by reference to *khmer-niyum*, 'Khmerism'.¹³⁸ Under the 1950 Cultural Commission, *-nyum*, by then already established, was officially defined as '-ism' (French *-isme*).¹³⁹ The rendering of 'ideology' in Khmer has been closely tied to different political projects, cast in the particular terms appropriate to the interpretation advanced by different actors. Cambodian communists from the Khmer Issarak era onwards used the alternative translation of *sate-aram*, in what seems to be a fairly direct translation of the Vietnamese *tu tưởng*, literally 'thought'.¹⁴⁰

Studying the nature and role of ideology in the post-independence Cambodian state, Slocomb has named the contemporary era 'post-ideological'. She contrasts '30 years of ideology' between 1955 and 1984 with a contemporary abandonment of ideology by the Cambodian state, hailed in by Hun Sen's 1985 accession to the post of Prime Minister.¹⁴¹ Yet this obscures ambiguities in the concept of 'ideology' in the Cambodian context, both before and after the sharp divide that she draws. The discrepancy between the Western idea of ideology and the way that indigenous actors have conceptualised their political projects, whilst using some of this language, was manifest from the outset. One illuminating example is Sihanouk's ambivalent response. Sihanouk argued that post-independence Cambodia needed a political and social ideology for the purpose of nation-building, and portrayed the creation of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum as the response to this need.¹⁴² Yet at the same time, Sihanouk was deeply distrustful of the French concept of *idéologie* and was even said to 'hate ideologies like the Plague'.¹⁴³ In an article entitled 'Le Sihanoukisme', published in Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum-era mouthpiece *Sangkum*, Tep Chhieu Kheng describes Sihanouk's viewpoint as follows:

¹³⁸ Pach Chooun coined what Penny Edwards (2007): 218 refers to as the 'ideology' of *khmer niyum*, a notion that was later taken up by Lon Nol during the Khmer Republic. Cp. Lon (1974).

¹³⁹ Jacob (1993): 159.

¹⁴⁰ Steve Heder, personal communication, 26 Feb. 2012.

¹⁴¹ Slocomb (2006): 388.

¹⁴² Norodom Sihanouk, 'Notre Sangkum', *Le Monde*, 8 October 1963; and Slocomb (2006): 378.

¹⁴³ Tep, Chhieu Kheng, 1968. 'Le "Sihanoukisme"', *Sangkum* 41 (December) (author's translation from French).

To define the political line of Samdech Euv,¹⁴⁴ the neologism 'Sihanoukism' has been forged. Is it a doctrine? A new philosophy? Or a new ideology? In fact, Sihanouk had no part in the formation of the new term. Wary of the spirit of system, he fled willingly the words in 'ism' that express a general trend, a little too categorical profession of faith. But the new term has been introduced. It is good to try to analyze it. If not a doctrine or a philosophy nor an ideology, what is it? 'Sihanoukism' is an attempt, but a successful attempt to apprehend the real, to capture the vivid fact in its authenticity and dynamism. It is also a way of being, a sort of 'way of life' a 'knowing how to behave' for the Khmer people and for all placed in the same situation. When we speak of 'Sihanoukism' it is almost always evoked in political terms. But it is not valid in this area only. Some other areas (social or religious) have for their part their field of application.¹⁴⁵

This illustrates Sihanouk's conflicting embracement of the '-ism' that had been coined, and simultaneous continued attachment to organic ideas of embodiment, at a breaking point when the language of ideology had become hegemonic in world politics.

Contemporary political actors generally avoid the language of 'political ideology' in the Western sense of a grand, totalising corpus of principles. In political discourse, *monokum vichea* is virtually absent. There are, however, a range of other notions that political actors employ to explicate their political thinking (*kummit noyobay*) which do not imply a totalising ideology in the Western sense, reflecting the particular problems such a construct poses in the contemporary Cambodian context. The incumbent CPP has refrained from substituting its former communist identity with adherence to any other grand ideology. Yet Hun Sen has outlined his political thinking in many different forms, by making reference to his political vision, *tusana noyobay*. The leaders of the opposition party SRP, meanwhile, state that the party agenda does not correspond to any one ideology, either socialist or liberal, whilst

¹⁴⁴ An epithet for Sihanouk.

¹⁴⁵ Tep (1968): 8.

incorporating aspects of both; this reflects the pragmatism of the party agenda that defies any such simple categorisation.¹⁴⁶

The frustration of framing political thinking as 'ideology' in the contemporary context is most clearly manifest in royalist debates. Political royalists make reference to 'royalism', *reachniyum*, as their political identity, indeed making up their very category of political self-identification. The closest to a mutually agreed understanding of what this concept means is the corollary notion of 'Sihanoukism', *Sihanoukniyum*. Yet, Sihanoukism, ever since the creation of the term, has related directly to ideas of a unique mandate of the person of Sihanouk, and is, in the contemporary context, closely related to ideas of embodiment. In fact, as will be shown, contemporary contestation of royalist discourse has come to centre precisely on whether Sihanoukism is to be understood as an ideology in the Western sense, detached from Sihanouk, or if it remains linked to the body of Sihanouk and, by extension, the royal family. This testifies to how constructs with the suffix *-niyum* cannot be translated into 'ideology' in the Western sense, without further qualifications. Pointing to how these questions remain unresolved in the present day, it perhaps also indicates that a Western-style interpretation of what an 'ideology' necessarily must be has gained increasing legitimacy, much to the detriment of royalists as a political force.

Whilst the notion of 'political ideology' thus remains an ambiguous concept, modern political actors have continuously selectively employed Western-derived political concepts in their political discourse, whilst also actually embracing Western-derived ideologies to different extents.¹⁴⁷ The process of incorporation of foreign-derived political notions into the Cambodian context can be understood following Benedict Anderson and Thongchai Winichakul. Rejecting notions of 'imitation and derivative

¹⁴⁶ Cp. author's interview with Tiouloung Saumura.

¹⁴⁷ Sihanouk's Buddhist Socialism and the Khmer Rouge can be considered two extremes in this regard, both in terms of the degree of adaptation of the 'original' Western concepts and the sincerity with which they promoted them. Sihanouk's Buddhist Socialism, created as an indigenous Cambodian doctrine that entailed some Western-derived notions such as 'socialism', located the beginnings of this 'socialism' with ancient Angkorean kings. The Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, are arguably best understood as having implemented their Marxist-Leninist and communist models.

discourses', Anderson charges that Western concepts were 'read about and modelled from' and that hybridities were consequently created. For Anderson, the resulting neologisms and the Western concept, though clearly not meaning exactly the same thing, 'stood in for another'.¹⁴⁸ Writing on processes of what he terms 'transculturation' of politically charged Western concepts in Siam during the period of colonialism in the region, Thongchai Winichakul similarly suggests that European ideas and practices were appropriated, localised and hybridised in the Siamese setting.¹⁴⁹ Winichakul makes the point that 'the success of the transliterated term indicates that there are needs in the Thai context for such a concept, but that there is no adequate substitute for it'.¹⁵⁰ That is, the survival of the concept indicates that it responds to something that some actors in society wish to express, yet the transliterated form retains a trace of the foreignness of the concept, and there is never complete overlap between the neologism and the original foreign concept.

In Cambodia, contestation of emerging modern political concepts was, from the outset, part of wider political contestation, used to articulate the political contents of the young nation. French officials and Francophone Khmer under King Sisowath (1840–1927), together formulated concepts of a Cambodian 'nation', 'soul' and 'race'. Whilst French remained the language of incipient nationalism, the vernacularisation of Khmer was envisaged as an integral part of the nation-building project.¹⁵¹ In 1927, the first Khmer-language newspaper, *Kambuja Suriya*, was produced by the Royal Library, followed by the emergence in the 1930s of the first openly political newspapers, magazines and novels in Khmer, including the 'flagship publication' of the early nationalist movement, *Nagaravatta*, in 1936.¹⁵² This confirmed Anderson's emphasis on the importance of print media in the vernacular for the early stages of nationalism.¹⁵³ *Nagaravatta's* contributors advocated the use of the Khmer language to spread *Khmer-niyum* ('Khmerism'), and called for Khmer to be used as the official language and language of education. Neologisms were coined

¹⁴⁸ Anderson (1998): 34.

¹⁴⁹ Winichakul (2000): 529.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 530.

¹⁵¹ Heder (2007a): 294.

¹⁵² Harris (2005): 137–38; and Edwards (2007): 188.

¹⁵³ Edwards (2007): 188; and Anderson (1991): 37–46.

based on the translation of French terms into Khmer, often by Buddhist scholars proficient in French, Sanskrit, Pali and Khmer, to the effect that many neologisms turned out to be what Steve Heder describes as 'Pali-Sanskrit jawbreakers', unintelligible to virtually everyone.¹⁵⁴ In the period leading up to independence, linguistic divisions accompanied political ones, each corresponding to distinct geographic bases, producing three 'political dialects' with parallel vocabularies. Most aristocratic youth in Phnom Penh favoured continued Francophonía, whereas some democrat nationalists wished to raise the standard of elite-level Khmer.¹⁵⁵ A second political dialect was developed by the anti-colonial and anti-royalist Khmer Issarak movement, which created a communist Khmer language by translating basic Soviet and Maoist terms into Khmer, often using Pali or Sanskrit, and throwing in some Thai-isms influenced by Thai Marxism.¹⁵⁶ Current Khmer concepts of democracy (*pracheathipatey*), communist (*kommunynis*), feudalism (*sákdéphoum nyum*) and revolution (*padevott*) closely follow the respective Thai translations.¹⁵⁷ They prioritised colloquial Khmer over Vietnamese words, avoided polysyllabic Pali-Sanskritisms, and did away with social hierarchy markers. This communist language, Steve Heder writes, was accessible to peasants and was rapidly popularised. A third competing political dialect was developed by the republican-leaning 'Populo Movement' (*pracheachalana*), largely purged of royalisms, yet maintaining other social hierarchy markers and elite neologisms whilst adding its own distinct political terminology. In this way, parallel concepts were expressed through different words, according to political geography. For example, 'the people' was referred to by the Franco-aristocratic elite as the *pracheareastar*; 'the subjects', by the communist Issarak as the *pracheachun*, the simplest formulation for 'people', and by the

¹⁵⁴ Heder (2007a): 296.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: 296.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 297–98. In neighbouring Thailand, the translation of key political and ideological words was similarly a highly contested issue, where, from the 1920s to the mid-1940s, the invention of official Thai neologisms discriminated against, retranslated or 'pretranslated' radical discourse. Thai Prince Wen invented a range of political coinages, some very similar to Khmer counterparts, including *sangkhom* ('society'), *navohai* ('policy'), *rabob* ('system'), *patiwat* ('revolution'), *wiswat* ('evolution'), *kammachip* ('proletariat'), *kradumph* ('bourgeoisie'), *mualchon* ('masses'), *sangkhomninyom* ('socialism'), *ongkan* ('organisation'), *sahapap* ('union'), *watthanatham* ('culture') and *wiphak* ('critique'). Tejapira (1994): 198.

¹⁵⁷ Cp. how Thai scholars have explored the problematic translations of *prachathipatai* ('democracy') (Connors (2003); and Tejapira (1994): 198); *khomnunist* ('communist') (Tejapira (1994): 197); *sakdina/saktina* ('feudalism') (Reynolds (1987); (2006)); and *patiwat* ('revolution') (Chaloentiarana (2007): 167, 214; and Tejapira (1994): 197).

republicans as *pracheapol roath*, 'popular citizens'. Reference to either of the three indicated which warring political side one was on, for peasants and elite alike.¹⁵⁸ Tellingly, today these three terms are still employed to different extents by different factions, so that royalists will typically use the notion *pracheareastr*, the CPP *pracheachun* and the democratic opposition parties *pracheapol roath*.

In this context, the state set out to create and define a new 'Khmer' vocabulary of more than 3000 terms as the language of independence, regarded as Khmer, but deliberately using foreign vocabulary.¹⁵⁹ A Cultural Commission, created in light of 'the difficulties encountered in composing the text of the Constitution of 1946' produced what was known as 'cultural words' (*peak vopphothor*), published by the Ministry of Education in the 1950 dictionary *Sâttheamukrom phearom khmer*, as well as in *Kambuja Suriya*. French words in need of translation were compiled, and the commission then took either a French loan word and 'matched' it to the relevant French word, or created a new word using Sanskrit and Pali. The degrees of overlap between the neologisms and existing Khmer and French words varied and worked in different directions. In some cases, the new words were intended to cover only some meanings of the French word to be translated, while in other cases they were intended to translate the full array of meanings.¹⁶⁰ The collection entailed political terms with an 'aura of newness' in the Khmer context,¹⁶¹ such as 'independence', which the Cultural Commission wanted to coin as *issarapheap* ('powerfulness', 'condition of overlordship'), but was more popularly translated as *aekareach* ('single kingdom', 'one power'), still in use today. The notion of *sethi* was introduced as 'rights'.¹⁶² Old Khmer words such as *omnach*, which had referred to 'power' in an abstract sense, also took on the secondary meanings of the French equivalent, *pouvoir*, so that it came to include the meaning of a 'powerful state'. New vocabulary also confirmed the previous coinage of the 'nation' as *cheat*, as well as concepts for making a Marxist class analysis, including 'worker' (*kâmmokâr*), 'farmer' (*kâsekâr*) and 'imperialist' (*châkrâpotte*). This new vocabulary was implemented in newspapers

¹⁵⁸ Heder (2007a): 297–98.

¹⁵⁹ Jacob (1993): 157.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 158.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 157.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*: 159.

from the 1950s onwards.¹⁶³ During the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, prompted by urban graduates' translation of their political ideas into Khmer, Sihanouk resumed efforts towards standardised Khmerisation of political language.¹⁶⁴ This began in 1967 with a National Committee of Khmerisation, which published a glossary providing new or standardised Khmer translations for French terms. Sihanouk also supported his political strategy on the spread of a particular Sihanoukist lingo, disseminated through village speeches, leaflets and radio, breaking with the previous confinement of the royal word to the palace. The Sihanoukist phraseology set out to strengthen ties between the people and its leadership through a range of linguistic and discursive devices.¹⁶⁵ The successive regimes of the Khmer Republic, Democratic Kampuchea and the People's Republic of Kampuchea all created their particular vocabulary.¹⁶⁶

Just as the discursive contestation of political concepts formed an integral part of contestation over the nature of the Khmer nation ever since the emergence of the idea thereof, so in the post-PPA era the contestation of key political notions has continued to play a fundamental role in contemporary reimaginings of it. This dissertation spells out how this takes place, through contestation over notions of democracy, socialism, royalism, class struggle, freedom rights, and so on. It shows how an important part of contemporary political contestation has taken place through different political actors manipulating and rearticulating concepts long central to modern political discourse, such as democracy, socialism and royalism, and mobilising them so as to support different claims to represent the nation. There is also an ongoing process of new coinages, often derived from liberal democratic discourse, which entails a productive contestation and hybridisation of political concepts by political actors.¹⁶⁷ References to these concepts should not be evaluated as part of

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Heder (2007a): 299–300.

¹⁶⁵ See Abdoul-Carime (1995). Abdoul-Carime identifies, amongst other novelties, a new usage of *je* and *vous*, indicating the 'abrupt humanization of political authority'; a passionate, theatrical, 'warm' language; and the fusion of interests between Sihanouk and the people.

¹⁶⁶ Heder (2007a): 302.

¹⁶⁷ One example is the notion 'Good Governance', which entered the region with the financial crisis of 1997–98. In late 1999 it was translated into Khmer as *kar kroop krong I or*, but was later substituted for *Aphibal kech (aphi 'high'; bal 'upholder', kech 'affairs', 'duty')*, which was first heard in one of Hun Sen's speeches in 2002 and has remained the standard translation ever since. (Touch Bora, personal communication, 26 Feb. 2012.) Another

coherent or stable universal 'ideologies', per se, but more fruitfully in terms of their context of articulation, with attention to how they link back to the nation. Moreover, the contemporary contestation of political concepts needs to be considered in the context of those concepts' particular histories of articulation of meaning.¹⁶⁸

Methodology

This dissertation applies an interpretivist framework. Interpretivism is particularly well suited for the purposes of this study, as it attempts to generate understandings of a social phenomenon by looking at meaning within the social context within which evidence is situated.¹⁶⁹ Interpretivism typically traces intersubjective realities through ethnographic and discursive means. Because of its attention to meaning, it pays particular attention to translation of what is observed into academic theorisations without changing the meaning of what is experienced by the subjects themselves. This is done in order to minimise the importing of meaning.¹⁷⁰

From an interpretivist perspective, the observer's task is to reproduce as evidence both the subject's actions and the encompassing social structure.¹⁷¹ This is particularly suitable for addressing Anderson's insistence on the imagined character of the nation as well as its structural and material rootedness. Interpretivism takes an interest in the subject's own observations of the self and structures, in addition to the theorist's observations of subjects and structures. The theorist inductively gathers evidence that allows him or her to see the problem as the subject saw it. Yet,

example is the concept of human rights, *sethi monus*, introduced with the PPA. Ledgerwood & Un (2003) find that this concept was not 'grafted onto' an existing political discourse, but rather a hybrid was created as local human rights organisations employed Buddhist ideas of morality when translating it.

¹⁶⁸ For example, the seemingly novel language of 'rights to freedom' precedes the post-1991 inflow of global vocabulary discussed by Ledgerwood & Un (2003). Jacob (1993): 163 quotes the comedy *Sombok ot me pa* ('A nest without the parents') by Hang Thon Hak, in which one of the young characters speaks the sentence, 'Give me the right (*sethi*) to have the freedom (*seripheap*) to fulfill my duty (*karonyakaeb*) with justice (*yuttethor*), boldness and heroism (*virophheap*'); whilst Jacob does not provide the year in which the play was written, each of these translated words, including the notions of rights and of freedom, were typical of the New Vocabulary created by the cultural commission in the 1950s.

¹⁶⁹ Hopf (2007): 64.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 60.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 61–63.

acknowledging that a subject's intentions do not emerge directly from the subject, the subject's words alone do not constitute evidence, but must be accompanied by an account of the relevant socio-historical context.¹⁷² Interpretivism therefore also takes an interest in the social structures that bear on the meaning of an individual's actions and words. The social structure that provides meanings for the subject's actions and words is reconstructed inductively, recreating the intersubjective meaning of that structure for the subject. Evidence of social structures is gathered through the subject's actions and is accompanied by the subject's own understanding of those actions. Hopf suggests the following criteria for assessing interpretivist claims that a phenomenon has a particular meaning: the number of times the phenomenon has been observed; the span of time over which it has been observed; the breadth, depth and distinctiveness of the cultural context in which it appears; the exhaustive treatment of the available empirical record; and alternative explanations being compared to the evidence and judged inferior.¹⁷³

To this end, I apply a twofold methodology. It builds on, firstly, archival sources, combined with, secondly, an ethnographic approach. Thereby, I combine political ethnography with historical interpretation.¹⁷⁴

For investigating nationalist discourses at the level of political parties, I have conducted an extensive review of Cambodian media during the time period under investigation. I have relied primarily on *Cambodia New Vision*, a monthly publication by Prime Minister Hun Sen's cabinet, which includes Hun Sen's speeches. I have also reviewed newspapers *Reaksmei Kampuchea*, the government mouthpiece, *Koh Santhepheap*, of a more moderate pro-government stance, and, to a lesser extent, *Moneaksekar Khmer*, tied to the political opposition; in addition, I consulted English-language newspapers *Cambodia Daily* and the *Phnom Penh Post*. Further, I have consulted reports, statements, studies, and pamphlets published by political parties, the government, and non-government organisations. I have also consulted the political writings of political actors themselves. This includes a series of

¹⁷² *Ibid.*: 62.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*: 74.

¹⁷⁴ McKenna (1998): xiii proposes this for the study of nationalist politics at the grassroots level, whereas I apply it to the level of political elite actors.

books by Prime Minister Hun Sen, as well as Norodom Ranariddh, which clearly outline their political visions. These have, to my knowledge, not generally been consulted in other academic analyses; thus, I find it particularly meaningful to represent them here. Providing another interesting type of source, many politicians have now taken to publishing autobiographies. Consulting these personal accounts has enriched and informed my understanding of the questions treated by this thesis. My line of research has also taken me to travel to document contemporary statues and to make excursions into art scholarship. I have also engaged in close reading of Cambodian historical sources, including chronicle texts. I have then studied all these primary sources at the backdrop of the larger secondary literature on Cambodia in the KOC period, combined with the scholarly literature on historical Cambodian nationalism, as well as other relevant literature, in order to carry out a historically informed interpretation of contemporary dynamics.

Secondly, I have used an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach is uniquely suited to the purposes of this study, in that it aims to acquire a deep knowledge of the social community and the individual. To this end, it gathers data through participant observation, deep immersion in a particular social context, and open-ended, discursive, and semi-directed interviews.¹⁷⁵ Giving precedence to empirical findings over a priori theorisations, this method privileges the subjective content of the relationship of the informant, ethnographer and environment.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, participant observation and discursive interviews are particularly appropriate methods for this study, in that they can overcome informants' security concerns in contexts where the research might make the informant cautious, since it naturally involves the emotional knowledge of the observer.¹⁷⁷

I carried out ethnographic research towards this dissertation during two prolonged stays in Cambodia: from September 2009 to July 2010, and from May to October 2011. During this time, I immersed myself in Cambodian society and, particularly, in the circles of national-level politicians, gaining access to the leadership and members

¹⁷⁵ Bray (2008): 296.

¹⁷⁶ Skidmore (2004): 35.

¹⁷⁷ Sluka (1989):12; and Skidmore (2004): 33–34.

of all main political parties. Participant observation allowed me to deepen my understanding of political actors' perceptions and inform my understanding of the wider context at hand. This was complemented by around 80 semi-structured, discursive interviews with political actors, which can be categorised as 'elite interviews'.

The concept of elite interviewing has been employed in two manners. Most commonly, 'elite' refers to the socio-economic position of the respondent. Yet others have emphasised that 'elite' also refers to the manner in which the interview treats the interviewee. Rather than looking for answers within the bounds set by pre-defined assumptions, as in standardised interviewing, in elite interviewing, the interviewer allows the interviewee to define the problem and question to be explained. Indeed, the notion of 'elite' can be extended to people who, whilst not in a political leadership role, are experts in their field and can be subject to elite interviewing in this second sense. This second sense ties in with this study's epistemological privileging of understanding meaning-making and mapping perceptions. These two approaches to elite interviewing naturally intersect:

[...] this approach has been adopted much more often with the influential, the prominent and the well-informed than with the rank-and-file of a population. For one thing, a good many well-informed or influential people are unwilling to accept the assumptions with which the investigator starts: they insist on explaining to him how they see the situation, what the real problems are as they view the matter.¹⁷⁸

For the purpose of this study, I carried out elite interviewing in both senses. The interviewees were mainly political elites, defined as people in political leadership roles, including political party leaders, members of parliament and government officials. Moreover, the interviews were premised on the interviewees being treated as experts on the topic at hand. This second approach could best fulfill the aim of this dissertation – to unravel political actors' meaning-making and perceptions, by

¹⁷⁸ Dexter (1970): 6–7; cited by Leech (2002): 663.

allowing them the scope to define and explain the questions to be addressed and the parameters of the discussion.

As a method, elite interviewing has several advantages that make it particularly appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. Firstly, one of the most important functions of an elite interview is to guide the theorist to understanding what theoretical position, perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes the interviewee has.¹⁷⁹ It aims to provide an insight into the mindset of political actors and an interviewee's subjective analysis of a particular situation.¹⁸⁰ This is best realised through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are particularly appropriate for the exploration of elite perceptions since they allow respondents to engage in wide-ranging discussions where they can fully articulate their responses on key issues relevant to the research project. They provide an opportunity for respondents to organise answers within their own frameworks and articulate their own world views without predetermined response categories.¹⁸¹ Thereby, they achieve the purposes of elite interviewing in its second sense, allowing the interviewee to define the problem under discussion. The main aim is to get the contextual nuance of the response and to 'probe beneath the surface of the response to the reasoning and premises that underlie it'.¹⁸²

Secondly, elite interviewing offers the opportunity to establish the informal processes and considerations that lie behind political practice.¹⁸³ By interviewing key participants in the political process, the researcher can gain data about the political debates and deliberations that inform political action. Thereby, elite interviews can shed light on elements of political action that are not clear from an analysis of political outcomes or other primary sources.

¹⁷⁹ Aberbach & Rockman (2002): 673; and Richards (1996): 199.

¹⁸⁰ Richards (1996): 200.

¹⁸¹ Aberbach & Rockman (2002): 674.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Richards (1996): 200.

Thirdly, elite interviews can provide information not recorded elsewhere, compensating for scarce and limited documentary evidence.¹⁸⁴ The first-hand testimony from direct participants allows the researcher to ask questions about issues highly specific to the research objectives.¹⁸⁵

Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing

The flexibility of elite interviewing employing open-ended questioning exacerbates its validity and reliability issues.¹⁸⁶ Firstly, problems of access can easily make sampling unrepresentative.¹⁸⁷ Secondly, the reliability of the interviewee can be questionable.¹⁸⁸ This is related to a third potential hurdle – the issue of power relations between the interviewee and interviewer. The interviewee is concerned with presenting his or her own viewpoint in a favourable way, and, ultimately, controls the information passed on.¹⁸⁹

Davies suggests three specific criteria for the additive use of elite interviews to be considered reliable. Firstly, the information should be obtained from a first-hand witness. Secondly, the level of access matters, and senior-level elites should be viewed as more reliable. Thirdly, the interviewee's overall displayed reliability should be assessed.¹⁹⁰

In carrying out the present study, I have taken a number of measures to address these potential hurdles. Most fundamentally, I was fortunate enough not to encounter a substantial problem of access, which could have caused severe bias. I enjoyed the enormous privilege of being granted interviews with the leaders of government and the leaders of all main political parties, including: Prime Minister Hun Sen of the

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; and Davies (2000): 74.

¹⁸⁵ Tansey (2007): 766–68.

¹⁸⁶ Berry (2002): 679. Validity refers to 'how important is the measuring instrument to the task at hand?' The issue of reliability refers to 'how consistent are the results of repeated tests with the same measuring instruments?'

¹⁸⁷ Richards (1996): 201.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Davies (2001): 77–78.

CPP; Prince Norodom Ranariddh, long-term leader of FUNCINPEC and, at the time, President of the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP); Keo Puth Reasmeay, President of FUNCINPEC; and Sam Rainsy, leader of the SRP. I believe that one of the main values of this dissertation lies in how it has assembled a unique array of information granted to me as a researcher by key contemporary political actors.

I have also employed a number of measures to minimise other risks associated with elite interviewing. Firstly, I maintained awareness of how information supplied by the interviewee is often highly subjective and, secondly, that the interviewee generally has a purpose in the interview.¹⁹¹ As noted by Berry, the first problem does not loom as large when the main objective of the research is to trace the interviewees' point of view.¹⁹² As this project is fundamentally concerned with meaning-making, the subjective nature of the information suitably addresses the objectives of this research. Secondly, to counter a dynamic in which interviewees attempt to fully control the direction of the interview, I adopted a semi-structured approach, referring back to an aide memoire during the course of the interview to ensure that all relevant topics were covered.¹⁹³

To support the findings and guard against self-serving accounts, I have also used multiple sources to cross-check collected data.¹⁹⁴ These include documents, memoirs, and other secondary sources, which I have outlined under archival sources. As Davies argues, multi-methodological 'triangulation', providing a cross-reference between interview data and archival records, is particularly applicable to elite interviewing as a political science tool.¹⁹⁵ Cross-checking interview information with written documents helps situate it in context, and, in turn, aids the interpretation of the written documents.¹⁹⁶ Where relevant documentary material exist, I have employed the triangulation triad proposed by Davies: primary sources (interviews, published first-hand accounts and documentary sources (published or archival)), with published

¹⁹¹ Richards (1996): 201.

¹⁹² Berry (2002): 680.

¹⁹³ Richards (1996): 201.

¹⁹⁴ Tansey (2007): 766.

¹⁹⁵ Davies (2001): 73.

¹⁹⁶ Richards (1996): 200.

secondary source information available. Information was then cross-referenced both between and within those data types.¹⁹⁷ Whereas the original use of triangulation (Webb et al.) treated elite interviews as purely corroborative, elite interviews can also be additive when archival information is scarce and conditions for validity have been met.¹⁹⁸ Interview material meeting these criteria is occasionally used additively in this study.

Sampling and Interview Design

The selection of interviewees for this thesis builds on non-probability sampling. The control over the selection process allowed for the inclusion of key political actors, which enabled me to collect testimony from the central players involved in shaping the contemporary Cambodian political landscape. Non-probability sampling, rather than probability sampling, is understood to be particularly suitable for a number of purposes aiding towards the aim of this dissertation, namely establishing what a set of people think, corroborating what has been established from other sources, and reconstructing informal reasons behind decision-making; whilst it is less suitable for making inferences about a larger population, which is not the aim of this thesis.¹⁹⁹

There are two general approaches to non-probability sampling. A positional approach defines the set of respondents according to the positions they hold, whereas a reputational approach selects respondents according to the extent to which their peers consider them influential in a particular political arena.²⁰⁰ I have combined the positional and reputational approaches. This study includes political actors whom I identified as highly relevant to the project in light of the key positions they hold, and whom I then approached for interviews.²⁰¹ These political actors then referred me onwards to other political actors they suggested to be highly influential, and whom I then incorporated into the research.²⁰² Pursuing these two approaches corresponded to

¹⁹⁷ Davies (2001): 78.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*: 75. The concept of triangulation was first proposed by Webb et al. (1966).

¹⁹⁹ Tansey (2007): 769.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*: 770.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*: 769.

²⁰² *Ibid.*: 771.

employing two methods of sampling. Mainly, I employed 'purposive sampling'. In this method, the study's purpose and the researcher's knowledge guide the selection process. The researcher identifies the particular respondents of interest and sample those deemed most appropriate. This is a relevant method when the research entails interviewing a pre-defined and visible set of actors.²⁰³ I also employed 'snowball sampling', also known as the chain referral sampling method. In this method, the researcher identifies an initial set of respondents, and then requests them to suggest other potential subjects of relevance to the object of study. The researcher then repeats this process until the sample is sufficiently large for the purposes of the study. The main advantage of this method is that it helps to identify political actors with hidden influence or with influence that exceeds that which is publicly known.²⁰⁴ This method is particularly suitable for research concerning high profile politicians for whom issues of privacy and secrecy are of utmost concern.²⁰⁵

Respondents were interviewed in person. When possible, respondents were interviewed on two or more occasions to clarify uncertainties and ambiguities. The research design employed a semi-structured method, incorporating both relatively structured and relatively unstructured components at different points. Whereas structured interviews rely on a fixed schedule, unstructured interviews rely on a series of topics to be covered and/or prompts intended to direct the respondent in particular directions; the wording and order of questions can be altered during the course of the interview. Each interview schedule started with a relatively unstructured initial phase. During this phase, I asked questions about the interviewee's personal background and political career, and its most important features relevant to the interview. This was followed by a more structured stage, in which the account given by the interviewee allowed me to select and modify appropriate questions from a more general purpose list.²⁰⁶ Questions were open-ended, allowing the interviewee to organise answers within his or her own frameworks and to define the problem under discussion.

²⁰³ Ibid.: 770.

²⁰⁴ Tansy (2007): 770.

²⁰⁵ Cp. how Davies (2001), for this reason, finds snowball sampling suitable for interviewing intelligence agents.

²⁰⁶ Davies (2001): 76-77.

Case Selection

This dissertation maps out the national imaginings advanced by political actors with an institutional base in Cambodia's main political parties competing electorally in the KOC multi-party democratic system. It examines these as three contending sets of political actors: the CPP, royalist parties and democratic parties. This categorisation follows Cambodian political discourse and corresponds to how political actors self-define. A fourth major political force in Second Kingdom Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, is not included. This is because the Khmer Rouge did not compete electorally in the KOC. Whilst the Khmer Rouge was a signatory of the PPA, their concerns that a neutral political environment had not been ensured led them to boycott the 1993 elections and reject its results.²⁰⁷ In 1994, the Khmer Rouge movement was declared illegal.²⁰⁸ In response, the Khmer Rouge set up the Provisional Government of National Union and National Salvation of Cambodia (PGNUNSC), an unrecognised government in opposition to the KOC. The Khmer Rouge thereafter engaged in continuing guerrilla warfare until the movement's disintegration, completed in 1998.

The first chapter of this thesis examines a narrative promoted by Prime Minister Hun Sen of the CPP. Hun Sen is not synonymous with the CPP, and it is argued that the narrative testifies to the increasing personalisation of political and symbolic power to the Prime Minister, in many ways trumping his party. At the same time, as the Prime Minister of subsequent CPP-led governments and Vice President of the CPP, Hun Sen's renegotiation of his political identity bears on the renegotiation of CPP legitimacy. It is part of the reinvention of a revolutionary identity inside the new framework of a nominally liberal democratic system and a constitutional monarchy, after the party has shaken off its socialist mantle. The subsequent chapter turns to examine royalist imaginings of the nation. It includes actors associated with political parties that claimed a royalist identity, including FUNCINPEC, Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), and the Sangkum Jatinियum Front Party (SJFP). The following chapter examines the national imaginings of actors associated with self-identified democratic parties, with roots in a political faction associated with an anti-Vietnamese, anti-

²⁰⁷ Roberts (2001): 93–103.

²⁰⁸ Chandler (1999): 179.

Communist identity. This includes the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), the Son Sann Party and the Human Rights Party (HRP).

Each chapter addresses a slightly different focus within this framework. The first chapter takes the perspective of the politics of memory, the political use of art, and of historical myths and legends in creating, renegotiating, and disseminating national imaginings. The subsequent chapter charts the difficulty in transposing historical ideas of the nation's political representation associated with the monarchy to a party political vehicle, looking at diverse strategies employed to achieve this. It offers a close case study of the process of transposing a pre-party political language and grammar of national representation to the party political framework with an associated language of ideology and doctrine, delineating the elements and challenges entailed. The following chapter more specifically reassesses domestic debates about democratisation. Whilst all chapters outline and discuss the intersection of domestic Cambodian national and democratic imaginings, this chapter offers a more focused examination of this nexus. Though each chapter is tied predominantly to one political actor or set of actors with political party roots, each also includes references to other political party actors most directly engaged in or targeted by the questions negotiated in each particular context. Apart from these more confined debates pertaining to the individual chapters, a larger debate emerges across the chapters. From different angles, they are all concerned with conceptions of the contours and characteristics of the nation and how the nation is to be represented by the political leadership, entailing questions of the nature of democracy, constructions of the people, elected versus inherited leadership, embodiment, and, ultimately, continuity and change in such conceptualisations. In the concluding chapter, I pull these strands together to offer a comparative discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The Cambodian political context is fraught with lingering conflict and high tension, and there are incidents of politically motivated violence. Therefore, ethical considerations were crucially important throughout the research process.

Firstly, considerations for the protection of informants guided my choice of methodology. The ethnographic approach, as noted above, is particularly appropriate for contexts in which interviewees may experience caution in engaging with the researcher. Discursive and semi-directed interviews leave it to the interviewee to decide the boundaries of the interview contents and empower the interviewee with the right to veto how deep into any particular context to prod. Moreover, as interviews took place in person, the researcher's emotional knowledge was naturally involved.²⁰⁹ The interviewee's security concerns were therefore mitigated whilst the researcher learned to recognise particularly sensitive information.

Interviewees were given the opportunity not to be named, and some interviewees asked to remain anonymous. I have simply referenced these interviews as 'author's interview', followed by date, to distinguish them from one another. There were also instances of interview contents that, whilst relevant to the arguments made here, were not used due to their sensitive nature. Yet, I have ensured that such information underlies and complements my understanding of the questions here discussed, and confirms and strengthens the arguments here made.

Note on Translation and Transcription

In carrying out this research, I relied heavily on my studies of the Cambodian language, also known as 'Khmer'. I started these studies in the summer of 2005, when, aided by a grant from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, I attended a language school in Phnom Penh for several months. Subsequently, I have been able to continue my study of Khmer on a largely independent basis, through academic as well as other work, which has ever since remained focused on Cambodia. Upon graduating from SOAS, I lived and worked in Cambodia from 2006 to 2007. Returning to England to pursue an MPhil at the University of Cambridge, the Gates Cambridge Trust funded fieldwork in Cambodia for my MPhil dissertation in December 2007 and the summer of 2008. Whilst these prolonged stays in Cambodia were indispensable for developing my knowledge of the

²⁰⁹ Sluka (1989): 12; and Skidmore (2004): 33–34.

overall social and political context, they were also linguistically beneficial. These previous language studies aided me greatly when I returned for my doctoral fieldwork, carried out from September 2009 to June 2010 and May 2011 to October 2011. Interviews were carried out in three languages: Khmer, English and French. High-level government officials were often accompanied by official translators, who provided Khmer–English translation. Some interviewees, who had been schooled in the French language, preferred to be interviewed in French. I have also consulted a large amount of Khmer-language books and documents. All translations from Khmer-language sources, interviews as well as printed materials, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

Throughout this dissertation, I base transcriptions on the Franco–Khmer transcription system. The Franco–Khmer transcription system was set forward by Franklin E. Huffman in 1983, building on an earlier transcription system employed by the French during the period of the French protectorate of Cambodia. Its main advantage is how it closely follows Khmer pronunciation.²¹⁰ It is the transcription system most commonly used by political scientists. By contrast, the other main system used in academic writing, the Pou system devised by Saverous Pou in 1969, is a transliteration system. It is therefore more commonly employed by scholars relying heavily on written texts, often within the disciplines of literature, religion and the arts.²¹¹

Whereas the Franco–Khmer transcription system, as originally devised, included many diacritics to distinguish between different vowel sounds, academic works of recent years have tended to drop many of these. Transcriptions in this dissertation follow the Franco–Khmer transcription system as reproduced by Heder and Ledgerwood (1996: xvii). This chart retains only one of the original diacritics (â).

²¹⁰ Marston & Guthrie (2004): ix. See Marston & Guthrie (2004): ix–x for a discussion of the comparative advantages of the Franco–Khmer transcription system versus the Pou system (Lewitz (1969)).

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Hun Sen: The Sdech Kân Narrative

On 5–6 July 1997, Cambodia's First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh was overthrown by Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, ending their co-premiership and the coalition government between royalist party FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) which had been instated in 1993. A few years thereafter, a narrative started spreading in Cambodia. This centred on the idea that the life of Prime Minister Hun Sen was somehow intimately connected with that of sixteenth-century king Sdech Kân, a man of the people who rose through his own prowess to topple the king at the time. Although this was always suggested implicitly, the idea conveyed was that the prime minister was the reincarnation of the legendary king.

Since the 1993 reinstatement of the monarchy and of a multi-party system, following on from more than a decade of one-party rule under the CPP and its predecessor, the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), a rickety relationship had developed between the royalists and the CPP. With the reinstated monarchy, Nation, Religion and King (*Cheat, Sasana, Mohaksatr*) became the national motto of the new, second Kingdom of Cambodia. These three notions and their historical precursors stand at the centre of historical Cambodian imaginations of power and moral order.²¹² The reinvention of the Sdech Kân narrative can be understood as Prime Minister Hun Sen's bid to remould the relationship between the nation, religion, and the monarchy in his favour, using a potent cultural legend which invokes a deeply engrained tension between inherited and non-inherited leadership within Khmer Buddhist kingship. The reinvention of the narrative is in this way central to the reworking of boundaries of power in the second kingdom between the monarchy and the royalist faction on one hand, and the CPP, and, primarily, Hun Sen on the other.

The narrative has wider Southeast Asian resonances, with similar goings-on in, for example, Burma, Thailand and Laos,²¹³ where historical kings have been used to

²¹² Heng (2008): 310.

²¹³ See, for example, on Burma, 'Burma: The end of an era or a dynasty's beginning?', *Irrawaddy*, 26 Jan. (2011); on Laos, Grabowsky and Tappe (2011), and on Thailand, Stengs (2009), and Phongpaichit and Baker (2008).

bolster political legitimacy, at the same time as the idea of reincarnation has spread. As examples of 'performative politics', each of these interacts with the fabric of political, historiographical and moral imaginations of their polities in different ways. In looking at the Sdech Kân narrative, I seek to trace the meanings and consequences of reincarnating this particular king in the contemporary Cambodian context. This chapter examines what the Prime Minister's claim to incarnation entails, and how this attempts to remodel the 'ideal' configuration of political power in contemporary Cambodia. It is thus concerned specifically with what it understands to be claims to legitimacy on behalf of Hun Sen, rather than of the CPP as a party. As the Prime Minister of successive CPP-led governments, the legitimacy-seeking strategies of Hun Sen necessarily affect the legitimacy of the CPP. However, the narrative here discussed accords Hun Sen a unique personal role. It can therefore be understood in the context of Hun Sen's increasing consolidation of political power not only vis-à-vis rival political parties, but also within the CPP. In the period leading up to the second kingdom, the then State of Cambodia (SOC) leaders had tried to assert their legitimacy as rulers of Cambodia ahead of the reinstatement of the constitutional monarchy by means of seizing control of the right to define the concepts nation, religion, and king to their own advantage.²¹⁴ In offering a further redefinition, the Sdech Kân narrative makes new claims that go beyond those of the SOC period when the triumvirate of Hun Sen, Heng Samrin and Chea Sim acted as kings ceremonially and politically. By engaging with historical ideas of kingship, the Sdech Kân narrative posits Hun Sen himself as the legitimate national leader.²¹⁵ The narrative is complicit in the increasing personalisation of symbolic and political power firmly tied to the person of the Prime Minister.

Changing Conceptualisations of Kingship

²¹⁴ Ledgerwood (2008b): 213.

²¹⁵ Steve Heder identifies three 'claims of qualification to rule' in postcolonial Cambodia: being *sdech*, 'king' or 'prince', a title associated with the royal family; *neak cheh doeng*, a person with higher education; and *neak tásou*, a person who has taken part in armed struggle. Hun Sen routinely portrays himself as a military figure, *neak tásou*. His claims to being a *neak cheh doeng* are epitomised by his election into the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC) on 28 April 2010. Performing Sdech Kân can be seen as his ultimate claim to being *sdech*. See Heder (1995): 425–9.

Sdech Kân is known in Khmer historiography as the quintessential *neak mean bon* (man of merit). He is a famous and controversial figure who, after killing a supposedly unjust king, ascended the throne himself. By invoking him, the narrative engaged with ideas of kingship itself.²¹⁶ These ideas are enmeshed in historical Cambodian Buddhist conceptualisations of authority and moral order, linking power to karmic laws of rebirth based on merit accrued in previous existences. Since the establishment of Theravada Buddhism as the dominant religion in the country, kingship has been bound up with the notion of *neak mean bon*.²¹⁷ The *neak mean bon* is associated with revolutionary activities, typically denoting a man who rises to power through his own prowess. His right to rule is a consequence of the accumulation of good deeds in previous lives. When recognised, his merit bestows him with the legitimacy to take the fate of the country in his hands or to ascend the throne.²¹⁸ The *neak mean bon* is a potent cultural concept alive in Cambodian collective memory.²¹⁹

Cambodian kingship was traditionally associated with extraordinary virtue, leading the country to prosperity.²²⁰ The organic link between the moral behaviour of the king and the welfare of the kingdom was conceptualised as a structure which, as in theories of kingship in many other parts of the world, presumed the unity of the physical, mortal body of the king, and his mystical body, the 'body politic'.²²¹ In Khmer Buddhist kingship, Ashley Thompson identifies the royal body as 'one in a series of substitute bodies, including the Buddha and the stûpa, each being an image of Mount Meru, which substitute one for the other in substituting for the kingdom or the universe governed by the *dharma*'.²²² The 'king as a substitute body' meant in the

²¹⁶ Heder (2007: 162) suggests that Hun Sen has 'occasionally attempted to present himself as a *neak mean bon*', and quotes a 1993 United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) report. The reinvention of Sdech Kân as a first more or less coherent form of narrativisation to frame such claims.

²¹⁷ Harris (2005): 50; for a discussion of the historical Sdech Kân as a *neak mean bon* see Khing 2008: 6; see also Thompson (2004a) on the *neak mean bon* during Cambodia's Middle Period (i.e., after the fall of Angkor and before the French protectorate, c. 1450–1863).

²¹⁸ Khing (2008): 1.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Thompson (2004b); Kent (2008).

²²¹ See Kantorowicz's (1957) classical study of the king's two bodies as a political theology of early-modern Western monarchies.

²²² Thompson (2004b): 92.

Khmer Buddhist context that Khmer royalty had multiple substitute bodies, and that the king was 'both transcendent or universal and uniquely particular'.²²³ The conception of just leadership/kingship in Cambodia is epitomised by the *Preah Bat Thommik* (Dharmic King or Just Ruler), a concept with messianic overtones, also engraved in the popular mind.²²⁴ This Just Ruler is thought to uphold what is known in Theravadin terms as the *dasavidha-rājadhmma*, the 'tenfold virtues of the righteous king', and to enjoy invulnerability.²²⁵ In a 'traditional' conceptualisation of the ideal configuration of political power, the *Preah Bat Thommik* was envisioned as a charioteer, supporting himself on the two wheels of state affairs (*anachkr*, the pillar of *Cheat*), and Buddhism (*Putthichakr*, the pillar of *Sasana*) to lead the people forward.²²⁶

The *neak mean bon* and the *Preah Bat Thommik* overlap conceptually.²²⁷ The well-known nineteenth-century prophecy *Putth Tumneay* foretells the appearance of the *Preah Bat Thommik* as a *neak mean bon* who will come to pacify Cambodia after a period of violent upheavals.²²⁸ These upheavals turn the world upside down: traditional values undergo a complete reversal, Buddhism is destroyed, and the ignorant gain power. Now largely associated with the Khmer Rouge period, the *Putth Tumneay* has been seen by many political opponents, including the royalist faction, to apply to the coming-to-power of the incumbent regime.²²⁹ They point to the communist origins of the CPP and the modest backgrounds of the party's leaders. The recurring messianic search to find the *Preah Bat Thommik* persists in the second

²²³ Ibid: 91.

²²⁴ Heng (2008): 310.

²²⁵ Ibid: 313. The 'tenfold virtues of a righteous king' (*dasavidha-rājadhmma*) are *dāna* (charity), *sīla* (morality), *pariccēga* (self-sacrifice), *ājjava* (honesty), *maddava* (kindness), *tapa* (self-control), *akkoda* (non-anger), *avihimsa* (non-violence), *khanti* (tolerance), and *avirodhana* (conformity to the law). See Heng 2008: 317-18.

²²⁶ Ibid: 310.

²²⁷ Khing (2008): 22, suggests a complete overlap between the *Preah Bat Thommik* and *neak mean bon* through the conceptual link 'dhammik = bodhisatta = neak mean boun'. According to de Bernon 1994: 91, the word 'dhammik' [thommik], part of the Cambodian royal title, designates in *Putth Tumneay* not only a just monarch, but also the warriors who submit only reluctantly to the sovereign Bodhisattva.

²²⁸ Khing (2008): 21; de Bernon (1994): 91.

²²⁹ On the association of the upheavals described in *Putth Tumneay* with the Khmer Rouge, see Mortland (1994): 82; Smith (1989): 18-23; Ledgerwood (2008b): 216.

kingdom.²³⁰ Royalists have nurtured the idea of reinstated king Norodom Sihanouk as a just leader, as the father of peace and national reconciliation.²³¹

The reinvention of the Sdech Kân narrative can be understood as a counter-narrative to a reading of *Putth Tumneay* which casts Sihanouk, and the royalist faction with him, as the rightful leaders of the nation. Immediately before the restoration of the monarchy, when expectations of the imminent coming of the *Preah Bat Thommik* ran high, Hun Sen, Chea Sim, and Heng Samrin, as the then SOC leaders, tried to distance themselves from the infidels mentioned in the *Putth Tumneay* by sponsoring Buddhist ritual activity.²³² Then, shortly after the July 1997 events, Hun Sen made reference to the short and violent war, lasting only as long as it takes “to fry a shrimp”, which according to *Putth Tumneay* hails in a new era of prosperity — thereby seemingly casting himself as the *Preah Bat Thommik*.²³³ In 2003, Hun Sen seemed to suggest an association between himself and King Jayavarman VII, the quintessential *Preah Bat Thommik*, using the language of reincarnation.²³⁴ Hun Sen’s subsequent revival of Sdech Kân represents the emergence of a full-fledged counter-narrative to a royalist reading of the *Putth Tumneay*, with the Prime Minister casting himself as a saviour figure, whilst omitting the other two members of the CPP top troika.

This counter-narrative engages with an age-old tension between inherited and non-inherited leadership, deeply engrained in Buddhist thinking on kingship and in the Khmer political and cultural context. The productive tension between inherited and non-inherited leadership is entailed in the terms *sdech*, generally translated as ‘king’ or ‘prince’, and *samdech*, an honorific accorded by the King to non-royals including the CPP’s leaders. These titles historically covered a semantic range within and outside of actual ‘kingship’, an ambiguity persisting into the present day. The Old Khmer origin of the word *sdech* is derived from the root verb *tac*, ‘to detach, to

²³⁰ See Heng (2008): 313.

²³¹ Some Cambodians consider Sihanouk as the *Preah Bat Thommik* or as a *Bodhisattva*, which would make him a *neak mean bon*. See de Bernon (1994): 93; Khing (2008): 22.

²³² Ledgerwood (2008b): 216.

²³³ De Bernon (1998).

²³⁴ Hun Sen released a press statement denying that he was a reincarnation of Jayavarman VII; this was prompted, he stated, by how many people believed this to be the case. Ledgerwood (2008b): 219.

separate, to be superior', and was used to designate people of the ruling class, only thence the king.²³⁵ Utilising this pre-existing tension, the Sdech Kân narrative employs the *neak mean bon* imaginary to glorify and exalt non-hereditary leadership. Thereby it engages with questions debated by a rapidly changing monarchy which is internally fractured over the meaning of a constitutional monarchy and how it can be reconciled with political royalism. Following his reinstatement as king, Sihanouk continuously sought a political role for himself, often ending up closer to the CPP than to FUNCINPEC. Sihanouk's 2004 abdication in favour of his son Sihanoni, who is disinterested in assuming a political role, has given Cambodia a constitutional monarch along Western lines. Meanwhile, Sihanoni's half-brother Ranariddh, as the leader of FUNCINPEC until 2006, manoeuvred his way through coalition governments with the CPP that compromised his political independence, as well as his royal stature. The Sdech Kân narrative relates to these different actors and their agendas in different ways. It is primarily understood to justify the July 1997 events and Ranariddh's political downfall. More broadly, it undermines the legitimacy of a national leadership role for royal family members, and particularly the idea of Sihanouk as the father of national reconciliation. By revealing a telling absence of rival rumours concerning the actual occupant of the throne, Sihanoni, it highlights the actual throne's hollowness.

Although the 'traditional' ideal configuration of power as the trinity of nation, Buddhism and kingship persists in Cambodia today, contestation over the relationship among the three has coloured Cambodian politics ever since Independence. Ian Harris charges that the idea of the king as indispensable to the flourishing of Theravada Buddhism may be a kind of caricature of Khmer Buddhism.²³⁶ The Sdech Kân narrative can be understood as the latest response to a long-standing legitimacy crisis of this trinity, in important ways forming a continuity with that of Sihanouk. Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community, 1955–70) and its

²³⁵ Pou (1998): 656. Pou (1992: 508) defines the Old Khmer meaning as 'To be aloof, above all. The supreme one. Sacred beings, espec. Princes. (Of these) To be, stand, move.'

²³⁶ Harris (2008). Anti-colonial Buddhist nationalism was non-monarchist and sometimes anti-monarchist, and several people at its heart later rose to prominence in the Khmer Republic. Their thinking was informed by larger debates within Buddhist thinking on kingship. Harris (2008: 82–88) identifies both Theravada canonical sources and Cambodian *chhups*, post-canonical sources, which justify insurrection as a consequence of misrule.

Buddhist socialism, launched as a social and political foundation for building independent Cambodia, was said by Sihanouk to build precisely on the 'traditional' base of the monarchy and Buddhism as 'irreplaceable factors of unity'.²³⁷ Sihanouk claimed direct descent from Jayavarman VII, the model *Preah Bat Thommik*, and likened his Sangkum Reastr Niyum to the Angkorean era.²³⁸ Yet at the same time, Sihanouk referred to the popular legend of King Trāsāk Ph'aem, a *neak mean bon*, to justify his 1955 abdication in favour of his father Suramarit, and his new role as chairman of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum. According to legend, Trāsāk Ph'aem was a gardener of the Samre minority, renowned for his skill in growing sweet cucumbers. Acting on the orders of the king to kill any intruder, the gardener one night killed a trespasser who then turned out to be the king himself. In recognition of the gardener's obedience, the gardener was then made king and started a new dynasty of popular origin. Harris notes that 'by drawing on the legend, Sihanouk was able to replace the idea of rule by traditional quasi-divine right with a slightly more democratic and popular notion of exclusive political power'.²³⁹ This was reflected in how around the same time Sihanouk started to be called by the newly invented kinship-term *Samdech Euv*, often translated as 'Monsignor Papa', rather than by Sanskrit and Pali terms hitherto associated with high status.²⁴⁰ Ever so slightly, kingship was shifted towards a more democratic ideal, by referring to the *neak mean bon* imaginary.

In the second kingdom, genealogical lines are again central to the royals' claims to legitimacy. Meanwhile, in contemporary society, historical imaginations of overlapping substitute bodies, whereby the king embodies the people and the state, persist. Alexandra Kent tells the story of how two middle-aged Cambodian women set out to recover the king's body through spirit performances in order, ultimately, to reconstitute Cambodia.²⁴¹ Just as these women use their bodies to channel that of the king, as the substitute in turn for the body social and the body politic, the Sdech Kân

²³⁷ Norodom Sihanouk (1965): 14.

²³⁸ Edwards (2007): 250.

²³⁹ Harris (2005): 146.

²⁴⁰ Sihanouk was granted the title of *dhanmik mahārāj* [thommik mohareach] (great righteous king) in the 1947 Constitution, but renounced it by abdicating. He occasionally referred to himself as king-monk (Harris 2005: 144). In contrast, legend has it that after Trāsāk Ph'aem ascends the throne, the title *Preah Bat Thommik* is added to his royal title, underlining the overlap between the *neak mean bon* and the *Preah Bat Thommik*. See de Bernon (1998): 91.

²⁴¹ Kent (2008).

performance can be understood as a mirror response by the Prime Minister to reorient Cambodia — through replacing the ailing monarchy. Through becoming the substitute body of Sdech Kân, the Prime Minister plunges himself into a series of associations, ultimately representing what in the modern context is imagined as the nation. The discourse surrounding Hun Sen's reincarnation of Sdech Kân can be understood as a bid to articulate and cement an interpretation of legitimate leadership to define the present era and to negotiate future political developments; a concern which goes beyond that of convincingly, in any straightforward sense, aspiring to be a *neak mean bon* or *Preah Bat Thommik*.

Performative Politics in the Second Kingdom

By (re)incarnating or performing Sdech Kân, Prime Minister Hun Sen has tapped into the sphere of emotion, drama and performance, testifying to what an important part such performance plays in contemporary Cambodian politics. Julia Strauss and Donal Cruise O'Brien identify three distinct modes of performative politics as the politics of 'affect, emotion and drama': state rituals, primarily staged ceremonies; theatrical performance by politicians and activists, such as elections and street protests; and individual or micro-performances, including speeches or events intended to engage people's emotions and rally support.²⁴² The performances of the Sdech Kân narrative predominantly belong to the third type. The Prime Minister makes individual performances in the form of elaborate speeches. There are also individual and micro-performances by different members of the political elite and their clientelistic networks, *khsae*. Performing the Sdech Kân narrative exalts the importance of Hun Sen's bureaucratic, military and economic networks, which make up what Steve Heder has referred to as an 'involved façade state'.²⁴³ It has tied together government officials with artists and academics who have been mobilised in an ongoing process of enlisting intellectuals into the Prime Minister's network. In a way, the narrative has become an inverted 'façade' by providing a platform for these individuals to come to the surface of public space, reinforcing existing power structures and integrating a

²⁴² Strauss and Cruise O'Brien (2007): 2–3.

²⁴³ Heder (2007): 162.

new set of people into them. Their performances include the erection of statues of Sdech Kân across the country, a book about Sdech Kân, and the work of a research team to locate Sdech Kân's capital. The narrative has also been disseminated nationwide through the media.

These public spectacles contain their own internal logic, aspirations and expressions. In contrast to Cambodian elections, which could be said to (sometimes schizophrenically) interact with both an international and domestic audience, the performances discussed here are aimed quite exclusively at a domestic audience. As a realm 'thoroughly saturated with symbols, as the script for the performance either implicitly or explicitly calls upon tropes, symbols and metaphors presumed to be well understood by those audiences', performative politics alludes to and draws meaning from a sphere of shared understandings.²⁴⁴ It thus naturally intersects with the politically embedded contestation of social memories. Sdech Kân was already a controversial figure in Cambodian collective memory prior to his recent reinvention, with interpretations of his rule ranging from a republican one making him out to be a false revolutionary to a royalist one casting him as a simple usurper of the throne.²⁴⁵ The most recent reinvention thus picks up and utilises tropes and symbols fresh in the collective memory. The performance can paradoxically be understood as a particularly 'sincere' medium by which Hun Sen communicates with the citizenry. Its indirect communications convey important messages, yet these are always subject to interpretation and bound to the context of the performance's enactment.

Sdech Kân: The 'Original' Narrative

Sdech Kân, also known by his royal name Preah Srey Chettha, is known in Khmer history as the commoner who became the leader of a popular uprising toppling King Srey Sokonthor Bât (r. 1504–12). Though several written versions of the story exist, Adhémard Leclère narrates the story of Sdech Kân as follows:²⁴⁶ Kân belonged to the

²⁴⁴ Strauss and Cruise O'Brien (2007): 3.

²⁴⁵ Saing (1972); Tauch (1995).

²⁴⁶ Leclère (1914): 235–78. The account given in Leclère (1910) is largely identical, but omits king Srey Sokonthor Bât's dream. Leclère does not provide a reference for the chronicle on which he based his account. But see Eng (1985) [1969]: 8–19 which largely mirrors Leclère's

temple-servant class. When his sister was offered to Srey Sokonthor Bât as a concubine, Kân came to live in the royal palace where he soon built up a certain standing. One night in 1508, Srey Sokonthor Bât had a nightmare in which he saw an ominous *neak* (dragon) drive him out of the palace and wreak havoc on the kingdom. Gathering with all the members of the royal family and court dignitaries, who offered him candles and flower garlands, the king then had a vision of two dragons hovering around either side of Kân's head. Immediately thereafter, he received news of ominous signs from all parts of the kingdom. Perturbed, King Srey Sokonthor Bât gathered his fortune-tellers, who foresaw that he would be toppled by a man born in the year of the dragon, a man who would reign in the direction of the east. Given that Kân was indeed born in the year of the dragon, the king schemed to have Kân killed in what was to seem like a fishing accident. The king's ignoble plot failed, however, as Kân was warned by his sister who had overheard the conversation. Escaping the king's trap, Kân fled eastwards to build up an army. Marching against Srey Sokonthor Bât in 1512, Kân finally defeated the king, who was struck down by one of his aides. Thereafter, Kân ruled benevolently over Cambodia, bringing order and prosperity. He introduced the first currency in the kingdom, the *sleung*, with the image of a dragon imprinted on it. However, a few years into his reign, a civil war broke out in 1516, which ended in 1525 with Sdech Kân being killed by the soldiers of King Chânt Reachea. The story allows plenty of space for interpretation as to whether Kân was a traitor or a just warrior rising against an unjust king. Historians have dwelt on the Sdech Kân story because it is perceived to tell important things about what Michel Tranet terms the 'psycho-sociological reality' of Cambodian history, whilst aspiring to historical truth-value.²⁴⁷

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account as retold above, whilst providing a lengthier account of events. Leclère's 1910 article was reprinted in Tranet (ed) (2002). Khin (ed. and trans.) (1988) discusses Sdech Kân's reign, but does not retell the legend recounted above, for which Khin instead references Leclère's 1910 account (p. 258).

²⁴⁷ Tranet (2002): preface.

From the early 2000s onwards, Prime Minister Hun Sen started bringing Sdech Kân to mind in a number of speeches. Several remarks by the Prime Minister seemed to suggest that there was an intimate connection between himself and Sdech Kân. The similarities between Sdech Kân and Hun Sen were given particular attention. They were both born in the year of the *neak* (dragon). Just as Sdech Kân came from the class of temple-servants, Hun Sen famously spent part of his youth as a pagoda boy. The main similarity, alluded to implicitly, was the idea of a commoner, rising through his own revolutionary prowess to govern the polity by toppling an unjust king.

This narrative emerged in the context of Hun Sen's restructuring of relations between himself and the royal family to the detriment of the latter, and particularly in relation to his ultimate outmanoeuvring of Prince Ranariddh. Ranariddh was dealt *the* major blow by the July 1997 events that ousted him as co-prime minister, effectively ending any real influence he might have had over national politics. The Sdech Kân narrative appeared in the aftermath of the 1997 events, in a period when Ranariddh was struggling to reinsert himself into national politics.²⁴⁸ In 2006, the conflict between Ranariddh and Hun Sen reached a new peak, leading to Ranariddh's resignation from the presidency of the National Assembly in March. The same month, the National Assembly amended the constitution enabling it to pass bills with a simple majority, rather than the previously required two-thirds majority. This move effectively eliminated royalist party FUNCINPEC as a political actor with agency.

Shortly before Ranariddh's resignation, on 26 February 2006, Hun Sen went with his wife Bun Rany to visit what had been identified as Sdech Kân's former capital, Srolop Prey Nokor in Kompong Cham province. Here, Hun Sen gave a speech, providing the fullest account to date of his perspective on Sdech Kân. Hun Sen started out by declaring that a religious ceremony had been conducted to ask permission from former king Sdech Kân's spirit for a restoration effort aimed at developing Srolop Prey Nokor into a tourism site. He then spoke at length about how the development of Srolop was to take place. An irrigation system was to be constructed, bringing water to the 213-hectare inner area of the former city or palace, as well as

²⁴⁸ Ranariddh was appointed President of the National Assembly in 1998, and again in 2003.

almost 2,000 hectares in the vicinity; 519 metres of the seven-metre-high city wall were to be rebuilt. Water reservoirs around the palace were to be restored. Canals were to be dug, ranging from 2,750 to 4,000 metres long. Four water gates were to be put in, and a new water system extending the water current from the canal to be constructed. Two other canals were to be restored together with a number of water regulatory mechanisms. As Hun Sen concluded, 'I think we have a long-term involvement here.'²⁴⁹

Hun Sen went on to narrate his version of the Sdech Kân story:

After the Ponhea Yat reign, Cambodia was ruled as a Kingdom that was divided into three separate areas ... The war later broke out. It is interesting to study its cause for the sake of preventing mistakes in the present. King Preah Srey Sokonthor Bât had a concubine whose brother was named Kân. One day the King dreamed of a fire-breathing dragon and fortunetellers spread rumors of instability believed to originate from Kân, since everyone was unhappy about him being promoted from the status of an outcast. A plot to kill Kân was hatched but Kân was saved by a secret letter from his sister and fled to gather forces, which later fought and defeated the forces of the King Srey Sokonthor Bât. He became King himself and was named Preah Srey Chettha. Sdech Kân or Preah Srey Chettha did a wonderful work in what should be termed a democratic revolution because he liberated all outcasts under his area of control. Because of this he became the strongest commander and King in his own right.²⁵⁰

Hun Sen continued the speech by addressing the deal struck between the CPP and opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) for the constitutional amendment mentioned above, requiring a simple majority rather than a two-thirds majority to pass a law in the National Assembly. Hun Sen referred to his recent audience with King Sihanouk to address rumours that this 'reconciliation approach' would lead to the monarchy's downfall. Hun Sen had informed the king that the constitutional amendment was aimed merely at avoiding a political deadlock, not at abolishing the monarchy. He

²⁴⁹ Hun Sen, 'Visit of Samdech Hun Sen and Bun Rany to the former Royal City of Sanloek Prey Nokor in Kompong Cham', *Cambodia New Vision (CNV)*, 97, 28 Feb. 2006.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.* This account of the Sdech Kân story as typically referred to by Hun Sen evidently picks the parts of the legend that serve to deliver his message whilst omitting other parts, such as how Sdech Kân was ultimately killed and replaced by another monarch.

further stated that the CPP should be called the monarchy's supporter, 'if not the monarchist', and that anyone wishing to abolish the monarchy had to first 'get me [Hun Sen] out'.²⁵¹ In his speech the Prime Minister had explicitly addressed the recent moves affecting the royalist party by claiming to be the monarchy's defender. He had also given a much longer account retelling the historical legend of Sdech Kân defeating the king at the time, and he had delivered it all at the site of Sdech Kân's capital. If read as a statement on the present situation, this latter part seemed to contradict the more explicit assertions.

Shortly after the speech, Ranariddh resigned from the presidency of the National Assembly, perhaps giving clues to *his* reading of the above speech and to which performance he attributed 'sincerity'. One month later, Hun Sen delivered another forceful speech reiterating the Sdech Kân story. This time, he drew exact parallels between present and past actors, stating that 'we should not be afraid to get exposed to history as some people should', and that 'we should not be afraid of the *truth* recorded by history', as, presumably, others should.²⁵² He noted the historical events as proof that 'all are born equal', and that 'it was not true at all that some people are born to be respected people and some are not', a message not lost on the royal family.²⁵³

Sdech Kân, the Win-Win Policy and National Reconciliation

Hun Sen's reinvention of Sdech Kân transmits a particular idea of national reconciliation in contemporary Cambodia. Hun Sen has stated that he has taken late Lao prime minister Kaysone Phomvihane's way of national reconciliation following the 1975 revolution as a model for the recreation of the Cambodian monarchy, in terms of how Kaysone's new regime dealt with the Lao monarchy that it replaced.²⁵⁴ This, he has specified, particularly refers to how Kaysone integrated leading royalists

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Hun Sen, 'Inaugurating Buddhist temple in Serei Suosdei Pagoda', *CNI*, 99, 27 Apr. 2006.

²⁵³ Author's interviews with senior royal family members suggest that they generally perceive of Hun Sen's references to Sdech Kân as a pledge to take revenge on the monarchy, by means of invoking their wrongdoings against Sdech Kân.

²⁵⁴ Author's interview with Prime Minister Hun Sen, 29 Sept. 2011.

such as former prime minister Prince Souvanna Phouma into the new regime.²⁵⁵

Through these measures, in Laos, royalists came to lend traditional notions of legitimacy to the new regime.²⁵⁶ In Cambodia, FUNCINPEC has been weakened by a series of coalition governments with the CPP, whilst King-Father Sihanouk sometimes appeared more supportive of Hun Sen than of FUNCINPEC.

Paradoxically, Laos's transition from monarchy to a people's republic has provided the model for the reverse transition in Cambodia to a constitutional monarchy from a communist system.²⁵⁷

The Sdech Kân narrative supports this agenda, further inserting the fate of the monarchy into a discourse of national reconciliation. In many of Hun Sen's speeches, the reinvention of Sdech Kân has in different ways been integrated into supporting his claims to be the main architect of peacebuilding in post-conflict Cambodia. Royalists and other members of the political opposition generally identify the signing of the Paris Peace Accords (PPA) on 23 October 1991 between the SOC government and the tripartite resistance coalition as the end of the civil war. Crediting Sihanouk with the successful negotiation of the PPA and pointing to how he presided over the Supreme National Council (SNC), the transitional government during the peace process, the idea of Sihanouk as the father of national reconciliation constitutes a main claim to legitimacy for second kingdom royalists in resonance with the promises of the *Putth Tumneay*. Hun Sen, whilst still regularly referring to Sihanouk as the father of peace and national reconciliation, has increasingly downplayed the importance of the PPA, pointing to how the peace accords were the product of external intervention and to how civil war between the new government and the

²⁵⁵ With the establishment of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, Souvanna Phouma became 'Counsellor to the Government', King Savang Vatthana abdicated and was appointed 'Counsellor to the President', former Crown Prince Vong Savang was appointed member of the Supreme People's Assembly, and Prince Souphanouvong was made President of the new republic. Stuart-Fox (1997): 170.

²⁵⁶ In a further parallel to contemporary Cambodia, the use of traditional notions of legitimacy became even more pronounced following the collapse of communist ideology in the late 1980s, when the Lao regime turned to employ a Buddhist discourse centred on righteous kings. Today, historical kings have increasingly been integrated into what Grabowsky and Tappe refer to as an 'official national hero pantheon'. See Evans (1998): 70; Grabowsky and Tappe (2011); Evans (2002).

²⁵⁷ This is even more paradoxical given that the Laotian transition is believed to have entailed putting the king to death. Ex-king Savang Vatthana, his wife and two sons are believed to have died under arrest in Houaphan. Evans (1998): 99–100.

Khmer Rouge resumed after their conclusion.²⁵⁸ Instead, Hun Sen credits his win-win policy, whereby defectors from the Khmer Rouge (KR) were offered full integration into Cambodian society, with having achieved national reconciliation with the integration of the last KR forces in 1998.²⁵⁹ The win-win policy thereby achieves the promises of 7 January 1979, celebrated by the CPP as the 'nation's second birthday', when the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation, out of which the PRK government would develop, with Vietnamese backing, overthrew the Khmer Rouge-regime of Democratic Kampuchea.

The reinvention of Sdech Kân advances an idea of the curbing of royal power as integral to national reconciliation and prosperity. Whilst the win-win policy constitutes Hun Sen's final defeat of the Khmer Rouge, the Sdech Kân narrative represents how he has clipped the royalists' wings, leading to their reintegration into national politics under the leadership of the CPP. The reinvention of Sdech Kân also supports the attribution of post-conflict national reconciliation to Hun Sen's win-win policy, outperforming Sihanouk. In a number of speeches, Hun Sen has recalled how the war that broke out during Sdech Kân's reign started a period of civil war lasting over three hundred years, until Hun Sen ended the chaos.²⁶⁰ Here Sdech Kân and Hun Sen, rather than overlapping, are intrinsically linked as instigator and conciliator respectively of a defining phase of Cambodian history. National reconciliation is typically defined as the 1998 integration of the last Khmer Rouge defectors under the win-win policy. At other times, Hun Sen links the achievement of the win-win policy in 1998 to the July 1997 events.²⁶¹ These were justified by Hun Sen as a counter-

²⁵⁸ See Hun Sen's speech at the twentieth anniversary of the return of Sihanouk from exile and Sihanouk's ninetieth birthday, *CNY*, 164, 30 Oct. 2011, in which Hun Sen, whilst still referring to Sihanouk as the 'father of peace', stops at emphasising 'the brilliant reflection' of Sihanouk and Monineath in 'the creation of [the] policy of national reconciliation and healing'.

²⁵⁹ See, for example, Hun Sen, 'Speech at Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Jakarta, 16 Mar. 1999' Jakarta, 16 Mar. 1999, cited in Chhay (2007): 79.

²⁶⁰ In yet other speeches, Sdech Kân brings peace in a straightforward parallel to Hun Sen more than three hundred years later. See Hun Sen, 'Inaugurating Buddhist temple in Serei Suosdei Pagoda'.

²⁶¹ For speeches in which Sdech Kân's killing of Srey Sokonthor Bât is linked to the win-win policy, as the start and end-point of civil war respectively, see, for example, 'Address to the closing session of the national conference: "Peace, national reconciliation and democracy building: Ten years after the Paris Peace Agreement"', *CNY*, 45, 22 Oct. 2001; 'Address on the occasion of the acceptance of the Honorary Doctorate Degree of Political Science from the

attack against an alliance between royalists and the Khmer Rouge. The July 1997 events are thereby tied up with the win-win policy, and together made to define national reconciliation in the second kingdom.

Establishing Origin: Co-creating Hun Sen and Sdech Kân

The reinvention of Sdech Kân built crucially on academic work on the historical Kân by former vice-president of the Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC), historian Ros Chantraboth. Having spent the previous thirty years in France, Ros was called back to Cambodia in 2000 to help set up the Royal Academy re-established the previous year.²⁶² He immediately set about the task of identifying the location of Sdech Kân's second capital, recorded by historical sources as Srolop Doun Tipichey Prey Nokor. Ros's research team decided to search for it in Kompong Cham's Tboung Khmom district, following Khmer historical sources.²⁶³ Finding a square brick wall at the nearby site of the pre-Angkorean temples Banteay Prey Nokor, the research team concluded that this matched the description of Sdech Kân's capital in Khmer sources.²⁶⁴ The development of the area for tourism was commenced at the height of the conflict with Ranariddh in 2006. As part of this, the pagoda known variously as Wat Angkor Knong, Wat Prasat or Wat Khmau, which stands in the middle of the area, has been renovated. The pagoda consists of a newer *vihear*, raised on the site of an older one; behind it, there are two smaller, pre-Angkorean *prasat*. So far, however, Srolop has yet to become a popular destination for domestic tourists in spite of television broadcasts that advertise the site as a place for leisure and historical discovery.

University of Ramkhamhaeng, Kingdom of Thailand'. *CN1*, 46, 15 Nov. 2001; for a speech in which 1998 as the end-point of national division since the time of Sdech Kân is put explicitly in relation to the 1997 events, see 'Inaugurating Bayon TV/Radio broadcast station', *CN1*, 110, 11 Mar. 2007.

²⁶² The RAC, the nation's highest academic body, falls directly under the Office of the Council of Ministers and its Minister DPM Sok An, Hun Sen's close associate. In April 2010, Hun Sen and Sok An were appointed as full members of the RAC, and in April 2011 Hun Sen was appointed its Honorary President.

²⁶³ Leclère (1914): 252 situates Srolop at the border of the historical provinces Tboung Khmom and Ba Phnom.

²⁶⁴ Ros (2007): 225.

Locating Srolop in Kompong Cham provided another parallel between the trajectories of Sdech Kân and Hun Sen. Hun Sen was born in Steung Trang district, Kompong Cham in 1952; he claims to have joined the maquis in Kompong Cham's Memot district in 1970, and later married Bun Rany in Tboung Khmom district, Kompong Cham, where they also lost their first son. The narrativisation of Hun Sen's life as a *neak tâsou*, a person who has taken part in armed struggle, prior to assuming national leadership outlines a series of events taking place in Kompong Cham, well engrained in the popular imagination. Hun Sen has explicitly put his personal history of revolutionary struggle in the area in relation to that of Sdech Kân. In his speech delivered at his visit to Srolop Prey Nokor, Hun Sen started out by recalling that not only had several senior CPP leaders lived in the area during the revolution, but also that he and his wife had a memorable history there.²⁶⁵ He recalled how he and his wife had reunited in the area after two months of separation, citing widely known songs about the fate of a woman separated from her husband, and compared his story to that of Sdech Kân, finding it no less pitiful.²⁶⁶ This was arguably intended to ensure that the well-known story of Hun Sen's revolutionary activities throughout the 1970s — including his ultimate toppling of the Khmer Rouge-regime — would henceforth invoke the image of Sdech Kân. In a later speech delivered in Memot in 2007, Hun Sen outlined his relation to the area as follows:

... everyone knows that I have started my political life in Memot from April 4, 1970 as I decided to join the Maquis in response to the appeal made by Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk ... At another juncture, on June 20, 1977, I left the district of Memot to lead the struggle movement for national liberation against Pol Pot's genocidal regime, which later achieved the victory on January 7, 1979. However, another event that shocked me the most happened right before this building ... My first son died on November 10, 1976. My other son, who is also here today, was born not far from this place. January 5, 2007 is indeed our 31st wedding anniversary. We got

²⁶⁵ Hun Sen, 'Visit of Samdech Hun Sen and Bun Rany to the former Royal City'.

²⁶⁶ These episodes from Hun Sen's and Bun Rany's life during the time of revolutionary struggle have been made famous through songs such as *Tukkh srey bdey prout* (The sorrow of a woman separated from her husband), authored by the PM himself. It is included in Chhay 2005.

married in the commune of Chrab, Tboung Khmom District with twelve other pairs...
My star had been full of dangers, not just simple hardships and comforts...²⁶⁷

In this speech, Hun Sen describes his distress when in 1976 his wife Bun Rany, pregnant, is sent to work at the site of Srolop Prey Nokor. He takes her to nearby Memot to give birth, but during the night she delivers the baby he is away on a mission. Returning the next morning, he finds his first-born dead. Hun Sen asks for a proper burial, but is denied even this. He remarks, 'I was accused of being a traitor for a long time, but I knew that it was not my time yet. I could have taken revenge because I had a pistol with loaded chamber already in hand. I did not do it.' Instead, Hun Sen leaves Memot on 20 June 1977 for Vietnam. From there, Hun Sen builds up his army and power base, culminating in his revenge — the toppling of Democratic Kampuchea on 7 January 1979. In this *neak tásou* narrative, well-known to the public, Hun Sen's revolutionary activities recall those of Sdech Kán. Like Sdech Kán, when accused of treachery and struck by misfortune, Hun Sen 'kills his anger' and escapes eastwards, to Vietnam, where he builds up an army that eventually returns to topple the regime.²⁶⁸ The Sdech Kán narrative resonates with the earlier narrativisation surrounding Hun Sen, an association encouraged by the prime minister, and draws strength from this.²⁶⁹ In turn, this analogy bestows Hun Sen's personal revolutionary history with the range of meanings attached to that of the historical king.

Drawing a 'New Vision' from the Past

²⁶⁷ Hun Sen, 'Opening Junior High School Bun Rany — Hun Sen Memot', *CNV*, 108, 5 Jan. 2007.

²⁶⁸ Although Hun Sen now claims to have joined the maquis in 1970 responding to Sihanouk's call to arms, during the PRK, he claimed to have joined the resistance in 1967, long before the anti-Sihanouk coup of 1970. For the former, see, for example, Chhay (2007): 32. On his claims during the PRK, see Kiernan (1985): 254.

²⁶⁹ The consequence of aligning the *neak tásou* narrative with that of Sdech Kán, is, evidently, how this shifts the enemy from the monarchy to the Khmer Rouge; and further serves to conceptually link the monarchy to the Khmer Rouge, as suggested above. This could also be read to indict Sihanouk, whose call to arms Hun Sen now claims to have motivated him to join the revolution which would go so frightfully wrong that he had to overturn it; emphasising Sihanouk's alleged complicity in the horrors of Democratic Kampuchea.

Ros was commissioned by the Prime Minister to author a book about the historical king. Published under the name 'Preah Sdech Kân' in October 2006, the book was intended to find a political doctrine and ruling strategy in Khmer history for how to best govern, develop and rebuild the nation.²⁷⁰ Funded privately by the Prime Minister and first lady Bun Rany, 5,000 copies of the book were distributed to libraries around Cambodia.²⁷¹ Ros identified three major political events in Khmer history which had changed the way of governing, when a commoner had dared to stand up to dismantle a royalist regime. These were the rise to power of, in turn, Trâsâk Ph'aem in the thirteenth century, Sdech Kân in the sixteenth century, and lastly Lon Nol, through his 1970 coup which overthrew Sihanouk as head of state.²⁷² These extraordinary events, Ros stated, begged the question of why so many people had come together to overthrow the king. As a character routinely referred to at times of conflict between a commoner and the king, when the commoner would typically be likened to Sdech Kân as a traitor and usurper, he sought to reexamine Kân.²⁷³ Setting out to contextualise Sdech Kân's rise to power and to scrutinise the ideas and actions of King Srey Sokonthor Bât, Ros's findings thus aspired to offer insights to guide contemporary politics.

In his preface to the book, Hun Sen interpreted its findings as follows:

Preah Sdech Kân has been continuously written down in Khmer history as a man who betrayed the King, or a usurper. ... we can note that Preah Sdech Kân was a Khmer, born in the class of temple-servants, that he was not a man who betrayed the King, or a usurper, as is always said.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Ros (2007): 1; all citations from this book are the author's own translations.

²⁷¹ Leang Delux, 'History: Hun Sen finances a book about Sdach Korn', *Cambodge Soir*, 29 Mar. 2007. A second edition was released in 2007. See Bo Proeuk, 'Hun Sen-sponsored 'Preah Sdach Korn' book needs 2d edition to meet demand', *Reaksmev Kampuchea*, 25 Sep. 2007.

²⁷² Ros (2007): 3-4.

²⁷³ The seriousness with which Hun Sen takes allegations of being a traitor to the nation was highlighted by how he warned critics of the 7 January ceremony that anyone accusing him or senior government officials of being a 'national traitor' would be arrested. See Cheang Sokha and Rebecca Puddy, 'Don't call me a traitor: PM', *Phnom Penh Post*, 10 Jan. 2011.

²⁷⁴ Hun (2007): i.

Hun Sen suggested the following points to be reexamined in order to provide a better understanding of Sdech Kân's actions:

- The manner of doing things and the behaviour of King Srey Sokonthor Bât.
- The popular movements throughout the country which joined Sdech Kân's struggle against the King.
- The monks and pagodas that had previously received support, benefits and privileges from the King and Royal family turned to support and protect Preah Sdech Kân.
- What was the reason that brought people from all classes to rise up to fight the King?
- What kind of problems did Khmer society have with the tenfold conduct of the King, justice, society, agriculture and economy during the period of King Srey Sokonthor Bât?
- Can Preah Sdech Kân, who escaped his attempted murder by the King just to survive, be considered to have committed an act of betrayal?²⁷⁵

These points can also be read as outlining a 'timeless' scenario centred on the relationship between an unvirtuous king and an emerging *neak mean bon*. Applied to the relationship between the royalist faction and Hun Sen, these suggest that in the period prior to Hun Sen's actions to limit the royalists' power, there was something problematic about the behaviour of the royalist faction, that Hun Sen enjoyed the unanimous support of the people and of the *sangha*, and that their support indicated underlying societal problems stemming from the morally flawed conduct of the royalists. It suggests that Hun Sen was justified in curbing the power of the royalist faction by alluding to the imaginary of the *Preah Bat Thommik*. It is because of the royalists' failure to uphold the 'tenfold virtues of the king' which define the *Preah Bat Thommik* that the people and *sangha* rally to protect the *neak mean bon*.

Reassessing the historical Kân also offered an opportunity for the Prime Minister to reinvent his political identity. Kân provides Hun Sen with a new vision to guide the present era.²⁷⁶ Kân's political thinking is said to have rested on two conceptual

²⁷⁵ Ibid: ii.

²⁷⁶ Ibid: iii.

innovations; freedom rights (*sethi seripheap*) and class struggle (*tāsou vannah*). These radical innovations predated the emergence of similar notions in Europe, making Cambodia the birthplace of democratic politics.²⁷⁷ In Hun Sen's preface, we read:

Preah Sdech Kân ... can be considered as a brilliant hero in the world, who raised the doctrine and vision of freedom rights, and was the first to speak about and practice this, in the sixteenth century. France, famous as the country of human rights, started discussing freedom rights only in the eighteenth century. Something even more special is how Preah Srey Chettha Preah Sdech Kân raised the theory of class struggle to become the base of building Cambodia. Karl Marx, the father of Communism, raised this thought and wrote down the theory of class struggle only at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷⁸

These two conceptual innovations together make up early democratic beliefs, providing a blueprint for contemporary politics:

Can the political theory of Preah Srey Chettha Preah Sdech Kân that advances freedom rights and class struggle, which became the base in building the nation, the motherland, be considered to be the first step in history towards democratic beliefs? Also, for my own vision, I can note that the doctrine and activity of Preah Srey Chettha Preah Sdech Kân has the characteristics of the first democratic revolution of the people in Cambodian history, thanks to Sdech Kân who liberated them from the class system, letting there be freedom and equality in society²⁷⁹

The toppling of the unjust monarch results from the belief in freedom rights and class struggle and constitutes a national democratic revolution, which in turn is posited as

²⁷⁷ Ros (2007): 271.

²⁷⁸ Hun (2007): ii-iii.

²⁷⁹ Ibid: iii.

an integral part of the very fabric of the nation.²⁸⁰ This particular nationalist vision turns the trinity of Nation, Religion, and King on its head and not only closely knits together the notion of democracy with opposition to a morally flawed royalist faction, but also situates this within broader ideas of equality and social mobility. The leader who dares to challenge the hereditary leader achieves the democratic revolution and embodies the nation's aspirations.

The conceptualisation of democracy as a fusion of class struggle and freedom rights refashions an earlier discourse which firmly integrated the notion of democracy as part of revolutionary history. Hun Sen invoked both concepts during the PRK, depicting democracy and the securing of freedom rights as the unchanging objective of the Cambodian revolutionary quest pursued through class struggle from the pre-protectorate era onwards.²⁸¹ Having cast off his previous socialist identity, the changing revolutionary imaginary provided by Sdech Kân allows Hun Sen to reorient the notion of democracy to respond to the novel threat of the reinstated monarchy.²⁸²

In this attempt to reconcile the Marxist concept of class struggle with freedom rights, now primarily imagined as part of a liberal tradition, Hun Sen echoes and challenges Sihanouk, whilst inheriting the same paradoxes that Sihanouk once faced. Just like Hun Sen, Sihanouk identified the beginnings of Cambodian socialism in the monarchy — but with Angkorean kings. These were taken to have demonstrated incipient socialism through the traditional pattern of land use whereby the king was the guardian rather than proprietor of the land, making Cambodians 'free men', and through economic and social projects such as irrigation projects and hospitals.²⁸³ The

²⁸⁰ In some of the PM's speeches, it is the very death of Srey Sokonthor Bât that marks the national democratic revolution. See Hun Sen, 'Educational achievements in Kompong Thom's Santuk District', *CNV*, 121, 11 Feb. 2008.

²⁸¹ Hun (1991): 76, 280.

²⁸² Reflecting the transformation of regime identity with the transition to a free market economy, Kân is credited not only with having invented Marxist-term class struggle, but also commemorated for having introduced Cambodia's first monetary unit, the *sleng*. The National Bank of Cambodia has reproduced the *sleng* coin. See National Bank of Cambodia, 'Cambodia ancient naga coin nordic-gold proof-like coin', http://www.nbc.org.kh/english/nbc_gallery/more_info.php?id=4, accessed 1 July 2012.

²⁸³ Sihanouk stated that 'we must go back to the past to find the veritable origins of a socialism that did not yet have this name. The installers of this socialism were our Kings of Angkor.' Norodom Sihanouk (1965): 18.

Sdech Kân narrative is a counter-narrative to Sihanouk's, in that it challenges socialism's Angkorean roots by ascribing the beginnings of class struggle to a *neak mean bon*. It offers an alternative, moral, genealogy of just leadership where the emphasis lies on a notion of democracy, which neatly cuts it off from the aristocratic kings who came before and after Sdech Kân.

Statuemanía

The intended overlap between Hun Sen and Sdech Kân is perhaps most prominently manifested in the statues of Sdech Kân that have started dotting the Cambodian landscape. The first statue of Kân was made in 2006 by a student at the Royal University of Fine Arts (RUFA) in Phnom Penh. An equestrian statue of Sdech Kân was thereafter commissioned for Srolol from a team of sculptors at RUFA by Oknha Sim Vanna, a native of Kompong Cham involved in the development of Srolol, upon orders from Hun Sen. Subsequently, statues modelled on the one in Srolol have been erected in Preah Vihear and Kep provinces and at the Ministry of Commerce in Phnom Penh; a further one is to be erected in Banteay Meanchey province. At least two different sculptors have been commissioned to make these. There are two main variations to the statue; an equestrian and a standing pose. The faces on these statues clearly resemble Hun Sen's. Indeed the sculptors for the Srolol statue, which subsequent statues have generally been modelled on, were instructed to make the face similar to the Prime Minister's.²⁸⁴ Sculptors from the same team also made one of two statues of general Ta Di, erected near Preah Vihear temple, commissioned to resemble Hing Bun Heang, chief of Hun Sen's bodyguard unit.²⁸⁵ All of these statues have been commissioned by members of the political elite as a means of showing their loyalty to the Prime Minister.²⁸⁶ One sponsor of a Sdech Kân statue explained

²⁸⁴ Statues of Sdech Kân's four closest aides, namely *Oknhas* Vieng, Veang, Lompeang and Sral (see Eng (1985) [1969]: 242–3), are being crafted at the time of writing, to accompany the statue in Srolol. Whilst it is unclear whether these are being made in the likeness of particular individuals, this possibility cannot be excluded.

²⁸⁵ One is equestrian and the other standing; one of these was commissioned by Hing Bun Heang, and the other by Bayon TV, owned by Hun Sen's daughter Hun Mana. A section of the Prime Minister's Bodyguard Unit is stationed at Preah Vihear.

²⁸⁶ The statues in Kep and at the Ministry of Commerce, both erected in 2010, were commissioned by Minister of Commerce Cham Prasilh; the statue in Preah Vihear, erected in 2011, was reportedly commissioned by the son of four-star general Kun Kim, Deputy-

that he had the statue erected in recognition of how the Prime Minister feels that he shares the same fate as Sdech Kân.²⁸⁷

Some time after these sculptures of historical figures made in the likeness of present-day political leaders started emerging, the Prime Minister declared that sculptures of contemporary leaders were forbidden. In June 2010, Om Yentieng, personal adviser to the Prime Minister and head of the Anti-Corruption Unit, was chastised in public by Hun Sen for ordering a 3-metre-high statue of the Prime Minister to be put in front of the Anti-Corruption Unit. The statue was removed, and Om Yentieng had to offer a public apology. The reason given for the removal by Hun Sen's cabinet chief, Ho Sithy, was that making statues of living people ran counter to Cambodian culture, according to which statuary was said to be associated with honouring the dead.²⁸⁸ Following this incident, all display or sale of statues of top leaders was ordered to be stopped.

How can we account for the seeming paradox that the making of portrait-statues of historical figures in the likeness of the political leadership is encouraged, whilst portrait-statues overtly depicting political leaders have been forbidden outright? A statue of the historical Sdech Kân, with what seems to be the Prime Minister's face, makes particular claims which go beyond those of a statue plainly representing the PM. Portrait-statuary as a genre in Khmer art was since Angkorean times bound up with worshipping the merit of the king as the statue was seen to represent the king as dharma, embodying moral order.²⁸⁹ The statue served as a bridge between future and past, in that the future kings' dharma in turn was embodied by the maintenance of the statuary and thereby the moral order.²⁹⁰ In modern times, many of these ancient statues continue to be venerated by royal family members and ordinary Cambodians alike, maintaining their association with Khmer royalty and with national political

Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and chairman of Hun Sen's advisors; and the statue in Banteay Meanchey, yet to be erected, reportedly by governor of Banteay Meanchey province Ung Oeun and DPM Yin Chhay Ly.

²⁸⁷ Author's interview, Aug. 2011.

²⁸⁸ Chun Sakada, 'Hun Sen statue removed after dust-up', *Voice of America (Khmer)*, 18 Jun. 2010.

²⁸⁹ Thompson (2008): 187.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 186–7.

integrity which follows from their 'cosmic ordering role'.²⁹¹ Contemporary worship of statuary, in different ways associated with today's king, is both of the statuary as representations of ancient kings and of the statuary as incarnations.²⁹² The political embeddedness of this worship is well-documented, such as in the case of the statuary of Stec Gamlañ', also known as the Leper King, and Yāy Deb, sponsored primarily by royal family members.²⁹³

The recent statuary of Sdech Kān competes with ancient royal statuary as embodied memories of the royal past, offering newly manufactured memories belonging to a different imagined lineage — one which uproots the very idea of genealogy. By tapping into this series of connotations, Hun Sen claims the moral ancestry of a rival imagined community, joined with Sdech Kān through the statue to embody national leadership.²⁹⁴ Just as today's royalty through the intermediary of the statues is 'endowed with divine stature', the Sdech Kān statues in some sense confer an association with the immortal and divine.²⁹⁵ Conversely, and more sinisterly, a direct depiction of present leaders, could suggest if not their death (as suggested by the Prime Minister's cabinet), then at least their mortality.²⁹⁶ It is perhaps no coincidence that the other person represented in this iconographic form, through the statues of Ta

²⁹¹ Hang (2004): 113, 125.

²⁹² Ibid: 113.

²⁹³ A cement replica of Stec Gamlañ' was erected at Wat Unnalom in Phnom Penh by CPP officials ahead of the 1993 national elections, seemingly to compete with the royal cult — yet, in the words of Hang, its cult turned out to be a 'discreet' one. Ibid: 122–3.

²⁹⁴ That association with royal statuary is an association primarily with national leadership rather than with kingship as such is clearly evidenced by an incident during the Khmer Republic, when the statue of Brah Ang Sañkh Cakr, the Leper King, at the Phnom Penh riverfront was beheaded in an attack on Lon Nol, who as the national, Republican, leader at the time the statue was then imagined to substitute for. See Marston and Guthrie (2004): 87–88.

²⁹⁵ Hang (2004): 113–14. Classical Cambodian portrait-statues typically represented kings, princes or high dignitaries after their death in their divine aspect. See Coedes (1960); Pou (1998): 653–69. Thompson (2008) explores the conceptual complexities of the portrait-statue in terms of the relationship between king and the god it represented, suggesting that the old Khmer portrait-statue 'was and is conceived as the posthumous abode of the person/god embodied within, and as an embodiment of the reign of successive kings' (p. 203).

²⁹⁶ The notion of invulnerability is well documented as central to social and political imaginings across Southeast Asia as a core of imaginings of the foundation of political power. See, for example, Turton (1991), and Day (2002). Invulnerability is an important characteristic of both the *neak mean bon* and the *Preah Bat Thommik*. Turton (1991): 171; Khing (2008): 10; Heng (2008): 313.

Di at Preah Vihear, is the person with the utmost responsibility to protect Hun Sen's personal safety.

The statuary also plays a decisive role in spatially defining the nation. Perhaps in line with lingering *mandala* conceptualisations of space, the contest for central authority in the capital is privileged, as it defines the contest to represent the nation and define its borders. Contemporary worship of royal statuary acts to maintain the substitution between ancient and modern capitals.²⁹⁷ The erection of a Sdech Kân statue at what has been identified as the ancient capital of Srolop symbolically shifts the nation's substitute centre to Hun Sen's home province. Imagined in the context of new-old struggle with royals, the statue particularly provides a counterpoint to the worship of royal statuary in a mirror fashion linked with national reconciliation after the 1997 events.²⁹⁸ The role of the recent statuary in claiming the right to define the nation's boundaries is perhaps most obvious in the placement of the statues of Ta Di at Preah Vihear temple, the centre of a border conflict with Thailand. By establishing an identification between the ancient monument and Hun Sen's network, these create a link between the newer statuary and a royal site which is the focus of much contemporary nationalist sentiment.²⁹⁹

Conclusion

Though he publicly claims to be the monarchy's defender, Hun Sen makes use of his implied reincarnation of Sdech Kân to remodel the relationship between the nation, Buddhism and kingship to weaken the national leadership role of the monarchy and the royalist faction in Cambodia's second kingdom. By drawing on the historical ambiguity between inherited and non-inherited leadership that the historical

²⁹⁷ Hang (2004): 124–5.

²⁹⁸ Sihanouk phrased his return to Angkor after the 1997 events to 'pay his respects to the statues' as a metaphor for reestablishing peace and reconciliation in their wake. Thompson (2008): 181. In 1998, Sihanouk and Queen Monineath sponsored a pavilion for Yây Deb shortly before a summit to resolve conflict in the wake of the first national elections after the 1997 events. Hang (2004): 116.

²⁹⁹ See further how Thompson (2008): 203–6, traces how the struggle for central authority through identification with monuments was bound up with the representation of the nation and borders at the time of the 2003 anti-Thai riots.

Cambodian monarchy entails, kingship is challenged from within its very discourse, and genealogy is uprooted. The reinvention of Sdech Kân exalts non-hereditary leadership, which is inserted into a modern discourse of democracy, equality and even social mobility. Hun Sen's reincarnation of Sdech Kân can be understood as fundamentally a bid to embody national leadership, rather than to incarnate kingship as such. As the man of prowess at the centre of the polity, Hun Sen personally represents the nation. Defining Hun Sen as a man possessing merit, the narrative testifies to the importance of moral claims in contemporary Cambodian politics. In its different forms of expression, his reincarnation as Sdech Kân powerfully delivers the message that Prime Minister Hun Sen is personally the architect of post-conflict national reconciliation, peacebuilding, and democracy in Cambodia, and that these achievements are founded, in turn, on his curbing of royal power.

Royalist Nationalism – Between Embodiment and Doctrine

How do Second Kingdom royalists imagine the nation and how do they envisage their own relationship to it?³⁰⁰ The monarchy and ideas of representation to guide social organisation evolved intertwined in Cambodia. Historical Cambodian conceptualisations of political representation developed around the monarchy, positing a direct link between the kingdom and the monarchy. Theories of kingship presumed the unity of the physical, mortal body of the king, and his mystical body, the 'body politic'. When the 'body politic' started to be imagined as the nation, it was the nation that the king was thought to embody. Such ideas were very much alive when, in 1993, a constitutional monarchy was reinstated after more than two decades as a republic, and former king Norodom Sihanouk again ascended the throne. Royalist party FUNCINPEC gained an electoral victory the same year, widely attributed to the popularity of Sihanouk, and went on to form a coalition government with the CPP. Whilst marking the end of a two decade long struggle to reinstate the monarchy, this did not signal that the role of the monarchy, intimately bound up with questions of national representation, had been permanently settled. Rather, it marked the beginning of a contestation of the mandate of the modern Khmer monarchy, and of the role and mission of political royalism. The challenge for royalists in the KOC was to work out and define a way for royalism, as a party political force, to represent the nation. In other words, their task was to transfer regal legitimacy to the party political vehicle, FUNCINPEC, which would compete in elections.

The main item on FUNCINPEC's political agenda, the reinstatement of the monarchy, was achieved when Sihanouk ascended the throne on 14 June 1993. Together with the First Kingdom national anthem *Nokor Reach* ('Royal Kingdom')

³⁰⁰ On 15 October 2012, King-Father Norodom Sihanouk passed away in Beijing, China. This chapter was prepared before the passing of the King-Father, and there has not been sufficient time to amend it to take the King-Father's passing into account. This chapter, however, in reflecting on the evolving dynamics of the Second Kingdom, examines from different angles the difficulty of transferring legitimacy associated with Norodom Sihanouk to other royalist actors and the FUNCINPEC party. As such, it offers an in-depth account of the unmatched significance of Norodom Sihanouk, the relevance of which has only been heightened by his parting. It thus offers a backdrop to the formidable challenges now confronting royalist actors.

and national flag, both of which had been replaced with the 1970 abolishment of the monarchy, the national motto, 'nation, religion, king' (*cheat, sasana, mohaksatr*), was restored that same year. According to You Hockry, newly appointed FUNCINPEC Co-Minister of Interior at the time, Hun Sen suggested that the word 'happiness' (*sopheak mongkol*) be added to the motto, to add considerations of welfare and development, but he later gave in to objections from the royalist side.³⁰¹ The importance that royalists accorded to the formulaic purity of the motto was derived from their objective to establish the historical continuity of the monarchy, as eternally bound up with the trajectory of the nation. Echoing how in the immediate post-colonial period Sihanouk portrayed monarchical institutions to bridge pre- and post-colonial Cambodia (and portrayed the colonial era to be an 'inauthentic abyss'), royalists in the Second Kingdom, in many ways, dismissed the period beginning with the institution of a republic in 1970 as an aberration.³⁰² The coup d'état of 1970 had put the very existence of the nation in peril, and the return of the royals in 1993 promised nothing less than its restoration.³⁰³ To promote this idea, Second Kingdom royalists sought to naturalise the 'king, nation, religion' trinity as an unchanging foundation of Cambodian social order, in a manner that would guarantee a political role for themselves.³⁰⁴ Yet this enterprise proved exacting, which reflected, as is traced out below, both the historically contested nature of its configuration and the variety of different meanings launched by contemporary royalists anchored in such historical ambiguities.

As the Second Kingdom progressed, political royalists were increasingly fragmented over the contents and mandate of political royalism and the corollary role of the constitutional monarchy. FUNCINPEC entered into successive coalition governments with the CPP. In government, FUNCINPEC notoriously engaged in rent-seeking behaviour that discredited the party in the eyes of the public and fractured it internally.³⁰⁵ 'Political royalism' became an increasingly meaningless notion. From

³⁰¹ Author's interview with You Hockry.

³⁰² On the immediate post-colonial period, see Edwards (2007): 9.

³⁰³ See, for example, Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 189.

³⁰⁴ FUNCINPEC party statutes pledge to 'try hard with all methods to protect the national motto "nation, religion, king"'. Cf. FUNCINPEC, 2005. *Statutes and Internal Regulations* (I. iv); and FUNCINPEC, 2006. *Statutes and Internal Regulations* (I. iv).

³⁰⁵ Cp. Roberts (2001): 126–30.

its victory in the 1993 elections, receiving 58 out of 120 seats, FUNCINPEC steadily decreased its share to hit rock bottom in the 2008 national elections, receiving merely 2 out of 123 seats. Parallel to this, the mandate of the monarchy was increasingly cemented as a 'strict form' of constitutional monarchy, to be contrasted with the larger mandate implied by ideas of the king as the embodiment of the nation.

Whilst the overall trajectory of political royalism went steadily downward, this chapter lays out how a multi-faceted and rich struggle to imbue royalist politics with meaning took place. Political royalists (FUNCINPEC and sister parties), I argue, made multiple, elaborate bids to represent the nation in the post-PPA era. They alluded to historical ideas of embodiment in a contemporary reinvention of incarnate politics. They struggled to develop a doctrinal identity to vest their claims in the language of ideology. They advanced theorisations of how democracy in the Second Kingdom necessarily remained tied to the monarchy. They thus advanced a rich array of bids to legitimacy, many of which hitherto unexamined, each attempting to establish a unique link between the nation and political royalists.³⁰⁶

These negotiations within the royalist camp are central to larger contemporary renegotiations of the categories making up the Cambodian political landscape. Since historical ideas of political representation developed around the monarchy, contemporary debates within the royalist camp about the nature of representation, entailing ideas of embodiment versus a doctrinal identity and hereditary versus elected leadership, have brought the renegotiation of these questions to a head. Examining these negotiations is also crucial for reassessing political imaginings and debates in the royalist political parties. In a 2010 note by former FUNCINPEC leader Ranariddh on the topic, 'The contributions of the Royalist Party FUNCINPEC led by

³⁰⁶ The following chapter lays out how royalists sought to build a separate identity, and made their claims to legitimacy, from within the parameters of a separate, royalist identity. I thus stress the importance of the negotiation of a separate royalist identity, in contradistinction to Hughes (2001): 311–12, who argues that, for FUNCINPEC as well as the SRP, whilst the primary identity internationally is that of democratic opposition, the primary identity domestically is that of nationalist resistance. Whilst this chapter addresses the partial, yet never total, overlap of FUNCINPEC and SRP party identity through evolving resistance identities, it situates this overlap in relation to parallel constructions of a separate royalist identity among FUNCINPEC party actors, who all, first and foremost, portrayed themselves to the electorate as *royalist*.

HRH Prince Norodom Ranariddh', Ranariddh typically summed up the achievements of FUNCINPEC party under his leadership (1993–2006) as the return of two fundamental principles: liberal and pluralist democracy, and the restoration of the constitutional monarchy.³⁰⁷ Yet, as is outlined below, the reinvention of historical ideas of royal legitimacy, such as embodiment, impacted on the meaning of both of these cornerstones of FUNCINPEC's legitimising language. A fine-grained study of the reinvention of links to the nation is therefore crucial for analysis of broader developments in the trajectory of political royalism.

The difficulty of royalist bids to representation, this chapter outlines, followed from difficulties in transposing ideas of legitimacy associated with the historical monarchy to the contemporary party political arena. The royalists' contemporary renegotiation of these questions built on recent historical elaborations of such ideas. Royalist politics, thus, provided an arena for these historically inherited debates to play out in the contemporary setting. The contemporary enterprise of the transfer of legitimacy to the party political context resulted in many inconsistencies. Royalists vacillated between ideas of embodiment, doctrine and genealogy.

Many of these questions had previously been debated by Sihanouk, as head of the first (and last) post-independence royalist regime, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community, 1955–1970). The Sangkum Reastr Niyum supplanted Cambodia's brief constitutional monarchy, which had been introduced under the French protectorate in 1947. Contemporary bids to legitimacy were therefore articulated in important ways around a renegotiation of Sihanouk's ideas. FUNCINPEC and other royalist political parties looked back to Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, and the practices and beliefs expounded by Sihanouk during this time, as a direct model for Second Kingdom Cambodia. Retaining a rosy and nostalgic glow as Sihanouk's self-proclaimed 'Oasis of Peace' before the outbreak of civil war, the Sangkum also provided a unifying rallying point for royalists, many of whom had scattered in different directions thereafter. It was also a sideways look to the reinstated monarch, Sihanouk, who was enjoying widespread popularity and was

³⁰⁷ Sam, Nora. 2010. Note of the Day 6: The Contributions of the Royalist Party FUNCINPEC Led by HRH Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

widely imagined to incarnate the nation. Sihanouk was celebrated as the father of national reconciliation, having presided over the signing of the 1991 Paris Peace Accords; an association encouraged by Second Kingdom royalists. Yet, in turning to Sangkum as a model, Second Kingdom royalists were left to pick up from its inconsistencies and paradoxes. In the celebration of Sihanouk, his personal legitimacy was further strengthened; however this personal legitimacy contributed only marginally to the legitimacy of political royalists on the whole.

The many, often contradictory, royalist appeals to legitimacy can thus be understood to reflect a breaking point, as royalists were attempting to work out how the legitimacy of the monarchy could be transferred to a royalist political party within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. This contemporary context differed from that of the Sangkum era. The Sangkum was described as a political 'movement' rather than a political party - whilst nonetheless functioning as one in the 1955 elections. Moreover, in the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, the question of the relationship between kingship and a political form of royalism were partly suspended in an ambiguous 'monarchy without a king', with Sihanouk acting as Head of State as an abdicated monarch. As just resistance became the main political identity of the royalist faction in the 1970s and 1980s, these fundamental questions of the role of the Cambodian monarchy and political royalism were further deferred. The contemporary renegotiation thus followed from these historical ambiguities, conserved in the person of Sihanouk. In this, particular dilemmas surfaced, centred on a tension between ideas of embodiment and doctrine, and the deep-seated stand-off between larger questions of inherited versus non-inherited leadership, merit, and genealogy, that it entailed.

In the following, I proceed to explore Second Kingdom royalists' attempts to establish a meaningful link between political royalism and the nation through four interlinked tensions. Firstly, I look at a productive tension between unity and diversity, seen variously in the tension between the royal family as a unified group versus the diverse political tendencies it embraced, and between the royal family as a 'truly national', suprapolitical force versus the necessity for royal family members to take a particular political stand. Secondly, I explore a tension inherited from the Sangkum era, centred on the reconciliation of kingship with a political form of

royalism. Thirdly, turning to royalist conceptualisations of democracy, I examine a tension between contending visions of royalist democracy as a Sangkum-derived discourse and of royalist democracy founded in a 'democratic opposition' identity. Fourthly, I turn to explore successive attempts at reinventing a Sihanoukist identity from the perspective of a tension between doctrinal identity versus ideas of embodiment, which this came to centre on. All of these interconnected tensions engaged in crucial ways with the person and legacy of Sihanouk, both as the leader of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum and as contemporary monarch and King-Father. The failure to work out each of these tensions, it is argued, contributed to the overall failure to establish a link between the nation and political royalism. Firstly, as royalist nationalism came to be strongly associated with national unity under Sihanouk, the historical and contemporary presence of diverse political tendencies within the royal family stood out uncomfortably, and, ultimately, crippled political royalism by placing national unity above partisan political action. Secondly, the failure to establish a clear mandate of political royalism meant that the very foundation of a party political form of royalism was missing. Thirdly, both contending democratic discourses became increasingly meaningless for asserting a political royalist identity. Fourthly, whilst ideas of embodiment were increasingly sidelined, attempts to turn the Sihanoukist legacy into a doctrine ultimately made it susceptible to hijacking by rival political parties. The combined effect was that the very foundation, form, and contents of political royalism as a force to represent the nation remained unaccounted for.

Royalism: Unity in Diversity?

The 1993 gathering of the great majority of royal family members in FUNCINPEC in many ways formed a *discontinuity* with the recent past, when members of the royal family had scattered over a diverse range of political tendencies. Second Kingdom royalists united from sharply contrasting political backgrounds. Whilst many had joined FUNCINPEC after its 1981 creation by Sihanouk, many had only at times (or more rarely not at all) sided with Sihanouk during the two preceding decades. Second Kingdom royalist politics can, in this sense, be understood as an enterprise of uniting a dispersed family from various political camps. Many who had not consistently sided

with Sihanouk after his 1970 ouster were given prominent roles post-1993, both in the Royal Palace and in party politics. This included royals who had actively supported the Khmer Republic, such as Sisowath Thomico, the present head of Sihanouk's cabinet, and Sisowath Sirirath, deputy President of FUNCINPEC (2006–). Many had been self-identified socialists of different types. In an apparent contradiction, Sisowath Thomico claimed to have joined the Khmer Republic out of Trotskyist convictions.³⁰⁸ Other senior figures had joined the Khmer Rouge revolutionaries, such as Sisowath Ayravady, the present head of King Sihanouk's cabinet.³⁰⁹ The two royal family members who had remained in Cambodia during the People's Republic of Kampuchea and both worked for the Heng Samrin regime, the late Sisowath Lola and her sister Sisowath Pong Neary Lolotte, were also integrated into new royalist politics. Sisowath Lola was instrumental in aiding the negotiations between Sihanouk and the PRK and later SOC governments leading up to the PPA, whilst Sisowath Lolotte was given an important ceremonial role in the Royal Palace and granted the honorific title 'Samdech' by Sihanouk.³¹⁰

This elasticity is arguably derived from a productive tension between unity and diversity characteristic of the royal family and, with them, royalist politics. The relationship between the part and the whole, particularity and universality, is central to conceptualisations of kingship worldwide.³¹¹ In historical Cambodian conceptualisations of the royal body as one in a series of substitute bodies, the king was 'at once a part for the whole and the whole in a part', meaning that the king was at once a part of the whole of the communal body, and, simultaneously, a whole in and of himself – or rather, Thompson writes, a potential whole.³¹² The king was,

³⁰⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010. Even Sihanouk, in his day, reportedly stated that he would have been a leftist if he was not a member of the royal family. See Osborne (1994): 145–46.

³⁰⁹ Sisowath Ayravady worked as a translator at the Democratic Kampuchea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with her husband, Ngo Pin, later a Secretary of State for FUNCINPEC. Sihanouk's son, Norodom Narindrapong, once in line to become king, remained a convinced Pol Potist until his death in 2003; he was, however, not integrated into royalist politics post-1993.

³¹⁰ Author's interview with Sisowath Pong Neary Lolotte.

³¹¹ In medieval Europe, the king's two bodies (the body natural and the body politic) were thought to depend on each other so that they formed 'one unit indivisible, each being fully contained in the other'. Kantorowicz (1957): 9, cited in Thompson (2004b): 92.

³¹² Thompson (2004b): 93.

ultimately, a merely potential whole, testifying to the contested nature of this ideal situation. In the contemporary context, as in the entire post-independence era, this friction between the part and the whole, now imagined as the nation, took expression in a tension between the royal family acting as a unified faction on the one hand, versus the diverse political tendencies it embraced on the other. This, in turn, emanated from a tension between the monarchy and the royal family as a truly national, suprapolitical force on the one hand, versus the need to take a particular political stand as royalists strived to become political actors within a multi-party framework (and to ensure that there would always be a royal family member on the winning side), on the other.³¹³

The way this tension played out can be understood as a major theme of Second Kingdom royalist politics. The imperative of royal involvement in the nation's shifting political fortunes had prompted family members to involve under different political banners during previous decades, when royalist side-taking was often messy and pragmatic. Royalist identity as a unifying force above partisan rivalries was now the chief reason why previous political affiliations were excused within the faction, enabling a regathering into one party. This was testified to in personal accounts of the motives both for leaving the side of royalists led by Sihanouk, and for later reconciliation. The Khmer Republic provides a case in point, as Sihanouk's cousin, Sisowath Sirik Matak, was instrumental in its establishment, and the 1970 coup has often been understood as a coup by the Sisowath branch against the Norodom branch of the royal family. Today, former supporters of the Khmer Republic, Sisowath Sirirath and Sisowath Thomico, both emphasise that the Khmer Republic was not 'Republican' *per se*, stressing instead its anti-Sihanoukist character based on the disapproval of Sihanouk's close ties with the North Vietnamese communists at the time.³¹⁴ The conflicting logics of the responsibilities of royal family members in this

³¹³ This tension has had to be negotiated by all Southeast Asian monarchies engaging in the making of nation states following the demise of absolute monarchies. For a discussion on the role of actors of royal blood engaging in complex alliances and side-taking in the making of postcolonial Laos, see Ivarsson & Goscha (2007); for an account of how the Thai monarchy has built its legitimacy on promoting a view of itself as suprapolitical, see Winichakul (2008).

³¹⁴ Having left Cambodia in 1958 to study in France, England, and Japan, Sisowath Sirirath was recruited to the Khmer Republic by his father, Sirik Matak. He states his main motivation to have been anti-communism. His cousin, Sisowath Thomico, on the other hand, returning

are noticeable in Sisowath Thomico's explanation: 'The people fighting against the Lon Nol-regime were Vietnamese. As a Cambodian, as a member of the Royal Family, I took the decision to stay and fight them. I think that the secret mission of every royal family member is to fight for the country.' This illustrates the perceived necessity for a royal family member to involve under any political banner. Further testifying to the perceived need that the royal family emerged on the winning side (precisely in order to safeguard the family's suprapolitical role), Sihanouk's cousin, Sirik Matak, was said to have taken sides with Lon Nol in order to protect the royal family, who mostly remained in Cambodia during the Republic.³¹⁵

Accounts of the reasoning behind the integration of the two sisters, Sisowath Lyla and Sisowath Lolotte, into the Heng Samrin regime offer a similar logic. The two sisters remained in Cambodia during Democratic Kampuchea and were the only royal survivors to remain after liberation. Lyla was recruited to work at the PRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and became Deputy of the United Front of the National Salvation of Kampuchea (UFNS) and Member of Parliament for Takeo.³¹⁶ Lolotte later explained her late sister's decision to work with the government in the following words: 'The government needed to assemble all the minorities, including the royal family. She represented the royal family in the *Communauté*. [...] It was the work that mattered to us. Socialism, or not socialism, it was the work, and remaining in the country.' This reasserts the royal necessity to remain in the nation, even as a marginalised part of it. Her words further highlight how, in the PRK nation, the royal

from studies in Paris, claims to have been a 'far-leftist' who disagreed with the Pol Potist analysis of Cambodian society along Maoist lines (in favour of a Trotskyist reading), and considered the Khmer Republic to be a necessary stage on the road to the final revolution. See author's interviews with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010, and Sisowath Sirirath, 13 May 2010.

³¹⁵ Most royal family members remained in Phnom Penh during the Khmer Republic, including Queen Kossamak. They lived rather freely until 1973, when a son-in-law of Sihanouk bombed the presidential palace, following which some royal family members were jailed and many were put under surveillance. Sylvia Sisowath, who remained in Cambodia until 1974, stated: 'Most of us [members of the royal family] stayed during the Khmer Republic. We had no reason to leave our country. The Republicans were not against the royal family.' See author's interview with Sylvia Sisowath.

³¹⁶ Sisowath Lolotte and Sisowath Lyla were reunited in Phnom Penh in September 1979, where they lived together until Lyla passed away in 1994. Lolotte was called by Lyla to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she briefly worked at the Political Department before changing to work in the Ministry's nursery.

family had been reduced to the status of a minority, a tiny fraction of the national community that could never aspire to representing its wholeness. This underlines just how far the monarchy had come from historical conceptualisations of its role, manifested precisely by the discrepancy between their particularity and the national whole.

The shared understanding of this tension arguably aided subsequent reconciliation. According to Samdech Lolotte, 'HM Sihanouk forgave everything to everyone. [...] When he came back, it was like there had been no problem happening at all.'³¹⁷ Sisowath Thomico and Sisowath Sirirath had already been reconciled with Sihanouk in 1979. Thomico explained to Sihanouk through Queen Monineath, his aunt, that he had just chosen 'a different path'; later that same year, he was appointed as their press attaché.³¹⁸ Meeting Sihanouk and Monineath in January 1979 in New York, Sisowath Sirirath accepted Sihanouk's invitation 'to unify all the Cambodian forces overseas'. Sisowath Sirirath was thus made Sihanouk's representative in Canada and the US, and became FUNCINPEC's ambassador to the UN in 1982.³¹⁹

After 1993, the royal emphasis on unity was paramount. Royal family members shared a perception that they needed to act as a unified faction in order to, in turn, serve as a unifying force for Cambodia. This need was only heightened by the discord of the preceding decades. Sisowath Sirirath captured a typical sentiment:

If you compare with all countries in the world, they only went through a transition between communism and capitalism. Cambodia is different – we went through five different regimes during 60 years. The royal family is a unifying force for Cambodia. Without Sihanouk and Sihanouk, Cambodia would not be a unified country.³²⁰

³¹⁷ According to Samdech Lolotte, during the PRK, Sihanouk even sent a representative to identify members of the royal family in the country; the representative found Lyla and Lolotte. Testifying to his unchanging concern, Sihanouk thereafter regularly sent money to Lolotte. See author's interview with Samdech Sisowath Lolotte.

³¹⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 28 May 2010.

³¹⁹ Author's interview with Sisowath Sirirath, 25 May 2010.

³²⁰ Author's interview with Sisowath Sirirath, 13 May 2010.

Royal family members gathered around Sihanouk's role in overseeing the peace process that concluded with the 1991 Paris Peace Accords (PPA). Royalists, together with other members of the political opposition, identify the signing of the PPA on 23 October 1991 between the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) government and the tripartite resistance coalition as the end date of civil war. Pointing to how Sihanouk presided over the signing of the PPA, the idea of Sihanouk as the father of national reconciliation constitutes a main claim to legitimacy for Second Kingdom royalists.³²¹ At the conclusion of the peace process, Sihanouk returned to Cambodia as Chairman of the Supreme National Council (SNC), a large coalition government. Ranariddh has stated that, thereby, in Sihanouk, the 'monarchic principle of a national community without any exclusion' was realised.³²² With Sihanouk's reinstatement as a constitutional monarch two years later, this suprapolitical role was tied to the reinstated constitutional monarchy.

Unity under Sihanouk was seen as a precondition for national unity and, as part of this, the royal family naturally had to come together around him. This neatly illustrates contemporary perceptions of part and whole – that gathering around Sihanouk would enable him to heal the nation. This also defined ideas of what royalist nationalism must mean. Royalist nationalism was defined by the irreplaceable role of royals in national reconciliation, associated with the suprapolitical role of Sihanouk. It is difficult to exaggerate how firmly the idea of royalist nationalism was thereby tied to the idea of unity and national reconciliation, and raised above partisan politics. This was manifest in Sisowath Ayravady's definition of 'nationalism':

³²¹ Whilst 23 October was originally a public holiday, the CPP later removed it. Hun Sen has increasingly downplayed the importance of the PPA, instead crediting his 'win-win policy' with having achieved national reconciliation. Cp. Hun, Sen, [n.d.], *Yithesaustra chnea chnea: 5 jomnatek rabas Samedch Nivokroathumtreay Hun Sen (The win-win strategy: 5 points of Samedch PM Hun Sen)*. In 2008, Hun Sen announced that celebrating the anniversary of 23 October was 'meaningless', and that the opposition would be free to do away with the 7 January celebration if it came into power. In the wake of Sihanouk's passing, the CPP-led government redesignated 23 October as a public holiday in October 2012. See Soy, Heng, 2009. 'Hun Sen: Celebrating the 1991 Paris Peace Accords is Meaningless.' January 12. <http://ki-media.blogspot.co.uk/2009/01/hun-sen-celebrating-1991-paris-peace.html> (October 27, 2012). *Cambodia Herald*. 2012. 'Government Redesignates October 23 as Public Holiday.' <http://khmerization.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/government-redesignates-october-23-as.html> (October 27, 2012).

³²² Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 155.

When I think about nationalism, I always look into the past, to what Cambodia as a monarchy has been going through. 1993 was an important date for the sake of nationalism. Sihanouk reunified all political parties or factions. [...] Royalist nationalism truly exists. For at least 70% of the people, nationalism is bound up with Sihanouk.³²³

In spite of the celebration of alleged unity, royal family members had little else but Sihanouk to unite around. At the most basic level, the common identity as members of the royal family was projected to hold them together under one political label as 'royalists'. As a consequence, 'royalism', *reach niyum*, was primarily defined as 'the political thought of different royal family members'.³²⁴ Yet, in itself, this emphasis on the incarnate perpetuated the same tension.

FUNCINPEC became a family affair, offering positions to royal family members eager to be involved, and placing less emphasis on previous political experience. Sisowath Phanuroth, returning to Cambodia in 1993 after 26 apolitical years in France, quickly moved on to become Vice Governor of Phnom Penh. He later explained his political involvement as 'the way to socialise and be part of the family was to be involved in FUNCINPEC. It was a natural way to go'.³²⁵ Sihanouk also expanded the royal family by granting royal titles to more distant relatives and in-laws.³²⁶

Since the brief introduction of party politics, royal family members had, however, encompassed diverse political strands. Indeed, it was three princes who, in 1946, founded the very first political parties in the kingdom. Prince Sisowath Yuthevong, founder of the Democratic Party (DP), Prince Norodom Narindeth, founder of the Liberal Party, and Prince Norodom Montana, founder of the Progressive Democrats, articulated early political programs in different directions from Sihanouk's later

³²³ Author's interview with Sisowath Ayravady.

³²⁴ Author's interviews with Sisowath Ayravady, Sisowath Phanuroth, Sisowath Panara Srinudh.

³²⁵ Author's interview with Sisowath Phanuroth.

³²⁶ For example, Eng Mary was made a Princess (*Preah Ang Mjas*) by Sihanouk in 1992; Sisowath Thomico was made Prince; and Sisowath Pongneary Lolotte was bestowed the honorific *Samdech*.

one.³²⁷ As is discussed further below, Yuthevong, particularly, is commemorated by royal family members as an early royal nationalist. This constitutes an alternative genealogy of royalist nationalism, tracing the origins of indigenous 'democratic' thought to Yuthevong rather than to Sihanouk.

This fluidity persisted post-1993, when senior royals joined rival political parties. Asked what Sihanouk thought about this, one of his nephews remarked: 'He had one son who was the leader of FUNCINPEC [Ranariddh], one son in CPP [Chakrapong], and then Narindrapong [another son] was supporting Pol Pot – what should he say? He accepted it.'³²⁸ Meanwhile, royal family members often remained closer to each other across the fault lines of political parties than was apparent. This can be understood partly as a conscious, enabling strategy, ensuring that royals would not be left out of the winning side. In turn, it was rooted in more profound incongruities in reducing the royal category to party political affiliation.

This state of affairs crippled political royalism and undermined royal claims to represent national unity that were so central to its bids for legitimacy; a dynamic which was intensified by Ranariddh's response. Whilst the themes of peace and national reconciliation are primarily associated with Sihanouk, Ranariddh has tried to recreate similar legitimacy for himself as the bringer of peace and national reconciliation. One example of this is how Ranariddh has justified his acceptance of the 1993 power-sharing formula in terms of emulating his father's example in prioritising peace and national unity. The power-sharing formula was a main factor enabling the CPP's continued hold on national politics and gradual marginalisation of FUNCINPEC. Ranariddh's explanation therefore justifies the singularly most important move in undermining political royalism. Ranariddh stresses that he agreed to the power-sharing formula at Sihanouk's request, in order to avert civil war following the threat of territorial secession by the movement led by his half-brother, Norodom Chakrapong.³²⁹ Whilst the exact dynamics of this course of events remains

³²⁷ Chandler (1991): 30.

³²⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 28 May 2010.

³²⁹ Cf. Sam, Nora. 2011. Note of the Day 23: The So-Called 'insanity?' of Samdech Krom Preah Norodom Ranariddh.

debated, Ranariddh's explanation seems largely accurate.³³⁰ The language employed by Ranariddh to outline his decision has, however, a particular resonance. For example, at a 2011 campaign speech for the Norodom Ranariddh Party (which Ranariddh headed following his 2006 ouster from FUNCINPEC), Ranariddh told the audience that it was because of the threatened secession that he agreed to share state power, lest Cambodian territory be split and civil war ensue. Sihanouk, he said, encouraged him to agree, 'to save Cambodian people's lives', and if he had not, all those present would be dead. For this reason, he stated, 'I sacrificed myself for the nation', and 'sacrificed the election result which made me the winner'.³³¹ In employing this language, Ranariddh draws on regal legitimacy as an actor above partisan political gain, taken to define royalist nationalism. The Prince regally sacrifices selfish political interest for the larger interests of the nation as a whole, following from how the royals are ultimately responsible for maintaining a suprapolitical conscience for national reconciliation. The consequences of this line of reasoning, however, differ greatly between the monarchy and political royalism. By defining royalist nationalism as opposed to supporting any partisan affiliation, this reasoning eclipses the political party form of royalism.

Embodied Politics: Constitutional Monarchy and Political Royalism

A second tension in royalist politics followed from royalists' failure to agree on the mandate of the reinstated constitutional monarchy, as well as on what role political royalism could and should play. Although such questions have been debated in many democratising contexts, in Cambodia, this debate followed the particular reconfiguration of the problem by Sihanouk's post-independence regime. To a great extent, it reflected a paradox created by Sihanouk's 1955 institution of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, which left questions of the mandate of the Khmer monarchy and Khmer political royalism unresolved and preserved in the very body of Sihanouk. The

³³⁰ It is clear that Chakrapong did publicly proclaim a breakaway zone in June 1993, shortly after the elections, and that Sihanouk favoured a fifty-fifty power-sharing solution, even before the threatened secession. See, for example, Roberts (2001): 109–13. Ranariddh is quiet, however, on the role played by the CPP in the threatened secession, alleged by some.

³³¹ Author's fieldnotes. NRP election campaign, 4 June 2011. Oudong village, Kompong Speu province.

unsettled question of how to reconcile kingship with a political form of royalism became a central paradox for royalists in the KOC. To resolve this, Ranariddh and other political royalists took recourse to historical ideas of embodiment. These were more successful in justifying Sihanouk's role, and, perhaps, that of the constitutional monarchy as a whole, but less so for justifying political royalism as a separate force. This suggests a failure to justify the very existence of political royalism, rooted in the particular historical handling of this problem by Sihanouk's post-independence regime.

Historical Khmer conceptualisations of kingship emphasise the inherently incarnate role of the king. The idea of embodiment, rather than the idea of elected leadership, can be understood as the faultline between Western liberal conceptualisations of legitimate leadership and historical Khmer ideas of kingship.³³² As noted above, the organic link between the moral behaviour of the king and the welfare of the kingdom was historically conceptualised as a structure that presumed the unity of the physical body of the king and his mystical body, the 'body politic'. In the Angkorean period, the king was associated with the divine, a link contained in the Brahmanic concept of the *devaraja*.³³³ With the spread of Theravada Buddhism, the righteous king was thought of as a *dhamma raja*, a king ruling in accordance with the Buddha's teachings.³³⁴ Harris writes that his benevolent power 'was no longer considered so much an expression of his divinity; rather, it was considered a register of how closely he adhered to the eternal laws of existence (*dhamma*), as discovered and enunciated

³³² Thompson (2008): 186–87.

³³³ Although *devaraja* later came to denote 'God-King' in popular usage, Angkorean inscriptions very rarely describe royals by this term. Instead, they identify the *devaraja* as a sacred, mobile object that the king would bring to his capital (Edwards (2007): 22; Harris (2005): 11–12; Kulke (1993): 355; Woodward (2001): 257–58; Kulke (1978); and Vickery (1998)). Saveros Pou (1998): 667 argues that kings became worshipped as gods *after* their death, which has been misunderstood as their having been considered God-Kings during their lifetime. Because of the important role of statuary in linking the king and the divine, the academic debate on the relationship between the king and divine has largely been carried out in the discipline of art history. Cp Coedès (1960). Thompson (2008): 185 suggests that 'A king was associated with a certain god and would be portrayed in that god's image, if not during his lifetime surely after his death. Like the father, the son both worshipped and was to be worshipped in the image of the supreme god. The contemporary notion, *dittep-khsatr* ('God-King'), was only introduced as part of the New Vocabulary (Jacob (1993): 159).

³³⁴ Harris (2005): 302.

in the teachings of the Buddha'.³³⁵ Khmer Buddhist cosmology posited Khmer royalty as having multiple substitute bodies through the merit, *dhamma*, they accumulated, including the kingdom and the entire universe. The king was regarded as a repository of merit symbiotically linking, through his person, the state and the cosmos.³³⁶

It was in the imaginations of French protectorate-era scholars seeking to define Cambodian political imaginations that the monarch was turned into an incarnation of the *nation*.³³⁷ In the 1930s, a few Western-educated individuals linked the Western concept of nationalism with indigenous notions of kingship and the Buddhist *sangha* to create a civic religion of loyalty to the nation. Following the Thai counterpart *Chat, Sasana, Phramahakasat*, which had been introduced in neighbouring Thailand by King Rama VI (r. 1910–25), the slogan 'nation, religion, king' (*cheat, sasana, mohaksat*) first appeared in Khmer usage.³³⁸ The Khmer historical precursors to these notions, *Sdech, sangha, srok*, had denoted slightly different meanings from their modern counterparts, and their relationship was not fixed in the implied equilibrium and equality of this formula. Yet when Sihanouk ascended the throne in 1941, the alleged unity between nation, religion, and king, since times immemorial, was celebrated.³³⁹ Contestation over the relationship between the three components of this trinity would nonetheless persistently colour Cambodian politics henceforth. Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum tried to settle conflict precisely by promising that it would assure that the motherland returned to its past glory by giving 'the trinity' its 'true sense'; this was an enterprise that, however, became ambiguous.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ Ibid.: 80.

³³⁶ Ibid.: 80; cp. Thompson (2004b): 91.

³³⁷ Edwards (2007): 13 quotes Étienne Aymonier, writing in 1896 that, 'The *Nation* has long been accustomed to the idea of not separating its own existence to that of the royal house. The monarch is the living incarnation, the august and supreme personification of *nationality*.'

³³⁸ Gyallay-Pap (2007): 72; Edwards (2007): 118, 169. On the creation of the three pillars in the Thai context, see Reynolds (1977): 274–82.

³³⁹ Cp. Gnoc Them's 1950 pamphlet, 'Nation, Religion, King', which describes the three words as 'very meaningful' in every country and the 'foundation of all other words'. Gnoc Them (1903–1974), schooled in Battambang and Thailand, had joined the Tripitaka Commission in the 1930s, defrocked in 1936, and became the editor of *Kampuja Surya* in 1938. On Gnoc Them, see Edwards (2007): 223, 308–9.

³⁴⁰ Cp. Norodom, Sihanouk. 198–. *Statuts de Sangkum* (Article 3).

A great part of the contemporary challenge for political royalists stems from ambiguities in Sihanouk's 1955 replacement of the first constitutional monarchy, instituted in 1947, by his Sangkum Reastr Niyum. Sihanouk abdicated the throne to make a comeback as a 'full-time politician' as Chairman of the Sangkum.³⁴¹ His father, Suramarit, ascended the throne, but upon Suramarit's death in 1960, no new monarch was appointed. Sihanouk's abdication was made out as a precondition for his political leadership role. Yet, although Sihanouk denied this, his political popularity could not be easily disentangled from his previous kingship, which he retained in all but title in the eyes of most citizens.³⁴² As Chairman of the Sangkum, Sihanouk certainly did benefit from and even encourage popular belief in himself as a God-King embodying the nation.³⁴³ Indeed, Sihanouk made a point of tracing the history of Cambodia in terms of the Cambodian monarchy, which he equated with the destiny of the Khmer people.³⁴⁴ The tension between Sihanouk's abdication as a precondition for political activity, at the same time as his legitimacy still rested on his previous kingship, can be understood as a constitutive paradox of Sangkum that left fundamental questions concerning the mandate of the Khmer monarchy unresolved and conserved in the very body of Sihanouk. Throughout the Sangkum, the regime would build its legitimacy on advancing the idea of supposed organic relations between Sihanouk and the people, a vision that would find doctrinal expression in Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism. All legitimacy was invested in Sihanouk, personally, although it was not clearly defined on what grounds.

³⁴¹ Chandler (1991): 78.

³⁴² A contemporary observer wrote that 'Sihanouk denies this, calling attention to the number of unemployed kings in the world. Sihanouk's royal blood may have smoothed the path to political success but it certainly did not ensure it, and Sihanouk today habitually behaves as if he were campaigning for a national election.' See Armstrong (1964): 20.

³⁴³ Chandler (1991): 78 cites a brochure put out by the Sangkum government: 'This abdication was justified by [Sihanouk's] fervent desire to serve better his people by whom *he is worshipped as a God*. In short, he wanted to give his people the necessary strength to fight favoritism and oppression ... and lead them back to the tradition of a glorious past.' This neatly illustrates the conflation between Sihanouk's abdicated and royal stature during Sangkum.

³⁴⁴ See, for example, Norodom, Sihanouk, 'La Monarchie Cambodgienne & La Croisade Royale pour L'indépendance', [undated, originally in *Réalités Cambodgiennes*, May 24-Sept 13, 1958].

Sihanouk, himself, has consistently emphasised how the Sangkum-era moves meant that power was invested in him personally. At the time, Sihanouk did not treat the monarchy as an eternal given, but rather as a temporal framework that might soon have outlived its days. He envisaged saving the nation as his own personal mission, whilst giving an oath never to resume the throne and pledging not to appoint a successor.³⁴⁵ Five decades later, in his memoirs, *Shadow over Angkor*, Sihanouk portrayed Sangkum as a necessary step towards fulfilling the political logic of the constitutional monarchy. Sangkum limited the king's involvement in political affairs, whilst transcending the constitutional monarchy to hail in a unique system of guided democracy.³⁴⁶ Sihanouk recognised that he had, 'in essence abolished the monarchy' with his abdication and portrayed the task to save the country as his personal mission, even outside the framework of the monarchy. In this sense, Sihanouk's personal importance transcended that of the monarchy as an institution.³⁴⁷

The assessments of historians of Sihanouk's motives for his abdication and hibernation of the throne add contextual nuance to these decisions. Sihanouk's abdication certainly 'opened up a new political game' allowing Sihanouk to emerge as a dedicated politician, shirking his royal, ceremonial duties. It is unclear, however, to what extent the move was premeditated and tactical, rather than a spontaneous strike of fortune.³⁴⁸ Sihanouk predicted that the arrival of communism in Cambodia

³⁴⁵ Sihanouk made this statement with the oath to never resume the throne: 'And this I have always said, too, the day when our Monarchy, by order of the popular will or international contingency, ceases to be a harmonious and useful framework, I would not hesitate to take the initiative myself in sacrificing it and orienting the nation toward other roads and assist it to accomplish in peace and without bloodshed the revolution of its choice.' Norodom, Sihanouk. *Réalités Cambodgiennes*, 3 August 1962: 9.

³⁴⁶ Sihanouk sums up the transition from absolute monarchy to Sangkum as follows: 'In the space of eight years, Cambodia had moved forward from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament and on to an original form of guided democracy via the National Congress of the Sangkum. The role of the monarch had been reduced – at my initiative – to a symbolic one. Power of decision was in the hands of the Prime Minister and his cabinet, reinforced by the direct participation of the people.' Norodom Sihanouk (2005): 59.

³⁴⁷ '[...] the time had not yet come for this. For the people, the monarchy and Buddhism equalled the nation. Thus, while fighting to retain the monarchy, I opposed choosing a new monarch. I knew in my own mind that in taking this stand I was, in effect, abolishing the monarchy in everything but the form. I had faced up to this with my own abdication. But the monarchy continued to be the greatest single unifying influence in the country, and a too sudden break would only benefit our enemies.' Norodom Sihanouk (2005): 61.

³⁴⁸ Chandler (1991): 78.

would ultimately dismantle the institution of the monarchy, and so his move was in preparation for this envisaged transition.³⁴⁹ On a more basic level, as the monarchy was now considered an illegitimate institution for political decision-making amongst the Cambodian political elite, Sihanouk's ambition was to transcend the multi-party elections they supported, and instead win acceptance for a national union government without political parties, where he could play a role.³⁵⁰ Once having abdicated, Sihanouk, who had sworn not to return to the throne himself, was cautious of someone more strong-willed than his father ascending the throne; this came to determine Sihanouk's decision to hibernate the throne upon his death.³⁵¹ The hibernation was therefore not so much a bid to avoid antagonism of different royal factions³⁵² as an outright attempt by Sihanouk to ensure that he would remain Cambodia's unchallenged leader. Sihanouk called a referendum for Chief of State, which Chandler refers to as a 'charade' (given the lack of voting secrecy), which resulted in Sihanouk's overwhelming victory.³⁵³ Upon being elected Cambodia's first non-monarchic Chief of State, Sihanouk assumed the constitutional powers of a monarch, whilst renouncing the monarch's ceremonial responsibilities. Whilst Queen Kossamak stayed in the palace as a symbol of the monarchy, Sihanouk reportedly paid less attention than previously to royal ceremony.³⁵⁴ Sihanouk organised elections for the National Assembly in 1962 and 1966, yet the powers of the Assembly were reduced to near insignificance; whilst biannual National Congresses were to ensure that decision-making was consensual under the direction of Sihanouk. The bases of regime legitimacy were thereby firmly invested in Sihanouk himself.

³⁴⁹ Norodom, Sihanouk, *Réalités Cambodgiennes*, 3 August 1962: 9.

³⁵⁰ On this last point, see Chandler (1991): 79.

³⁵¹ Were Ranariddh, his eldest son, to be appointed king then, as a minor, his powers would have been assumed by a regent. This was not unlikely to be Prince Monireth, an uncle of Sihanouk whom Sihanouk was wary of promoting, suspecting him of royal ambitions. Moreover, when reaching majority, Ranariddh could provide another counterpoint to Sihanouk. Sihanouk also opposed appointment of his mother, Kossamak, as queen in her own right, in all likelihood over similar caution of increasing her influence. Chandler (1991): 115–16.

³⁵² Cp. how, in Spain, the throne was similarly hibernated under Franco because Franco was wary of antagonising different royalist factions. Franco restored the monarchy in 1947, yet, not until 1969 was Juan Carlos appointed as designate monarch, and no king was appointed until after Franco's death in 1975. See Maddens & Vanden Berghe (2008): 82.

³⁵³ Chandler (1991): 116–17.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 117.

The Sangkum heritage left Second Kingdom royalists two main challenges. Firstly, they needed to reinstate the value of the reintroduced constitutional monarchy, which 23 years of hiatus had shown, with even more certainty than the hibernation of the throne, not to be an inalterable, timeless national institution. Secondly, they needed to give value to FUNCINPEC party as the vehicle of political royalism, in spite of how Sihanouk could not act to continue the conflation between the royal element and personal political prowess in political leadership.

Both these dilemmas necessitated a re-reading of Sihanouk's leadership role during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum. To reestablish the intrinsic link between themselves and the nation, royalists turned to historical ideas of embodiment. Sihanouk's leadership role during the Sangkum was derived from how he embodied the monarchy, and thereby the nation. After the introduction of a constitutional monarchy, his kingship had to be exercised outside its traditional, absolutist framework. The Sangkum arrangement provided this mechanism, allowing Sihanouk to act out his *royal role* outside the institution of the monarchy. Denying that Sangkum entailed either the abolition in disguise of the monarchy or, tellingly, its 'disembodiment', Ranariddh writes:

[...] one measure needs further examination: the hibernation of the Throne (1960). Hypocritically, some have wanted to see a kind of abolition in disguise of the monarchy at the initiative of the ex-King himself. Others, in the field of political science, have analysed it as an imprudence which disembodied [*désincarnait*] the monarchical institution and got the popular masses used to a power without King. To this it is easy to reply that Prince Sihanouk did not ever conceive of the institution of Head of State as an instrument of destruction of the monarchy; it was on the contrary about a skillful construction destined to assure its survival avoiding blockages and strife which would have resulted from the appointment of a new monarch. In terms of the effects on popular opinion, of a 'monarchy without King', to confirm it one would need to measure the aptitude of the peasant masses to grasp the juridical subtleties and the constitutional distinction between a monarch and a Head of State – old monarch-titular of all royal prerogatives. Especially since it must also be considered the extreme personalisation of power – royal or as Head of state it matters little – that Sihanouk realised.

Finally, it should be added that that abdication and return to power after a phase of retreat [*retrait*] is one of the constants of Khmer history. The reform of 1960 institutionalised in all respects a traditional mechanism.³⁵⁵

What we see in this quote is the self-conscious styling of the monarchy according to historical ideas of embodiment. Ranariddh outlines an exceptional role given to Sihanouk by virtue of his *royal status*, which allows him even to abdicate and later return. Indeed, the king's periodical absences and much anticipated returns are a distinguishing trait of the Khmer monarchy.³⁵⁶ As Thompson writes, Sihanouk's 1955 abdication, in keeping with this historical tradition, was predicated on the idea of the king's multiple bodies. In Thompson's reading, the abdication protected kingship which is not elected and never can be (as the substitution of bodies does not follow changing public opinion) from the encounter with democracy; this principle allowed Sihanouk to be elected only after his abdication.³⁵⁷ In Ranariddh's reading, the abdication allowed Sihanouk to maintain kingship, in a way that transcended the limits of the institutional form of the monarchy. Sihanouk's faithfulness to his ancestral past averted the 'fetishism of monarchism as a form of government'. His abdication marked, 'conforming to historical tradition', that 'the royal function could not be reduced, by its titular, to advantages of prestige or interest. [...] During the Resistance, as in all his notes and directives, the Prince-King has taken it as a rule not to reason but on the *functional* necessity of a chief of state, king or elected president, little does it matter'.³⁵⁸ In this way, Ranariddh attempts to reconcile all of Sihanouk's various capacities after his abdication, with Sihanouk inhabiting multiple substitute bodies. Sihanouk incarnated kingship in each of these capacities – including as an elected leader.

Contemporary royalists, in fact, needed to show how the substitution of bodies – a characteristic that cannot be suspended and reassumed – was consistently maintained by Sihanouk, who in 1993 again ascended the throne. Sihanouk, as the reinstated constitutional monarch, was represented as the incarnation of the nation. Ranariddh

³⁵⁵ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 135.

³⁵⁶ Thompson (2004b): 109–11; see also Thompson (2008): 180–81.

³⁵⁷ Thompson (2004b): 109.

³⁵⁸ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 160.

speaks of the monarchy as being constituted by man and action, inseparable from each other, emphasising its embodied quality.³⁵⁹ Even the 1993 constitution, Ranariddh argues, did not exclude such organic relations between the king and the people.³⁶⁰ The re-embodiment of 'man and action' was necessarily tied to Sihanouk:

The constitution of 1993 is above all the restoration of the legitimacy of Norodom Sihanouk. But it does not realise the effective return to power of the prince, it only assures the recognition of his work and the restitution of *a symbol where the man and action are inseparable, the monarchy*. [...] History teaches us that restorations are generally a compromise between the past and the integration of revolutionary steps. [...] In certain respects, this analysis, devoid of illusions, holds true for Cambodia. In others not: we need to take note that authority was restored not only as an abstract principle, but *on a personal basis in Sihanouk as an uninterrupted incarnation of the national struggle and fight against oppression*.³⁶¹ (Italics author's own.)

These ideas of embodiment determined the nature of the newly instated constitutional monarchy. Ranariddh traces ideas of embodiment to the concept of the God-King, *devaraja*. For Ranariddh, Sihanouk's legitimacy rested in age-old beliefs in the Cambodian king as a God-King:

Cambodia, traditionally, is a Kingdom. The people of Cambodia are very attached to the royalist system. *But for them, it is the Royal Family*. The traditional one, the original one, is the concept of God-King. It is not, you cannot compare it, to the Parliamentary or Constitutional Monarchy of the United Kingdom for instance. I admire very much the English people, they adore the royal family. But for Cambodia, the original idea is the God-King. Even my father, he is very liberal. But, he is seen as a God-King. [...] It is very deeply anchored into the Cambodian mentalities. [...] My father stepped down and he formed his own party: the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. But, the mentality of Cambodians: God-King since thousands of years.³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Ibid.: 263.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.: 279.

³⁶¹ Ibid.: 263–64.

³⁶² Author's interview with Norodom Ranariddh.

As a God-King, Sihanouk's role transcended that of a strictly constitutional monarch along western European lines. Ranariddh considers the phrase that 'the King reigns but does not govern' in the 1993 constitution, to be 'adapted to the socio-political realities of the European parliamentary monarchies'. This formula, he states, does not correspond to the Cambodian popular mentality, and it is therefore necessary to adapt it to the Cambodian environment.³⁶³ Whilst not explicitly spelling out how, he charges that its danger is that the rural masses, finding that the king is no longer their natural protector and dispenser of benefits, instead turn to political parties tying them in bonds of dependence.³⁶⁴ The idea of embodiment informing ideas of kingship thereby lies behind Sangkum-derived conceptions of democracy advanced by FUNCINPEC under Ranariddh, which are discussed in detail below.

The idea of embodiment was also advanced to support political royalism. The incarnate nature of the monarchy was projected to bestow legitimacy on all royal family members, who, to some degree, shared in the ability to incarnate the monarchy and thereby stand in for the nation. This is seen in Ranariddh's above quote, in which he argues that Cambodian popular attachment is to royal family members rather than the monarchy as an institution. Ranariddh has repeatedly phrased his political role in the language of embodiment, whilst precisely what he claims to embody reflects the shifting larger political context. The notion of embodiment thereby ties together diverse claims to legitimacy, including ideas of democracy and resistance. This is clearly manifest in Ranariddh's 1997 account of his sources of legitimacy. Under the headline 'The Bottom of the Problem: Cambodian Legitimacy', he asks: 'In Cambodian political life, who *incarnates* what in 1997?' (Italics author's own). Ranariddh then lists his multiple sources of legitimacy:

- Legitimacy of traditional essence: in a country without points of reference, searching for its roots, he incarnates, in the shadow of the king, monarchical values forged by Buddhist tolerance and concerns of the common good.

³⁶³ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 289. Cp. 1993. Constitution of Cambodia (Article 7).

³⁶⁴ Ranariddh also notes that the formula does not preclude royal intervention in the event of a grave crisis.

- Legitimacy of national order: without any ties of dependence, even to the country that received him in exile. He owes neither his past, nor his present power to them.
- Legitimacy of resistance
- Liberal and Western academic legitimacy, open to everyone's comprehension, respectful of the freedom of expression of all
- Above all, democratic legitimacy. It was the Khmer people who in 1992 gave him the mandate – as a representative of Sihanouk, who never withdrew his confidence in him; but also as an autonomous person!
- National legitimacy³⁶⁵

Whilst historical ideas of embodiment singled out the king based on merit rather than genealogy or elections, the Cambodian monarchy has evolved to incorporate elective elements framed by genealogical restraints. To justify a role for themselves, Second Kingdom royals stressed genealogical lines. Embodiment needed to be thought of as a hereditary quality, equally for the Crown and for political royalism. Whilst lauding the Crown's elective nature, Ranariddh has also argued against an overemphasis on it, charging that the principle of heredity is at the root of the monarchy.³⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Ranariddh's royal descent was used to legitimate his leadership of FUNCINPEC, suggesting that the ability to incarnate the nation particularly applied to him, as Sihanouk's oldest son.³⁶⁷ Ranariddh has occasionally made reference to himself as a God-King, and FUNCINPEC under his leadership has portrayed itself as a vehicle to achieve a 'union of people and prince', closely mimicking the Sangkum.³⁶⁸

The effectiveness of these strategies has been mixed. Ideas of embodiment have continued to bestow legitimacy on Sihanouk.³⁶⁹ To what extent Sihanouk's imagined incarnation of the monarchy has carried over to the office of the constitutional monarchy is unclear; indeed, the failure of Sihanouk's 2004 appointment as King to

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 177–78.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 268, 280, 281.

³⁶⁷ Hughes (2001c): 308.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Cp. Kent (2008).

stir much social or political commotion suggests that the significance of the king is declining.³⁷⁰ Ranariddh's repeated claims of national embodiment, meanwhile, have failed to garner support. This is unsurprising, given how Sihanouk has continued to play a central role in Cambodia as a constitutional monarch, and also as the much-revered King-Father after his second abdication in 2004. As Ranariddh derives his royal claims from Sihanouk, he ends up second to a man who has often contradicted him in public, sometimes publicly supporting Hun Sen rather than his son. This, in turn, stems from a more general crisis of reconciling kingship with a political form of royalism following the personalisation of power to Sihanouk under Sangkum. By advancing ideas of embodiment, political royalists hoped to reinstate legitimacy to Sihanouk as well as themselves. Yet, in perpetuating the idea of Sihanouk incarnating the monarchy, they have yet to convincingly justify the existence of a political royalist faction.

Royalist Conceptualisations of Democracy

FUNCINPEC and the SRP have come together under a democratic banner at crucial points of time, contesting the fundamental 'rules of the game', such as elections. A shared democratic opposition identity has, at these times, been the basis of claims to represent the nation. Parallel to this, royalists routinely draw on understandings of democracy that differ from both Western liberal democratic understandings and those of the self-identified democratic opposition. Hughes argues that the SRP and FUNCINPEC share a 'democratic opposition' identity, opposing the legitimacy of the CPP on the grounds that it views the CPP as authoritarian, and claims that, beside this core identity, FUNCINPEC has as its second core identity 'royalism' and its appeals to the Sangkum legacy.³⁷¹ Yet these two identities did not simply coexist but, instead, entail enormous tension in terms of their visions of how to organise society, which are readily visible in the contrasting democratic imaginings explored below. Both of these sets of democratic conceptualisations, it is argued, were imagined by different FUNCINPEC actors to be 'royalist', and integrated into their definitions of 'royalism'. Rather than mutually exclusive identities, they can be understood as two

³⁷⁰ Hughes (2009): 50.

³⁷¹ Hughes (2001c): 307.

poles on a continuum, so that the same actor could refer to both at different points of time.

Below, a discourse is traced that, framing itself as distinctly royalist, made reference to Sangkum-derived concepts of democracy. It offered unique conceptualisations of democracy in the Cambodian context, which ran directly contrary to the liberal democratic conceptions that Ranariddh has occasionally claimed as the basis for FUNCINPEC identity. Yet these concepts were increasingly used to justify cooperation with the CPP, and have become increasingly meaningless for asserting a political royalist identity. This discourse was closely associated with Ranariddh, who, as leader of FUNCINPEC 1993–2006, to a large extent defined party political royalism.

Following this discourse, I trace a democratic opposition identity. This entails reference to an anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese resistance identity, as suggested by Hughes, but also reference to liberal democratic imaginings of relations of accountability between the elected leadership and the electorate, coupled with the support of a strictly constitutional monarchy. It was primarily associated with a separate group of FUNCINPEC actors who advocated closer cooperation with the SRP. Yet it is argued that their vision of royalist democracy ultimately also lost meaning as an articulation of political royalism, due primarily to Ranariddh's outmanoeuvring of these elements and policies to the opposite effect. Moreover, when Ranariddh was eventually sidelined, this resistance identity was claimed by pro-CPP elements and royal family members associated with this second stance were prompted to join Ranariddh, who they had no further faith in, in order to defend the involvement of royals in politics.

Royalist Democracy as a Sangkum-Derived Discourse

Liberal democracy is characterised by how the 'sovereignty of the nation is assumed to be distributed evenly among the citizens'. This contrasts with Cambodian models

of kingship, which posit an organic relation between the people and the king.³⁷² As noted above, Ranariddh argues that the 1993 constitution does not exclude organic relations between the king and the people.³⁷³ A continued allegiance to such beliefs has continuously coloured interpretations of democracy in KOC royalist politics. Ranariddh's main claim to democratic legitimacy has been electoral legitimacy – seemingly in line with liberal democratic political imaginings. As the leader of FUNCINPEC, Ranariddh has repeatedly claimed democratic legitimacy by virtue of FUNCINPEC's victory in the first national elections in 1993.³⁷⁴ Yet, rather than referring his democratic credentials to FUNCINPEC having a particularly 'democratic' policy agenda that would ensure the equal distribution of sovereignty among citizens, Ranariddh has typically alluded to how he embodies the aspirations of the national community, in line with historical conceptualisations of the king's representation of the people. The 1993 victory has been extended to prove that Ranariddh personally enjoys popular support and that, as a consequence, any idea he launches is inherently democratic. This overlay is widely made among royalists. Democratic ideas are typically seen as intrinsically linked to royalism, which is proven by how the royal party is believed to be supported by the people if there are free and fair elections.³⁷⁵ This mirrors similar beliefs by the self-identified democrats, who similarly judge the will of the people to be obscured by various CPP strategies and, therefore, not adequately represented in elections subsequent to 1993. Yet royalists differ in how their claims to popular support are situated in larger ideas of kingship and political royalism as representation through organic relations.

³⁷² Thompson (2008): 186–87.

³⁷³ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 279 argues that the king's status is constitutionally ambiguous, as the 1993 Constitution of Cambodia does not specify whether the king is representative of the people, co-sovereign with the people, or an autonomous authority.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 178.

³⁷⁵ This logic is also evident in the following quote by Ranariddh, under his pen name Sam Nora, in explaining why FUNCINPEC, after his ouster from the party leadership, was clearly not a Sihanoukist party: 'In that sense, we do not believe that the "neo-FUNCINPEC" under the current leadership, can be considered anymore as a Sihanoukist political party. The voters of the 2008 general elections did not make any mistake. In effect, how a party which pretends to be Sihanoukist could get only two seats in the current National Assembly?' See Sam, Nora. 2010. *Note of the Day 5: Is the 'Neo-FUNCINPEC Party' a Sihanoukist Party?*. The premise is that, since Sihanouk embodies the aspirations of the people, a failure to attract voters primarily indicates a failure to represent Sihanouk.

In his book, *Droit Public Cambodgien* ('Cambodian Public Law'), Ranariddh elaborates on the meaning of democracy.³⁷⁶ The book offers Ranariddh's analysis of the Cambodian state and political and judicial institutions, from Angkorean times up until the contemporary period, discussed with reference to notions of the nation, state, sovereignty, democracy, and legitimacy. In the book, Ranariddh asks the central question: In the Cambodian context, is democracy compatible with the monarchy?³⁷⁷ His response is scholarly and starts by noting how democracy has become a worldwide myth of modernity with widespread mobilisational force. He identifies a general world trend whereby, after power was initially personalised, authority was conferred on the absolute, theocratic monarchy. In a second stage, power and sovereignty were transferred to the people, which marked the transition to a democratic system. This gradually erased the idea of sovereignty by hereditary means. This is not to say, however, that the abolition of the monarchic form of state necessarily must follow from this final stage. Instead, Ranariddh charges that, within a democratic framework, the monarchy retains value as a national symbol, the 'more irreplaceable the more fragile the country is'. For this, he takes the British and the Thai monarchies as examples, underscoring how the British monarchy has come to serve as an archetype for modern liberal democracies.³⁷⁸ The preservation of the monarchy rests on tradition – the 'cumulative and inalterable consensus of generations'.³⁷⁹

In Cambodia, however, the monarchy and democracy are not only compatible, as in Britain and Thailand, but they are also linked by an unfailling tie. This stems from the originally elective nature of the Khmer Crown.³⁸⁰ Ranariddh quotes Thiounn Thioum, who, in this, saw the affirmation that popular sovereignty exists in perfect harmony

³⁷⁶ This book is an adaptation of Ranariddh's doctoral thesis. According to Ranariddh's preface, it was prepared for publication before the July 1997 de facto coup. In the first preface, authored in March 1997, he states that the thesis has exclusively didactic and pedagogical intentions: to prepare young Cambodians for higher education in law so that they may assume their responsibilities as citizens and as future administrators or cadres of the national private sector. It aimed to instill a number of indispensable notions and values of a modern state, which had been extinguished under the trauma that had shaken Cambodia after 1970 (i.e. the Khmer Republic).

³⁷⁷ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 61.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 61–62, 68.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: 64–65.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*: 65.

with the Cambodian monarchic institution.³⁸¹ Ranariddh writes that, whilst the development of an absolute monarchy later blurred the line, this tie at least remained in form – invigorated by the 1947 constitution – which put popular representatives in the body that elected the king, again reconfirmed by the 1993 constitution. This tie, Ranariddh states, explains the history of the Cambodian monarchy from 1950 to 1960, which saw the affirmation of a ‘modern conception of Khmer democracy’, as Sihanouk launched a new solution to the problem of elected versus inherited leadership.

For Ranariddh, the real question in this context concerns the *exercise* of power within a democratic system; that is, how to ensure that democracy, in terms of the people being the holders of sovereignty, is best realised. Contrasting ‘representative democracy’ with ‘direct democracy’, Ranariddh charges that under a system of representative democracy, such as that of France, power is taken from the popular masses and given to a dominant political class. The ‘nation’, as the holder of sovereignty, is then nothing but an abstraction, whilst real power comes to lie with its representatives. This system gives no place to the expression of the people’s will, apart from the delegation of power by the vote.³⁸² Ranariddh outlines how the monarch, in such a system, can step in to compensate for the democratic deficit caused by its shortcomings – arguably offering a model for contemporary Cambodia. The imperfection of representative democracy is manifest in the flaws of elections, its main instrument, as opposed to the referendum, the main instrument of the direct democracy. Contrasting the ‘traps’ of elections with the ‘virtues’ of the referendum, Ranariddh charges that ‘the election is not a magical process to appoint authentic representatives of the State’ but has scope only to the extent that it testifies to a ‘real consensus’ by the governed. Yet, he charges, a real and more widespread consensus can be marked by the attachment to the monarchic principle and ‘to the one that embodies it’, i.e. the King. Here arises the tie of compatibility between democracy and the monarchy. The monarch assumes the quality of a national symbol and guarantor of the common interest, rather than a ruler in the strict sense. In times of

³⁸¹ Thiounn (1952).

³⁸² Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 66.

crisis, the monarch's role may temporarily be even greater.³⁸³ The monarch thus steps in for the shortcomings of representative democracy in guaranteeing consensus and national unity.

Ranariddh's preferred system, however, is that of direct democracy.³⁸⁴ Ranariddh distrusts the political party as the basic unit of popular representation, which elections rest on, and has a positive eye to the gathering of different political tendencies under one and the same organisational structure. The crucial point to consider for the realisation of democracy is not a multi-party versus one-party system, Ranariddh charges, but the decision-making structures internal to a party. A grouping of various national trends in a single but flexible structure allowing ample space for internal freedom of expression, he deems, is not incompatible with democracy.³⁸⁵ He warns against the multiplication of political parties without a doctrine or with similar doctrines, judging that a few parties should be enough to 'incarnate' the major national tendencies. The multi-party system has never been the sign of a healthy and efficient democracy, he charges, but rather a factor of political manipulation. Indeed, the multiplication of political parties 'without doctrine' is dangerous for real democracy, since partisan secession 'in order to impose one's view' does not further increase the democratic spirit.³⁸⁶

This vision of direct democracy emulates Sihanouk's model of democracy during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum in important ways, transposing its ideas of an organic relationship between the ruler and the people to the contemporary context of a multi-party system within the framework of a constitutional monarchy. In Sangkum, Sihanouk reproduced ideas of an organic relationship between the leader and the people, as 'the King in person was posited as the embodiment, interpreter and guarantor of popular aspiration, guardian of harmony, and repository of Khmer culture and memory'.³⁸⁷ The Sangkum emphasised consensus and national unity.

³⁸³ Ibid.: 68.

³⁸⁴ Ranariddh engages with no political theorists in this discussion. Rousseau, famously associated with developing ideas of direct democracy, is instead later criticised for overlooking how democracy can lead to oppression. See *ibid.*: 70.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.: 71.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.: 71–72.

³⁸⁷ Hughes (2001c): 308.

According to its statutes, the Sangkum, rather than a political party, was the symbol of aspirations of the 'Petit Peuple', the 'true People of Cambodia'. The Sangkum was 'a National Gathering [...] defending the National Union [...] for the return to good traditions which created the grandeur of Cambodia in her glorious past. These traditions are the People's Community with its two natural protectors: Religion and the Throne'.³⁸⁸ Democracy was thus understood as organic unity, and the body politic made out to be 'a democratic, creative organism whose members would live together as one family in social and racial harmony'.³⁸⁹ The chief mechanism for this was the National Congress, a new version of direct democracy that replaced parliamentary democracy, where members of the Sangkum movement voted through a show of hands.³⁹⁰ The National Congress initiated policies, later turned into laws by the National Assembly, and was to mediate conflicts between the Assembly and the cabinet. First instituted in 1955, 28 National Congresses were held until 1970. These ideas were laid out in Sihanouk's 'Buddhist socialism', the self-professed regime identity.³⁹¹

Ranariddh writes that Cambodian-style democracy in the Sangkum was based on a 'coherent doctrinal basis' assuring the 'originality and efficacy' of what would soon be known everywhere as 'Cambodian democracy'. It consisted of three main, interrelated components: a social opening, a national union, and direct democracy.³⁹² Ranariddh's evaluation of Sangkum concludes that Sangkum-style democracy uniquely responded to the 'socio-cultural level of development' of Cambodia at the time, which did not correspond to the 'pre-established schemes' of Western democracy. The Sangkum, known as 'Cambodian-style democracy' (*la démocratie*

³⁸⁸ Norodom. 198-. *Statuts de Sangkum* (Article 4): 2-3.

³⁸⁹ Hughes (2006): 473.

³⁹⁰ Kershaw (2001): 51; and Chandler (1991): 84. See also Norodom. 198-. *Statuts de Sangkum* (Section 3).

³⁹¹ Over the late 1950s and 1960s, Sihanouk developed Buddhist socialism in a series of writings published in journals such as *Sangkum*, *Kambujia* and *Réalités Cambodgiennes*. See, for instance, 1955. *Sangkum* 1 (June); cp. Harris (2005): 147. Chandler (2000): 199 calls Buddhist socialism a 'ramshackle ideology', and Kershaw (2001): 55 refers to the 'blatant philosophical inconsistency of the doctrine'. Observers have also noted Sihanouk's confessed lack of knowledge of political theory, his pragmatism, and how he was influenced by other leaders at the time rather than studies on political thought. See Chandler (1991): 87; and Osborne (1994): 135.

³⁹² Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 133.

cambodgienne), was specific to Cambodia, yet nonetheless possessed 'global authenticity'.³⁹³ Ranariddh offers the assessment that:

The real problem, in fact, for *Sangkum* was not to caricature a Western-style democracy for which the democratic phase of our history which had just come to a close had demonstrated the dangers and ambiguities, but to integrate the peasant masses far removed from classical democratic values into a system listening to the people and to its actual needs. To avoid that the People would continue to be mystified, the *Sangkum* asserted itself fundamentally as an anti-Party regime, that is, anti-establishment. Hence its hostility to classic 'bourgeois' formations, instruments and beneficiaries of a moderate democracy, which were pushed to dissolve after 1956.³⁹⁴

Here, Ranariddh criticises Cambodia's short experience of parliamentary democracy before the *Sangkum*, and lauds its dissolution of the 'bourgeois formations' of rival political parties.³⁹⁵ This, he charges, was the democratic value of the *Sangkum*.

In advancing his own democratic vision, Ranariddh explicitly refers back to the particular articulation of democracy during the *Sangkum* *Reastr Niyum*.³⁹⁶ Expressing a similar reluctance to impose strict schemes of Western democracy, he can thus be understood to instead favour the specifically Cambodian-style democracy he has identified in the *Sangkum*. Ranariddh identifies a straight parallel between post-PPA national reconciliation and Sihanouk's achievement of independence.³⁹⁷ Ranariddh, therefore, finds *Sangkum*-era political institutions to provide a valid model for the KOC to duplicate outright. He supports this belief by referencing FUNCINPEC's 1993 electoral victory, which he considers an affirmation that the people support the 'political logic' of reintroducing the *Sangkum*-era constitution. This, however, has

³⁹³ Elsewhere, Ranariddh discusses the question of cultural specificity in more detail, in relation to the notion of 'general interest' (see *ibid.*: 40–41). Here, he likens the historical link between the Cambodian king and people to a social contract, concluding that this facilitates conceptions of 'general interest' (widespread in the modern world) in contemporary Cambodia.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*: 136.

³⁹⁵ Particularly, the Democratic Party was incorporated into the *Sangkum* from 1957.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: 67.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: 259.

been prevented by international constraints (as it would have reduced the UNTAC intervention to merely a restoration of Sihanouk's power) and domestic constraints (the tight grip on state structures by the preceding regime).³⁹⁸

Whilst accepting the 1993 constitution as a matter of fact, Ranariddh and other royalist actors have repeatedly referred back to the Sangkum-era articulation of democracy, partly in conflict with it, in advancing a royalist democratic vision. This can be summarised under the three notions of social opening, national union, and direct democracy; the three doctrinal bases Ranariddh identifies for Cambodian-style democracy under the Sangkum. Yet the contemporary context is radically different from that of Sangkum, when Sihanouk dominated the totality of the political scene. As a consequence, these references have become increasingly void of meaning, and have either been susceptible to takeover by the CPP, or ill-masked justifications of any attempt to get some limited share of power.

The Social Opening.

Ranariddh characterises 'the social opening' during the Sangkum era in the following terms: 'The social opening built on the integration of the royal tradition of aiding "le petit peuple" within a modernised framework of third-world socialism, but without participating in their [the people's] too often mystifying nature.'³⁹⁹ He then references Sihanouk's *Considérations sur le socialisme Khmer*, a document in which Sihanouk outlines an indigenous Khmer socialism with roots in the Angkorean monarchy.⁴⁰⁰ In this document, Sihanouk finds proof of the beginnings of this socialism in how the Angkorean kings realised great public works for the benefit of the peasants, who retained ownership of the land. He quotes historical King Jayavarman VII's famous dictum: 'He suffered from his subjects' illnesses more than his own: because it is the suffering of the public that is the suffering of kings, and not their own suffering.'⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁸ Ibid.: 266.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.: 133

⁴⁰⁰ Norodom, Sihanouk. 1961. Ministry of Information. *Considérations sur le socialisme Khmer*. This essay thus preceded Sihanouk's 1965 *Notre Socialisme Bouddhique*, which provided a further elaboration.

⁴⁰¹ Norodom Sihanouk (1961): 4-5.

Sihanouk then situates his nationalisation of industries and collectivisation of agriculture in this context, listing the wide range of communal projects this entailed.

The social opening in this sense of provision and protection, bestowed by a ruler who can provide healing by virtue of how he embodies the body politic, remained central to Ranariddh's vision of what democracy must mean in the KOC. The constitutional formula 'the king reigns but does not govern' was therefore even perilous.⁴⁰² 'Unaware of "constitutional nuances",' Ranariddh writes, 'the rural masses in particular will misunderstand that the King is no longer, as before, the dispenser of all benefits and the natural protector against the abuses of the officials.' This, he fears, will make them likely to turn away from a power unable to meet their expectations (i.e. the monarchy) to find help elsewhere; 'particularly in political parties which are infinitely more binding than the King in their demands of loyalty or dependence, so that democracy and freedom will suffer from this change'.⁴⁰³

With the king's abilities to provide circumscribed by the limits of constitutional monarchy, the social opening took expression in how FUNCINPEC under Ranariddh continuously engaged in development activities, framed as directly modeled on Sihanouk's activities in the past. Yet the overwhelming discrepancy in ability to provide between the CPP and FUNCINPEC to the latter's detriment made FUNCINPEC vulnerable to CPP criticism over their failure to actually provide.⁴⁰⁴ Caroline Hughes demonstrates the centrality of gift-giving practices as an 'invented tradition' for the CPP in contemporary Cambodia. Here, I would like to draw attention to two further dynamics, which qualify the negotiation of the symbolic dimensions of gift-giving in contemporary Cambodia and, in turn, have directly borne on the viability of 'royalist democracy'. Firstly, the social opening, as argued above, was not solely a historical legacy but, in theory and practice, an important part of the contemporary reinvention of royalist democracy. Secondly, whilst Hughes rightly acknowledges that Hun Sen drew on the legacy of Sihanouk in gift-giving, Hun Sen did not stop at this, but took these practices as his basis for explicitly arguing that the

⁴⁰² 1993. Constitution of Cambodia (Article 7).

⁴⁰³ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 289.

⁴⁰⁴ Hughes (2006): 476.

CPP was a continuation of Sangkum, outperforming Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC.

These claims evidently gained force by how ideas of provision continued to form an important part of democratic legitimacy for the contemporary royalist faction.

The CPP has purported to follow the line of the Sangkum ever since Sihanouk's 1991 return to Cambodia. Five days thereafter, Frings writes, a CPP statement declared that it professed 'domestic and foreign policies in line with the Sangkum Reas[tr] Niyum led by Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk'. A circular adopted by the CPP standing committee established that, 'Samdech has expressed great satisfaction with the current political line of our party and state, regarding it as the *continuation of the policy of the Sangkum Reas[tr] Niyum party* [sic] that he led before 1970'. The CPP was made out to be the 'Little Brother of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum Party*', a title said to have been bestowed by Sihanouk himself.⁴⁰⁵ Yet, as Frings notes, Sangkum Reastr Niyum's Buddhist socialism was not a Marxist socialist regime.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, the CPP under Hun Sen has challenged both (as argued in the preceding chapter) Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism and (as is argued later) its contemporary rearticulations by royalist actors. Rather, CPP discourse has developed during the course of the KOC to portray the party as rightful heir to the line of Sangkum Reastr Niyum, primarily in terms of development activities, claimed to be directly modelled on those of the Sangkum-era social opening. This is seen in the following statement by Hun Sen:

I am now setting aside my time to visit our people like what was done by HM the King in 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and CPP has always followed that model. I used to mention that we have a great university, that is HM the King and Samdech Preah Reach Akkeamhosei [Queen Monineath] who have always firmly associated themselves with our people and Buddhist parishioners through activities for development.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Frings (1995): 359–60.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid: 360.

⁴⁰⁷ Hun, Sen. 2004. 'Inaugurating a Buddhist Hall of Common in Srey Santhor.' *Cambodia New Vision* 72 (January).

In fact, Hun Sen has claimed to directly derive his notion of 'people's democracy' from the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, pointing to the shared prioritisation of efforts to 'rebuild' the country (i.e. development activities).⁴⁰⁸ Integral to this is an 'art of sharing' resources, part of which involves private donations by party officials to public projects. Hun Sen has portrayed this as the social and political line of the CPP and earlier KPRP ever since 1979, inherited from the Sangkum Reastr Niyum. This is accompanied by an emphasis that, were the CPP to lose elections, sharing would come to an end, as the people would no longer be able to request help from CPP leaders.⁴⁰⁹ This could be said to neatly fulfill Ranariddh's prophecy that support being provided by political parties will result in imposition of party demands for loyalty for provision. Yet, this was indeed also the case for FUNCINPEC, which reinforced the logic of provision as a precondition for political legitimacy. Together with FUNCINPEC's continued reliance on such practices without the necessary material resources, this weakened the royalists.

Apart from the FUNCINPEC party apparatus, royalist actors also relied on purportedly humanitarian organisations for carrying out the royal function of provision. There is an intimate association between the idea of healing and historical conceptions of kingship.⁴¹⁰ Ashley Thompson outlines how Jayavarman VII's maxim, 'The suffering of the people is the suffering of the king', quoted by Sihanouk, above,

⁴⁰⁸ 'There is no other option but to continue with people's democracy under the leadership of CPP – a concept that is similar to *Sangkum Reastr Niyum*. Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk led a crusade for independence from French colonialism and rebuilt the country under the time when there were serious threats of wars from countries around us. I am so proud and thankful that Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk and Samdech Preah Akka Mohesai always allowed their *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* to be mentioned as predecessor of the Royal Government's efforts in rebuilding the country.' Hun, Sen. 2007. 'Keynote Address at the Opening Ceremony of the Samdech Hun Sen's Tree Nursery Station at Tamao Mountain.' *Cambodia New Vision* 117 (October).

⁴⁰⁹ 'It is about the art of sharing which is a part of the CPP's policy in bringing about development to the country from 1979 to the present I think this has brought us to a clear political and social line. Sharing resources has been a tradition of CPP since 1979 and it was also done in the time of Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk's *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* or to be frank since when the earth exists because Cambodia also enjoys donation and assistance from the rich countries as well. [...] Judging from what they said as soon as CPP loses the elections there will be no more sharing and people could not request helps from leaders of CPP. This would help our people make political choice in the upcoming elections.' Hun, Sen. 2007. 'Inaugurating Junior High School Hun Sen – Srah Banteay.' *Cambodia New Vision* 110 (March).

⁴¹⁰ Thompson (2004b): 91.

is derived from a 'certain conjunction of the physical health of the people and the social health of the kingdom through the figure of the king'. She suggests that 'in Cambodia, attempts to heal the king, the community, or the individual subjects of the king inevitably have recourse to complex strategies of integration, embodiment, and substitution between these various co-implicated bodies.'⁴¹¹ The king, then, plays a crucial role in the healing of national community.

The Cambodian Red Cross (*Kakābat Krohom Kampuchea*; CRC), then known as the Khmer Red Cross Society (*Samokom Cheat Kakābat Krohom Khmer*), was originally founded in February 1955, shortly before the establishment of the Sangkum.⁴¹² Since its early beginning, the CRC received unique recognition from the government as its auxiliary.⁴¹³ It has since enjoyed a unique mandate as a quasi-governmental organisation, basing its work on the help of volunteers to distribute aid to victims of natural disasters, soldiers, orphans etc. Mirroring his larger role in peacemaking, Sihanouk led the reunification of the CRC between 1992 and 1994.⁴¹⁴ This integrated four different Red Cross groups operating in the respective occupied zones during the civil war from 1979 onwards, illustrating the politicisation of the organisation.⁴¹⁵ Ranariddh's wife, First Lady Princess Mary Eng, became President, re-establishing royal control over the institution after the hiatus brought by the 1970 Khmer Republic.⁴¹⁶

Envisaging her work for the Cambodian Red Cross as a particularly royal task, Princess Mary Eng would later describe the reunification of all warring factions that it entailed, and its provision of aid, as the very meaning of royalist nationalism in the

⁴¹¹ Ibid.: 93.

⁴¹² The organisation was renamed the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) in 1979.

⁴¹³ Men & Dickens (2005): 31.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.: 27.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.: 7.

⁴¹⁶ Presidents of the CRC: Samdech Preah Reach Kanitha Norodom Rasmī Sobhana (1955–67); Queen Norodom Monineath (1967–70); Chuop Samlot (1971–73); Phleech Phiroun (1974–75, 1979–1992); Princess Norodom Marie Ranariddh (1993/4–1997/8); and Bun Rany (1998–present). Honorary Presidents: Queen Kossamak (1961); Sihanouk assumed High Patronage of the Cambodian Red Cross (1962); and Her Majesty Queen Norodom Monineath (since 1994).

KOC.⁴¹⁷ Parallel to her work for the CRC, Mary Eng also headed her own organisation, Sobhana. Named after Princess Rasmi Sobhana, who had originally founded the CRC, it was established by Mary Eng in 1985 and its activities were expanded nationwide following the peace process.⁴¹⁸ These activities included training villagers on textiles and handicraft, sponsoring education for girls, and establishing a variety of health projects. These effectively carried out practices associated with the 'social opening' alongside FUNCINPEC party structures, engaging the wives of party functionaries in humanitarian work. Accompanied by the wives of FUNCINPEC ministers, secretaries of state, and undersecretaries of state, Mary Eng travelled to beneficiary villages where they educated village women on hygiene and sanitation, aided by medical practitioners, and handed out free medicine. Mary Eng estimates that approximately 200,000 people have benefited from Sobhana project activities since 1993. For Mary Eng, the activities of the organisation have followed a distinctly royal tradition of royals personally exploring and addressing the people's needs, which she aimed to transpose to the party political context. She explained it as: 'Most of the volunteers belong to FUNCINPEC; they are wives of the ministers, secretaries of state and undersecretaries of State. I want them to understand only that you have to love your country and especially the people because they need you. You have to understand and been yourself there, that is what I have done.'⁴¹⁹

The political and symbolic importance of such strategies of provision is highlighted by how, following the July 1997 de facto coup against Ranariddh, Bun Rany replaced Princess Mary Eng as President of the Red Cross in 1998. Since then, the Red Cross under Bun Rany has become increasingly publicly exalted.⁴²⁰ Sobhana, on the other hand, has drastically reduced its activities. The First Lady's caretaking abilities and wider association with healing intersects with the conceptual and historical role of royals on a number of levels. Paralleling the consolidation of power by Hun Sen and

⁴¹⁷ Author's interview with Eng Mary.

⁴¹⁸ The name Sobhana also reflected Eng Mary's appreciation for Rasmi Sobhana as a 'second mother-in-law' who had taken care of Ranariddh when he was young. See author's interview with Eng Mary.

⁴¹⁹ Author's interview with Eng Mary.

⁴²⁰ This can be contrasted with the CPP working groups, the backbone of CPP strategies of provision, which remained an open secret, in that they were mentioned in the news but with no public documentation available, and were directly associated with voter mobilisation at the local level.

his network, it has firmly integrated practices of gift-giving into personalised claims to embody nation-building in line with historical conceptualisations of kingship. The discourse adopted by the CPP on the CRC emphasises ancient Cambodian indigenous roots of mutual aid and solidarity, and credits the CRC with helping Cambodia find her way back to this tradition. In a speech, Hun Sen stated: 'The Cambodian Red Cross has helped Cambodia by enabling the Cambodian people to express, in an institutionalised way, our ancient culture of helping each other. This is a trait that is found in the core of our civilization, inherited from our forebears but one we have been unable to nurture in our dark recent history. The CRC has helped all of us re-awaken this important trait.'⁴²¹ This is strikingly similar to how, describing voluntary work together as one of the principal characteristics of Khmer socialism, Sihanouk wrote that, 'The ideals of mutual aid and solidarity between all social classes of the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* are the motors that drive the people to provide a voluntary effort to serve the Khmer community and nation.'⁴²²

Indeed, an important reason for the exaltation of Bun Rany's Presidency of the CRC is arguably its distinctly royal overtones of the ability to 'stand in for the suffering of the kingdom'. By offering medical relief to the citizenry, Bun Rany carries out a task with inherent royal overtones. If Hun Sen's autobiography is used 'as a metaphor for the resurgence of the nation after "the ashes of Democratic Kampuchea"',⁴²³ then the increasing focus on his wife carrying out caretaking functions completes the family metaphor.⁴²⁴ This division of labour is naturally aided by how Bun Rany worked as a nurse during the years of revolutionary struggle until withdrawing, in 1979, to raise a family; her experience as a nurse allows her to legitimately provide medical advice.⁴²⁵ The characteristics with which Bun Rany is described closely invoke the *srey krop leak*, or the Khmer ideal woman, a discourse with widespread legitimacy in

⁴²¹ Hun, Sen. 2005. Talk at the Third General Assembly of the Cambodian Red Cross. Chaktomuk Conference Hall, Phnom Penh. Quoted in Men & Dickens (2005): 5.

⁴²² Sihanouk (1961): 11.

⁴²³ Hughes (2006): 473–74.

⁴²⁴ The most comprehensive example of official narrativisation of Bun Rany's life to date is Huot (n.d.), *Red Rose of the Mekong*, which provides an account of Bun Rany's life from childhood to her activities as President of the CRC.

⁴²⁵ See, for example, the CRC-produced video, 'Medical Practitioner and Woman Understands Women', in which Bun Rany gives medical advice to women about to give birth.

contemporary society.⁴²⁶ Thereby, Bun Rany has become the perhaps foremost example of the 'feminization of moral order', a return to traditional social values in terms of gender, which Edwards identifies in contemporary Cambodia.⁴²⁷ Just as a traditional discourse ties the family's prosperity to female activities, Bun Rany's virtues are relevant to the prosperity of the entire nation.⁴²⁸ In CRC material, such as songs frequently broadcast on national television, Bun Rany is typically portrayed in a motherly role towards the nation, and referred to as a 'saving mother' (*neak mdae sangkroas*). This portrayal has significantly royal overtones, echoing the way that Queen-Mother Monineath was commonly referred to as *Samdech Mae* (Mylady Mother), and sometimes *Samdech Yeay* (Mylady Grandmother), just as the less frequent appeal of Hun Sen as *lok puk* mirrors King-Father Sihanouk's nickname, *Samdech Euv* (Monsignor Papa), and now *Samdech Ta* (Monsignor Grandfather).⁴²⁹ Indeed, underlining how important it is for the CRC (under Bun Rany) to be acknowledged as the very same CRC of the royal past, a Royal Decree (*kret*) of 6 May 2002 officially recognised the Cambodian Red Cross as the successor of the original Cambodian Red Cross, established in 1955.⁴³⁰

The CRC has produced a number of songs, which are frequently broadcast on the Bayon TV network.⁴³¹ These songs typically acknowledge the royal origin of the organisation, characterising Bun Rany's work as the continuation of the royal work

⁴²⁶ Cp. Ledgerwood (1996); Rocun (2004); and Lilja (2008): 70.

⁴²⁷ Edwards (2008): 228; and Jacobsen (2008): 4.

⁴²⁸ Ledgerwood (1996): 143. In Khmer Buddhist conceptualisations, a woman's virtue, in itself, is a sign of previous meritorious behaviour, and will bring safety, order, and prosperity to her family. In this sense, any woman acts as a substitute for the family, and the first lady, necessarily, for the nation.

⁴²⁹ Indeed, the CRC can be said to contain a wider 'familiarisation' of political power, integrating the wives of senior CPP leaders as well as business tycoons (*oknhas*) into its structures. The Central Committee of the Fifth Term of Office (2011–) thus includes as First Vice President, Annie Sok An, wife of the Minister of the Council of Ministers Sok An; Second Vice President, Choeng Sopheap, wife of *oknha* Lao Meng Khin; Nhem Sophanny, wife of National Assembly Vice President Nguon Nhel; Men Pheakdei, wife of late National Police Chief Hok Lundi; and four *oknhas*, namely Ly Yong Phat, Mong Rithy, Kith Meng, and Lim Chhiv Ho, among whom Kith Meng is National Chamber of Commerce President, and Ly Yong Phat and Mong Rithy are CPP senators. See 2011. *CRC Newsletter* 3: 45–47.

⁴³⁰ Cambodian Red Cross. 2010. '*Preah reach kret sdey pi kar totuol skoal kakabat krohom Kampuchea*' [Royal decree on the recognition of the Cambodian Red Cross].

⁴³¹ Bayon TV, one of the main TV channels in Cambodia, is owned by Hun Mana, daughter of Hun Sen and Bun Rany. Since 2009 until present, these songs have been broadcast on a daily basis.

handed down. Typically, they also employ royal language.⁴³² Several CRC songs paraphrase Jayavarman VII's famous dictum, suggesting a deliberate attempt to insert the first couple's patronage of it into the context of kingship and healing. One song declares that, 'Wherever there is a victim, there is *Lok Chumteav Bandit*,⁴³³ President of the CRC, descending to help. *Samdech Techo*⁴³⁴ and *Lok Chumteav Bandit* are powerful (*sakseth*) gods who save lives, they are like a father and mother. *The suffering of the people is the suffering of both of them*, distributing wealth to help the CRC provide help.'⁴³⁵ In this song, as in a number of other songs popularised by the CRC, Hun Sen and Bun Rany are described as nothing short of 'divinities' (*tevota*).⁴³⁶ This echoes how historical conceptualisations of the healing conflated royal and divine status by positing the king as a substitute body of the Buddha as a healer.⁴³⁷ The above song stretches the saving capacity of the first couple to tell the audience that the first couple are divinities, vested with magical power (*sakseth*) – a form of power associated with royalty.⁴³⁸

This illustrates not only the similarity of legitimisation between the CPP and the Sangkum, but also FUNCINPEC's failure to reinvent the royalist provision-based identity to its advantage. Provision was envisaged as a cornerstone of royalist democracy and remained the practical way for actors associated with FUNCINPEC to relate to the electorate. Both the loss of Presidency of the CRC and, more generally, that they were outmanoeuvred by the CPP as providers of benefits, can therefore be

⁴³² Royal language forms a particular register of Khmer, with its own distinct vocabulary reserved for royalty.

⁴³³ Bun Rany was awarded the title *Lok Chumteav Kittipritt Bandit* by the Royal Academy of Cambodia in 2010.

⁴³⁴ Epithet for Hun Sen.

⁴³⁵ *Samdech Techo aphirochum* ['The hero Samdech Techo']. This is later paraphrased: 'The people are easily victimized. *Lok Chumteav Bandit* pities and helps victims from her heart which wants to save the people. Because the suffering of the Khmer subjects is the suffering of both [Hun Sen and Bun Rany], they need to be saved.'

⁴³⁶ See, for example, the songs *Tisana monusathor krop chrong chroey* ['A complete humanitarian vision'], which states 'Husband and wife are living gods [*tevota ros*] who help victims ... they descend to help because of pitying their nephews and nieces [...] They will be our mother and father for a long time to come, their hearts will not leave their nephews and nieces.'; and *Bādam Lok Chumteav Bandit* ['The advice of Lok Chumteav Bandit'].

⁴³⁷ Thompson (2004b): 96.

⁴³⁸ Cp. how in the Lao and Thai contexts, the notion of *sakset* is similarly an important criterion for the contemporary cult of royals (Evans (1998): 30, 101–3).

understood to have caused a resulting 'democratic deficit' for the royalists.⁴³⁹ This also testifies to the importance of a material base for realising this vision of royalist democracy. Without such a base, royals have a less-than-royal stance; whereas conversely, political actors with the ability to provide can be thought to overtake some of the royal aura. This brings up questions of the overall liberty of royalists to pick-and-choose in their legitimising discourse. With provision deeply engrained in ideas of kingship, their ability to move away from such ideas was constricted. The above quandary was, in this sense, indicative of a larger problem of the viability of transposing royalism to the party political arena.

The National Union.

Ranariddh writes about the Sangkum-era national union that it was 'key to the system, part of the essence of the monarchic power as the protector of all. [...] It postulates that no political tendency, current of thought, or faction should be excluded from the national community or the political dialogue.'⁴⁴⁰ This notion is central to Ranariddh's political analysis of the KOC, and manifest in his distrust of a multi-party system and how he, instead, advocates the gathering of different political tendencies under one structure, as outlined above.⁴⁴¹

Ranariddh and other actors have repeatedly appealed to the idea of a national union to frame FUNCINPEC policies. Ranariddh has continuously appealed to the value of consensual politics in order to justify the sequence of coalition governments formed with the CPP in 1993, 1998, and 2004, claiming to act in conformity with the wishes of Sihanouk to solve political crises.⁴⁴² As a reinstated monarch, Sihanouk also repeatedly advocated some variant of a consensus-based national union, although under the guise of a multi-party political system. When the 2003 general elections resulted in the CPP failing to gain the two-thirds majority required to form a

⁴³⁹ Author's interview with Princess Eng Mary.

⁴⁴⁰ Ranariddh (1998): 133–34.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 71.

⁴⁴² As mentioned above, Ranariddh blames the 1993 coalition government on Chakrapong's threatened secession. Subsequent coalition governments are portrayed as pragmatic measures to solve political crisis in conformity with the wishes of Sihanouk. Cp. Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 23*.

government on its own, FUNCINPEC and the SRP formed the 'Alliance of Democrats', contesting the election results and each claiming they would refuse to join a coalition government if Hun Sen remained Prime Minister. King Sihanouk then proposed a tripartite coalition government between the CPP, FUNCINPEC and SRP, which resulted in a meeting on 5 November 2003 in which the three parties agreed to form a coalition government under Hun Sen as Prime Minister.⁴⁴³ A senior FUNCINPEC official explains it as follows:

There was a meeting between Sihanouk, Hun Sen, Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy. Sihanouk said 'Having an opposition is contrary to Cambodian culture. We should all join together to work towards reunification like during the Sangkum.' Then there was also a very small democratic opposition, but it was included in the Sangkum. Everyone agreed, also Hun Sen, Ranariddh and Sam Rainsy. It was even decided which portfolios would go to whom to set up a new government. But after Sam Rainsy left the meeting, he phoned Ranariddh to decline. [...] The opposition wants to stay in opposition!⁴⁴⁴

Although this exact course of events is not corroborated by written sources, the quote is significant because of how it clearly situates Sihanouk's encouragement of a tripartite coalition government in the context of the Sangkum idea of a national union.⁴⁴⁵ It explicitly sets out that a democratic opposition would be contrary to Cambodian culture. Here, democracy in the sense of a conflict of ideas is fraught with danger, and the possibility of democratic division (which Sangkum sought to counteract) is a real threat to contemporary politics. The significance of this account is further heightened by how it offers an alternative explanation of what led to the effective end of cooperation with the SRP and a joint opposition agenda. When

⁴⁴³ *New York Times*. 2003. 'World Briefing | Asia: Cambodia: Coalition Government.' November 6. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/06/world/world-briefing-asia-cambodia-coalition-government.html?src=pm> (October 26, 2012).

⁴⁴⁴ Author's interview with Anand Noranariddh.

⁴⁴⁵ The CPP seems to certainly have favoured a two-party solution. Outlining his case against the '5 November '03' agreement, Hun Sen stated that a tripartite coalition government would result in constitutional ambiguities on how to dissolve the government in case of a coalition partner leaving, and in regards to the National Election Committee (NEC), and stated that he was in favour of a two-party coalition with FUNCINPEC. See Hun, Sen. 2004. 'A Visit to the Kompong Raing Bridge Construction.' *Cambodia New Vision* 73 (February).

FUNCINPEC proceeded to form a two-party coalition government with the CPP in 2004, marking the end of cooperation with the SRP (which has since remained deeply distrustful of FUNCINPEC), Ranariddh received heavy criticism also from inside the party for agreeing to the coalition government.⁴⁴⁶ By referring to Sihanouk's suggestion of a national union, the story of these events is turned around to portray the democratic opposition as sowing seeds of discord in a fundamentally non-Cambodian manner.

Yet the reference to a national union, when advanced from a position of political marginalisation rather than national leadership, carries different meanings and implications than Sihanouk's original ideas. This is underlined by Ranariddh's increasingly vocal opposition to the very idea of a Cambodian political opposition following his ouster from FUNCINPEC leadership in 2006, when campaigning for his new Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) and attempting to advance it as a potential coalition partner for the CPP. Ranariddh argued that an opposition is contrary to Cambodian culture, precisely by reference to Sihanouk's 2003 advice to form a large-scale coalition government.⁴⁴⁷ He judged the Cambodian opposition 'sterile' and 'inefficient', referring to it as the 'champion of division', which he derived from how alien the very notion of a political opposition is in the Cambodian cultural context.⁴⁴⁸ A communication from his pen name, 'Sam Nora', thus read:

Prince Ranariddh has noted 'There're also three possibilities offered to him. The first one would be to join the CPP? The Prince refused it, for the reasons belong to him alone. Second would be to join the opposition. The Prince also refuses it. He thinks that in Cambodia, it doesn't have any

⁴⁴⁶ Sam Rainsy's agreement to sign the 2006 constitutional amendment (which required a simple majority rather than a two-thirds majority) in parliament, which made the FUNCINPEC redundant as a coalition partner, is generally understood as an act of revenge following the 2004 coalition government between FUNCINPEC and the CPP.

⁴⁴⁷ 'The so-called "middle path" is nothing else but the implementation of valuable advice given by our venerated Samdech Ta, Samdech Ta Tuot to H.E. Sam Rainsy and Samdech Krom Preah Norodom Ranariddh, with the presence of Samdech Hun Sen, during the meeting in the Royal Palace on November 5, 2003.' Sam, Nora. 2011. *Note of the Day 24: Samdech Krom Preah Norodom Ranariddh's Middle Path*.

⁴⁴⁸ Sam, Nora. 2010. *Note of the Day 1: The Opposition Parties in Cambodia are the Champion of Division*.

culture of opposition. On the other hand, the Cambodian opposition is sterile and incapable to unite.⁴⁴⁹

Ranariddh argued that there are three political forces in Cambodia: the CPP, the royalists, and the 'oppositions'; he thus juxtaposed the royalists and the opposition.⁴⁵⁰ The royalists, divided into 'new FUNCINPEC' and the NRP, needed to be reunified in the framework of a 'real royalist party', the NRP, for 'the Royalists, Sihanoukists and others Patriots' to represent a second political force. The opposition consisted of the SRP and the Human Rights Party (HRP). Ranariddh even referred to these three forces as the new political 'triptych' (*kámleang noyobay bey*) in Cambodia, recalling the national motto of nation, religion, king.⁴⁵¹ The existence of royalists as a third pole, neither opposition nor ruling party, was said to be unique to Cambodia.⁴⁵²

Ranariddh branded his political bid to reunify the 'Royalists, Sihanoukists and Patriots' into one national force that would neither join the opposition nor oppose the CPP, as the 'middle path'.⁴⁵³ This recalled how, during Sangkum, Buddhist socialism was said to represent a middle path to the Cold War, split between the free world and communism, and between the domestic right and left. Sihanouk cast his middle path as distinctly Buddhist, tied to what was celebrated as age-old national religion safeguarded by Cambodia's historical kings.⁴⁵⁴ Ranariddh, on the other hand, defined his middle path as the 'participation of the royalists/nationalist in the state powers and administration, in a process of peace, stability and development, leading towards real national reconciliation and unity'.⁴⁵⁵ This consisted of the royalists and nationalists participating in the legislative (Senate and National Assembly), executive (government), and local state powers (commune, district, and provincial councils); what could only be realised through cooperation with the ruling CPP:

⁴⁴⁹ Sam, Nora. 2011. *Note of the Day 47: The NRP's Middle Path. Rationale and Justification*.

⁴⁵⁰ Sam, Nora. 2010. *Note of the Day 14: The Royalists within the National Community (Part 1)*; Sam, Nora. 2010. *Note of the Day 15: The Royalists within the National Community (Part 2)*; and Sam, Nora. 2011. *Note of the Day 38: The Political 'Triptych' in Cambodia*.

⁴⁵¹ Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 38*.

⁴⁵² Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 24*.

⁴⁵³ Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 47*.

⁴⁵⁴ Norodom, Sihanouk. 1965. 'Notre Socialisme Buddhique.' *Kambuja* 8 (November); Hughes (2009): 40; and Girling (1971): 5.

⁴⁵⁵ Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 24: Samdech Krom Preah Norodom Ranariddh's Middle Path*.

Hence, the quasi magic formula: the political force, represented by the Royalists, Sihanoukists, Patriots, ADDED to the other one, the CPP, to serving, altogether, Cambodia. That one is not servitude, but a real cooperation and collaboration, to resolving altogether, the problems of national interests, in stability, peace and in the framework of a rule of law. The Prince refuses thus the idea of using the Royalists, Sihanoukists and Patriots, to oppose and fight against the ruling Party. Such a way will represent for them and, in a long run, for our country a mortal danger.⁴⁵⁶

This stance of advocating collaboration with the CPP was summed up in NRP's campaign formula, 'don't confront – add' (*kom bok – bauk*).⁴⁵⁷

Yet Ranariddh's middle path, which attempted primarily to justify coalitions with the stronger CPP as, necessarily, its junior partner, differs sharply from that of Sihanouk, which put Sihanouk firmly in control of his political adversaries. Indeed, this was the main source of friction as royal family members gathered around Ranariddh after his 2006 ouster, many disapproving of his dependent stance. Other senior royalists, advocating a much more confrontational stance vis-à-vis the CPP, heavily criticised what they considered to be Ranariddh's subversion of the Sihanoukist idea of a middle path. One of them charged:

I don't understand Ranariddh's thinking. They [NRP] don't campaign to win. They campaign to be in coalition with the CPP! They call it a middle way. They represent themselves not like a leader, but like a mistress, a second wife. 'Honey, I will vote with you for this, but not for that. For that one, I support the opposition. For this one, I vote with you honey.' For me, a political party cannot campaign like that. You must campaign to win!⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Sam. 2011. *Note of the Day 47*.

⁴⁵⁷ Author's field notes. Ranariddh campaign speech, 4 June 2011. Oudong village, Kompong Speu province.

⁴⁵⁸ Author's interview, 10 July 2011.

Direct Democracy and the National Congress.

Ranariddh writes about the Sangkum-era practice of direct democracy that 'The third concept, "direct democracy" is a unique form of Khmer democracy. [...] It is the technique to put the new doctrine into practice and above all expresses a refusal to see power confiscated by an intermediary of officials, whether elected, or civil servants.'⁴⁵⁹ This was primarily realised through the National Congress, which Ranariddh credits with having been successful in terms of political decision-making, whilst criticising its inefficacy in ensuring accountability. Ranariddh suggests that this might have been resolved through the interpellation of officials 'within a framework of authentic direct democracy' entrusted to local congresses.⁴⁶⁰ The medicine for the ills of the system would have been *more* consequent application of direct democracy, rather than less.

In advancing his own democratic vision, Ranariddh contrasts the current representative democracy with an ideal direct democracy. He deplores how the 1993 constitution makes no provisions for a referendum. In outlining the virtues of a system of direct democracy, Ranariddh refers to the multiple interventions attempted by Sangkum to involve citizens in the management of public affairs, namely the right to petition, referendum, and revocation of representatives, and, above all, the National Congress.⁴⁶¹ The National Congress was in fact provided for by the 1993 constitution, which set forth that a yearly National Congress, chaired by the king and open to all Khmer citizens, would have the mandate to inform citizens on various matters, to raise issues and requests for the state to solve, and to adopt recommendations for consideration by state authorities and the National Assembly.⁴⁶² In spite of the constitutional provision, the National Congress has yet to be convened. FUNCINPEC under Ranariddh has persistently campaigned for the king's right to head a National Congress and to realise two other constitutional provisions: the king's right to preside over the Supreme Council for Armed Forces, a body not yet created; and the right to preside over the High Council of Magistracy, including the right to grant royal

⁴⁵⁹ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 134.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: 279.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 67.

⁴⁶² 1993. Constitution of Cambodia (Chapter XII, Articles 128–30).

pardon.⁴⁶³ For Ranariddh, direct democracy stems from the organic relationship between the people and the monarch, which he believes is a relationship that cannot be substituted by an elected parliament or executive. In this sense, the National Congress is an instrument without comparison for direct democracy, at the same time as it cannot remain confined to a simple 'corrective', as in the present constitution; that is, it needs to be anchored in larger provisions for direct democracy, which treat the people as an organic whole. From this follows how Ranariddh objects to the liberal democratic language of individual rights of citizens in the 1993 constitution. Ranariddh laments how the techniques imagined for assuring that 'the Khmer people is the master of the country's destiny', are limited to 'classical recipes of representative, liberal, pluralist democracy', with the 'corrective' of the National Congress; and how there is no heading in the 1993 constitution that lays out the role and powers of the 'Khmer People'.⁴⁶⁴

Yet the calls for a National Congress today carry different meanings from those of the Sangkum era, and highlight the hollowing out of meaning from political royalism. Whereas the National Congress during Sangkum served as the main mechanism for communication between a paternalistic ruler and the people, and thereby served also to give a semblance of power-sharing, in the KOC it was invoked as a means of investing the constitutional monarch with some limited powers. The political harmlessness of such claims is perhaps best illustrated by how the reinstatement of constitutional rights to the king emerged as the main point that FUNCINPEC and the NRP could unite around in negotiations about merger in the years following Ranariddh's 2006 ouster. Both the post-2006 FUNCINPEC and the NRP campaigned for the reinstatement of the king's constitutional powers and, as a main part of this, promoted the idea of the National Congress.⁴⁶⁵ Asked in a press conference what the two parties had to offer 'now that monarchism and Sihanoukism were outdated', the party leaders referred to two unrealised constitutional provisions: that the king should head a Supreme Council for Armed Forces, and that the king should head a National

⁴⁶³ Ibid.: Articles 287–88.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.: Article 279. In fact, Chapter III of the constitution addresses 'The rights and obligations of Khmer citizens'.

⁴⁶⁵ FUNCINPEC. 2006. *Kolokar noyobay sangkhep konabak FUNCINPEC*: 6. See also author's interviews with Keo Puth Reasmey, 8 June 2010, and You Hokry.

Congress. FUNCINPEC President Keo Puth Rasmey recalled their response as follows: 'There are two things to be a royalist that are mentioned in the constitution. We are royalists, if we win the elections we will make sure that the King gets both of these powers.'⁴⁶⁶ That is, royalism had by then been eroded to refer merely to protecting the constitutional powers of the king. Ultimately, it further helped define the king as a purely constitutional monarch.

Royalism as 'Democratic Opposition'

Appeals to Sangkum-style democracy coexist with parallel appeals to a democratic opposition identity. There were thus two parallel democratic logics invoked by royalist actors. Whilst this did not mean that FUNCINPEC was split in two clear-cut camps, different actors have more strongly associated themselves with either of the two. Whilst Ranariddh has associated himself more closely with Sangkum-derived ideas of democracy, another group in FUNCINPEC's leadership advocated for FUNCINPEC to assert itself as an opposition party, and was more willing to ally with the political opposition than to form coalition governments with the CPP. This group of royalists was disappointed by Ranariddh's lack of oppositional stance. They understood FUNCINPEC to be a party that believed in a multi-party, liberal democratic system, as well as having a constitutional monarch that reigned but did not rule. They envisaged the 'royalist' political agenda as the protection of the multi-party democratic system, various freedom rights, and the constitutional monarchy. They took pride in how FUNCINPEC helped achieved the PPA in terms of how it overturned the one-party system, established that Cambodia would be a liberal, multi-party democracy, and outlined the rights of the citizens; and in the resulting constitution of 1993, which contained provisions to this effect.

To support their claims of a democratic identity, some FUNCINPEC actors invoked an indigenous democratic legacy, derived not from Sangkum but from the Democratic Party (DP) founded by Prince Yuthevong in 1947. The DP posed a formidable challenge to Sihanouk at the time – to the point that Sangkum was set up

⁴⁶⁶ Author's interview with Keo Puth Reasmey, 8 June 2010.

partly in response to it. As Cambodia's first Prime Minister, Yuthevon had overseen the drafting of the 1947 constitution, which instituted a constitutional democracy and invested more power in an elected assembly than the chief of state.⁴⁶⁷ In creating a liberal democratic framework through the 1993 constitution, some claimed to have looked back to Yuthevon's framework set out by the 1947 constitution, using it as a model. Sisowath Sirirath phrases it this way:

When Yuthevon died, he was the PM of Sihanouk. He wrote the first constitution of democratic Cambodia in 1947. We used this and changed it gradually. After FUNCINPEC won the elections in 1993 and we drafted the constitution, we took a lot of wordings from Yuthevon's Constitution, such as the line 'free, independent and neutral'. We took a lot from Yuthevon. But 90% of it has been changed by the CPP since then through amendments. Now it is not allowed to have more than 200 people demonstrating in the street. We are slowly moving back to another phase. Our newspapers are very free and fair in looks only, but you don't see the opposition parties on TV. This is not democratic. There is only one voice. This is not in conformity with our vision.⁴⁶⁸

This can be understood as an attempt to argue for the royalist roots of an indigenous democratic movement, which is used to support a more general identification with a liberal democratic agenda based not on Sangkum-style national consensus but on a multi-party system, freedom of demonstration, and freedom of press. Invoking Yuthevon's name in this sense invoked shared intellectual origins with the self-identified democratic opposition, which repeatedly makes such demands. Such references to Yuthevon typically contrasted him favourably with Ranariddh, and, at times, Sihanouk. In one example of such a reading, a royal family member criticised Sihanouk and Ranariddh for their 'paternalistic' leadership style, before concluding that Yuthevon, on the other hand, because of his work for a multi-party democratic system and constitutional monarchy in Cambodia, was the 'pride of the family'.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Chandler (1991): 35–36.

⁴⁶⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Sirirath, 13 May 2010.

⁴⁶⁹ Author's private communication, September 2012.

References to Yuthevong, therefore, in some sense, offer an alternative genealogy of royalist nationalism.

The tension between these co-existing logics has been a constant source of friction within FUNCINPEC. Ranariddh's ideas of democratic representation founded in ideas of organic relations contrasted sharply with the conflicting vision of FUNCINPEC as a liberal democratic party, promoting relations of strict accountability between the elected and the electorate. Proponents of the latter criticised the hierarchical vision of society envisaged by the circle around Ranariddh, a vision mirrored by FUNCINPEC party structure. Whilst it was by no means a coup by a more liberal democratic faction, the party coup in 2006 that ousted Ranariddh did highlight tensions in the party resulting from Ranariddh's strong grip over party internal affairs. After the resulting effective implosion of the royalists, actors who identified with a liberal democratic identity blamed the downfall of political royalism on the failure of FUNCINPEC leaders, especially Ranariddh, to work out a royalist identity based on what they considered to be modern democratic ideas of equality. This exasperation was expressed by a senior aide to Prince Norodom Sirivudh, testifying to the tension between two contrasting views in the party of the royalist stance on democracy:

So, when you [the author] write about royalism, who do you include as a royalist? What does royalism mean now? I don't know what royalism means anymore. In the 1990s, many foreigners were suspicious of royalists, thinking it [royalism] is too pyramidal. I used to explain it like 'We are modern democrats who believe in having a King, as well as multi-party, liberal democracy.' But in actual fact, there is a contradiction. We do not have the maturity to have a constitutional monarchy like in the UK. The concept for the Prince and others, is still the God-King ... it is really a pyramid, so hierarchical. So it is a contradiction in terms with the idea of a constitutional monarchy. [...] I think there is a contradiction that we cannot overcome, between the idea of a constitutional monarchy and democratic ideas [on the one hand], and the old pyramidal idea, what monarchy means

in Cambodia – absolute [on the other]. I don't know what political royalism could mean in Cambodia.⁴⁷⁰

To this disenchanted group, FUNCINPEC's pyramid organisation made it a less than democratic party, which, together with a lack of internal discipline, weakened it. FUNCINPEC leaders, they claimed, showcased a liberal democratic identity by virtue of their association with liberal democratic countries where they had spent time in exile, yet failed to substantiate this claim:

As a political party, FUNCINPEC had a platform but had problems with the daily management, administration, and some visions were not there. The base perspective was to receive some vision from the top. [...] People think that we are from a liberal culture so we are democrats, but I think people from FUNCINPEC knew nothing about democracy or liberalisation. They only speak the word. I spent some part of my life in a democratic country, the discipline is there, otherwise it is anarchy. FUNCINPEC was a total mess-up. Ranariddh made the decisions, but the decisions were not respected.⁴⁷¹

This group took practical measures to form concrete alliances with the self-identified democratic parties. In 2003, then Secretary General of FUNCINPEC Norodom Sirivudh proposed the Alliance of Democrats (AD) between FUNCINPEC and the SRP. The effort to bridge the differences between royalists and self-identified democratic parties was repeated by Sisowath Thomico's 2006 establishment of the Sangkum Jatinyum alliance. The formation of a joint democratic opposition floundered, however, on several reasons. A decisive one was the power balance within FUNCINPEC, which tilted in favour of Ranariddh. Ranariddh's 2004 decision to call off the AD and form a coalition with the CPP was a turning point for relations between FUNCINPEC and the SRP that permanently ended trust between the two parties, and also alienated and embittered those within FUNCINPEC who identified closely with a shared democratic opposition identity.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷⁰ Author's interview with Pok Marina.

⁴⁷¹ Author's interview with Sisowath Pheanuroth.

⁴⁷² See, for example, author's interviews 12 July 2010, 10 July 2011.

A second main impediment was deep-seated distrust by royalists, even those who associated closely with a democratic opposition identity, of the SRP being anti-royalist, either in the sense of being anti-constitutional monarchy (Republican) or anti-Sihanoukist. Royal family members are generally convinced that Sam Rainsy holds Sihanouk responsible for his father Sam Sary's death, and, in spite of his outward support of the constitutional monarchy, believe that he holds deeply anti-royalist sentiments in both of the above senses.⁴⁷³ One senior royal family member who had previously been the driving force behind cooperation between FUNCINPEC and the SRP thus typically remarked: 'Sam Rainsy is still anti-royalist, because Sihanouk killed his father.'⁴⁷⁴ This has continuously acted to prevent close cooperation, even at times when these actors have appeared to have a joint agenda. In 1994, Norodom Sirivudh resigned from his posts as Co-Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs following Ranariddh's expulsion of Sam Rainsy from the post of Minister of Finance.⁴⁷⁵ Yet Sirivudh and his aides deny that the two men shared a common agenda, precisely by pointing to Sam Rainsy's perceived anti-royalist stance.⁴⁷⁶ Sisowath Thomico has similarly claimed to have lost hope of cooperation with the SRP after seeing a French documentary in which Sam Rainsy 'spoke unjustly of Sihanouk'.⁴⁷⁷ Trust was further damaged by the publication of books by Sam Rainsy and his sister Sam Emmarane that were highly critical of Sihanouk.⁴⁷⁸

Thirdly, whilst the democratic vision propagated by Ranariddh and that of royalism as democratic opposition were primarily associated with two different sets of actors,

⁴⁷³ Sam Sary helped Sihanouk found the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, but fell out with Sihanouk and died under unclear circumstances in 1962, after having fled Cambodia.

⁴⁷⁴ Author's interview, 10 July 2011.

⁴⁷⁵ Cp Roberts (2001): 156.

⁴⁷⁶ Author's interview with Pok Marina and author's interview 10 July 2011.

⁴⁷⁷ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 28 May 2010. Sisowath Thomico, Sam Rainsy, and Tioulong Saumura studied at Sciences Po (Paris) together in the early 1970s, and were also all activists (who would later militate against the Khmer Rouge). According to Sisowath Thomico, they split because Sam Rainsy was more political, whilst Thomico wanted the struggle to be broader, envisaging it in terms of culture and civilisation. In the magazine *Amvath*, Thomico wrote articles about the strength of Cambodian civilization, Sangkum Reastr Niyum and Buddhism.

⁴⁷⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 28 May 2010.

these stances were, in reality, more like two end points on a continuum with many royalist actors intermittently associating themselves with either pole. In the wake of his calls for royalists and the SRP to unite, Sisowath Thomico would, as explored below, attempt to revive Sihanouk's doctrine, elevating Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism to a guiding ideology for the KOC and advocating the implementation of its ideas of direct democracy. His vacillating stance manifests how ideas of democracy derived from Sihanouk remained a prominent, if not inescapable, part of royalist discourse and thinking, bringing real difficulty in uniting with the non-royalist democratic opposition.

Royalism as 'Democratic Opposition' and the Legacy of the Resistance.

If a joint 'democratic opposition' identity with the SRP was difficult to form, then a 'democratic opposition' identity based on the legacy of the PRK-era 'resistance' was more successful. A dynamic that pushed FUNCINPEC towards a 'democratic opposition' identity, in this sense, was the defection of members of the former KPRLF faction to FUNCINPEC. In 1998, the Son Sann Party, successor to the KPRLF, merged with FUNCINPEC. Former KPRLF fighters had continuously joined FUNCINPEC, following the formation of the first coalition government in 1993; the disintegration of its successor party, the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP); the July 1997 events, which forced actors to take sides between Hun Sen and Ranariddh; and, finally, the implosion of the Son Sann Party the following year. As a consequence, most of the former KPRLF leadership ended up in FUNCINPEC.⁴⁷⁹ Former KPRLF joined the FUNCINPEC because of their shared anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese national resistance identity, as well as the access to patronage structures this connection granted, as seen in the following quote:

'In 1997, everyone jumped from Son Sann to FUNCINPEC. They don't want to go to the CPP – that is a different school of thought. They consider FUNCINPEC, from the national resistance. To go to the CPP, they climb slowly. In FUNCINPEC, if you are good with Ranariddh you can jump up.'⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Author's interview with Huy Vora.

⁴⁸⁰ Author's interview with Keo Puth Reasmeay, 8 June 2010.

This suggests the importance of lingering ties from the resistance. Senior royalists generally thought the defunct KPNLF/BLDP/Son Sann Party faction to share with them a democratic identity defined in terms of the anti-communist resistance struggle.⁴⁸¹ They emphasised Son Sann's loyalty to Sihanouk, which they contrasted with the more ambiguous stance of Sam Rainsy. One senior adviser within FUNCINPEC explained the relationship between FUNCINPEC and the parties coming out of the old KPNLF faction as, 'it is like democratic ideas [held by KPNLF/BLDP/Son Sann Party], versus another democratic faction [FUNCINPEC] that emphasises the role of the King. We are both the successors of the old Democratic Party.'⁴⁸²

FUNCINPEC and former KPNLF generally considered themselves to share a democratic identity, defined as anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese resistance. Within this framework, the difference was outlined as FUNCINPEC being royalist and KPNLF 'nationalist' (meaning neither monarchist nor anti-monarchist).⁴⁸³ The KPNLF contained both members loyal and opposed to the monarchy and Sihanouk. Royalists could accept former KPNLF fighters, such as General Dien Del (former general in the Khmer National Armed Forces (FANK), the army of the Khmer Republic, and co-founder of the KPNLF), into their ranks more easily, as their previous opposition was understood (and to some extent perhaps redefined) as anti-Sihanoukist (opposing Sihanouk's perceived pro-Vietnamese stance) rather than fundamentally Republican. This tied them to the shared, basic, anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese stance. The limitations of the contemporary constitutional monarchy after Sihanouk's ascension on the throne, in turn, made FUNCINPEC more palatable for former KPNLF fighters.⁴⁸⁴ Their support of the monarchy was fundamentally opportunistic, based on the perception that rural people still supported the monarchy,

⁴⁸¹ Author's interviews with Pok Marina, Keo Puth Reasmey, Eng Mary, Ek Sereyvath.

⁴⁸² Author's interview with Pok Marina.

⁴⁸³ See, for example, author's interviews with Dien Del and Huy Vora.

⁴⁸⁴ Cp. author's interview with Dien Del: 'I prefer Sihanouk to Sihanouk – he correctly does his job. Sihanouk has too much political tactic and always supports the Vietnamese. [...] Sihanouk follows the constitution, I think he is a very good king. I can tell you that the situation of Cambodia now is because of Sihanouk. [...] They [FUNCINPEC leaders] know me, they know that I am not really a royalist, if I said I like the monarchy, but now we have a good King.'

and the need to follow the people to gain votes. This could not be disentangled from the resistance lens, which prioritised anti-communist struggle as the goal of national politics. This was expressed by Dien Del as: 'Nationalism is not like before. If you were a nationalist you went to the Republic, now you go to the monarchy. It is the tendency.'⁴⁸⁵ This opportunism also explained their dislike of Sam Rainsy, who they considered democratic but not monarchist, and therefore alienated from the political will of the rural electorate.⁴⁸⁶

On 18 October 2006, Prince Ranariddh was ousted as President of FUNCINPEC at an extraordinary party congress that turned him into the party 'historical leader'; what can be understood as the endpoint of his gradual weakening after the July 1997 events. The new FUNCINPEC leadership explained this in terms of a divide between former resistance fighters and the circle around Ranariddh, which had disproportionately promoted returnees and (particularly) royal family members at the expense of former resistance fighters.⁴⁸⁷ They claimed to want to democratise FUNCINPEC, by transferring more powers to its mid- and lower ranks, staffed by many former resistance fighters. Whilst Ranariddh had been party President for life, the Presidency now became subject to election, and decision-making powers were transferred to the steering committee. FUNCINPEC leaders accused Ranariddh of having planned to change FUNCINPEC into the 'Prince Ranariddh Party', which Ranariddh denied.⁴⁸⁸ They portrayed it as Ranariddh wanting to create his own party identity, free from the shadow of Sihanouk, even comparing him to 'an 18 year old who wants to be free from his parents'.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Cp. author's interview with Dien Del: 'We cannot accept Sam Rainsy. He is democratic, everything is good, but he is not a monarchist. Openly he cannot be against it. I think people in the countryside are still closer to my position than to Sam Rainsy.'

⁴⁸⁷ Author's interview with Keo Puth Reasmeay, 8 June 2010.

⁴⁸⁸ According to Keo Puth Reasmeay, new president of FUNCINPEC, Ranariddh had prepared to dissolve FUNCINPEC and proclaim a new party, upon which another group of people had arranged to bring FUNCINPEC under Nhek Bunchhay's control. According to the NRP version, Ranariddh was aware that Nhek Bunchhay was planning to take over FUNCINPEC, and waited for Nhek Bunchhay to act first, whilst expecting to set up his own party thereafter. See author's interviews with Keo Puth Reasmeay, 8 June 2010, and Anand Noranariddh. Keo Puth Reasmeay's assessment seems correct: 'There were preparations made behind the scenes for both men.'

⁴⁸⁹ Author's interview with Keo Puth Reasmeay, 8 June 2010.

The party coup was effectively the takeover of FUNCINPEC by a faction that, by all accounts, enjoyed the close support of the CPP. It can also be understood in terms of the tension between royalist and resistance identities, which lent itself to CPP manipulation. Returning royal family members, other returnees from Western countries, and former resistance fighters, had long competed for power in FUNCINPEC. Relatively few royal family members were involved in resistance activities in the border areas.⁴⁹⁰ Yet royal family members returning to Cambodia in the early 1990s came to occupy FUNCINPEC's top positions at the expense of resistance fighters. Moreover, non-royal returnees from the west, who also came to occupy positions at the top of the party (with high levels of competence and personal wealth), were expected to show deference to royalty, resulting in disaffection and disloyalty.⁴⁹¹ The 2006 party coup reflected discontent with Ranariddh's leadership and testified to the strength of loyalties between former KPNLF and FUNCINPEC resistance fighters. General Nhek Bunchhay, new FUNCINPEC Secretary General, instrumental in masterminding the party coup, was backed up by other former militaries, both from FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. He had been the main point of contact within FUNCINPEC for former soldiers to join the party, and had cultivated their allegiances.⁴⁹² Following the split, the new FUNCINPEC leaders continuously claimed to represent previously neglected resistance fighters. For example, Princess Mary Eng, at that point separated from Ranariddh who remained in FUNCINPEC, stated that Ranariddh had left those who fought with him (whereas she stayed with those who fought) and criticised royal family members following him to NRP for generally not having taken part in the resistance.⁴⁹³ FUNCINPEC's continued royalist credentials were additionally maintained by Keo Puth Reasmey, new party President, married to Sihanouk's daughter, Norodom Arunreasmey; and by Sisowath Sirirath, Second Vice President and Arunreasmey's ex-husband. Ranariddh's supporters,

⁴⁹⁰ These included, for example, Norodom Ranariddh, Eng Mary, Norodom Sirivudh, and Norodom Chakrapong.

⁴⁹¹ Hughes (2001 c): 309.

⁴⁹² This included Dien Del, who joined FUNCINPEC actively after 1997, after originally having turned to FUNCINPEC after the failure of the LDP to win seats in 1993. Dien Del later stated: 'I would have liked to join FUNCINPEC even before the 1997 but some leaders were too proud – they look down on other people. They didn't connect with our military past. I didn't need that. They have no way to take the FUNCINPEC military up.' See author's interview with Dien Del.

⁴⁹³ Author's interview with Eng Mary.

meanwhile, formed a new, small party in October 2006, named Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP).⁴⁹⁴ The party was known as the 'Nationalist Party' between 2008–2010, during which time Norodom Ranariddh was in self-imposed exile, and again in August 2012 onwards, following Ranariddh's exit from the political scene.⁴⁹⁵ The party enjoyed the support of the majority of politically involved royals, and included both returnees and a few former resistance fighters, both from FUNCINPEC and KPNLF. It emphasised the role of CPP manipulation in engendering the split.⁴⁹⁶

Royals in the new FUNCINPEC leadership were quickly sidelined in 2008 when Hun Sen announced that royal family members Keo Puth Reasmeay, Sisowath Sirirath, and Norodom Arunreasmey would not be part of the new government, whilst Nhek Bunshhay and other non-royalist resistance fighters would. By then, the debate was radicalised to centre on the involvement versus the non-involvement of royal family members in politics. Royal family members associated with a democratic opposition identity saw themselves constrained to take a stance for Ranariddh, who they remained unconvinced by. If anything, Ranariddh's ouster seemed to further prove to them that Ranariddh was a hopeless card, yet they needed to gather around him more than ever.⁴⁹⁷ Meanwhile, the CPP controlled FUNCINPEC even more firmly than it had under Ranariddh's leadership.

Doctrine versus Embodiment: Reinventing Buddhist Socialism and Sihanoukism

⁴⁹⁴ The Khmer National Front Party changed its name to NRP on 16 October 2006.

⁴⁹⁵ The Nationalist Party and the NRP have had the same party symbol, a map of Cambodia and the motto 'freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity' (*seripheap, atepthey, boronapheap tek dey*), with the difference being that the NRP symbol featured Ranariddh's picture on top. The name 'Nationalist Party' [*Kanapak Cheatnyum*] was intended to make people think of Sihanouk's nationalism, as well as to be similar to the 'NRP'. See author's interview with Huy Vora.

⁴⁹⁶ Author's interviews with Anand Noranariddh and Ngo Pin. You Hockry, Minister of Interior (1993–1998 and 1998–2003), who, together with Ranariddh, was responsible for appointing FUNCINPEC provincial governors, governors of districts and chiefs of districts, as well as police commissioners during these periods, thus blamed the lesser representation of resistance fighters in FUNCINPEC on their lower education. See author's interview with You Hockry.

⁴⁹⁷ Author's interviews with Ngo Pin, Sisowath Panara Sirivudh, and Sisowath Ayravady.

FUNCINPEC and, since 2006, its sister parties, claim to represent 'royalism', *reach nyum*. One key way to bestow the concept of royalism with meaning has been to turn to Sangkum as a legacy to unite around, reinventing ideas of 'Sihanoukism' (*Sihanouk nyum*) and 'Buddhist socialism'. Yet these reinventions highlight tensions as to what extent Sihanoukism and the legacy of Sangkum lends itself to provide a party political ideological identity, rooted in deeper tensions in the royalist project between embodiment and doctrine. Ranariddh, as outlined above, has referred to Buddhist socialism as his model for democracy in the Cambodian context, tying democracy to the Khmer monarchy. He has consistently argued for these conceptions from the perspective of embodiment, whereby he and other royal family members are in a unique position to incarnate the nation's aspirations. Other self-identified royalists have attempted to make Sihanoukism relevant by advocating it as a political ideology. Yet this 'disembodiment' of Sihanoukism made it susceptible to being claimed by any political group. This danger was illustrated at the time of division of political royalists after 2006, when, following Ranariddh's ouster from FUNCINPEC, royalists divided into three parties: FUNCINPEC, the NRP, and a short-lived Sangkum Jatiniyum Front Party (SJFP). The ensuing debate came to focus on the contents of the Sihanoukist heritage, particularly the tension between embodiment and a doctrinal identity to be distilled from it.

Turning Buddhist Socialism into an 'Ideology' for the Second Kingdom.

One of the most outspoken attempts to revive the legacy of Sangkum took place in 2006, as an attempt to save political royalism that was in disarray. In March, Ranariddh had resigned as head of the National Assembly after the constitutional amendment had been passed allowing motions to be passed with a simple majority rather than the previously required two-thirds majority, and thereby making the existing coalition between the CPP and FUNCINPEC redundant. FUNCINPEC was also plagued by internal divisions, beset by rivalry between Ranariddh and FUNCINPEC Secretary General Nhek Bunchhay. At the time of this crisis, shortly before Ranariddh's ouster from the FUNCINPEC Presidency in October, Prince Sisowath Thomico, Sihanouk's adopted son and head of his personal cabinet, announced that he would form a broad coalition political party to unify all royalists in

Cambodia, which was to take the ideology of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum as the basis of its political platform.⁴⁹⁸ This was intended to resolve the crisis of the involvement of royals in politics and to address deeper problems in Cambodian society rooted in a lack of vision.⁴⁹⁹

In July 2006, Prince Thomico launched the Sangkum Jatiniyum alliance with four small political parties at the former royal capital Oudong, a symbolically important location.⁵⁰⁰ During the following weeks, Thomico toured the Cambodian countryside, screening Sihanouk's Sangkum-era films, *Le Cid* and *Twilight*, as well as documentary footage about infrastructure projects undertaken by the Sangkum Reastr Niyum governments.⁵⁰¹ In August, the Sangkum Jati Niyum Front Party (SJFP) held its first congress.⁵⁰² Shortly thereafter, a ceremony was organised at Wat Phnom in Phnom Penh where participants swore an oath to sacrifice their lives for Cambodia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and 'to protect the King and Queen forever'.⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁸ A nephew of Queen-Mother, Monineath, Sisowath Thomico gave up his royal title in 1970 and fought for the Khmer Republic. Returning to Paris in 1973, Thomico founded the journal *Anuvuth*, where he advocated for social and political change in Cambodia. According to Thomico, it was at this time that he first started writing articles about how Sangkum Reastr Niyum and Buddhist socialism could be useful to this end, claiming that: 'It was a way for me to have my own revolutionary ideas put in place. It was the way for Cambodia to reach revolution, through the spirit and culture of Cambodia. I was for non-violence. I thought we will do the revolution peacefully, through ideas. Buddhist Socialism could have been the basis to reach Cambodia to that final goal.' See author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010.

⁴⁹⁹ A third reason was to ensure that Ranariddh would have an alternative party political vehicle to FUNCINPEC, if necessary. See author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010.

⁵⁰⁰ The royal capital (1618–1866) Oudong houses royal stupas from this period. During the Sangkum period, the site was considered so invested with royal power that flying over Oudong was prohibited (Monipong (2008): 135). Samean, Yun and Douglas Gillison.

⁵⁰¹ 'Thomico Announces Alliance with Fringe Parties,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 28 July 2006.

⁵⁰² Samean, Yun. 'Thomico Visits Four Provinces, Shows Movies,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 9 August, 2006.

⁵⁰³ Samean, Yun. 'Thomico's New Party Holds First Congress in Capital,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 21 August 2006.

⁵⁰⁴ Thomico also urged the UN and the international community to monitor the 2007 commune elections and 2008 national elections, and accused FUNCINPEC of inaction when the media broadcast anti-Sihanouk songs from the Khmer Republic in October 2005, around the time that Hun Sen threatened to dismantle the monarchy if King Sihanouk did not sign the supplemental border treaty with Vietnam. Thul, Prak Chan and James Welsh. 'Thomico, 50 Party Faithful Swear Oath to Country,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 11 September, 2006.

Thomico attempted to revive an elusive doctrine Sangkum was said to have been founded on, arguing that Cambodia had to find a way to develop the country through a coherent *ideology*.⁵⁰⁴ The Sangkum Jatiniyum Front Party reflected Prince Thomico's perception that Cambodia had suffered a loss of political vision, and that contemporary Cambodia was undergoing similar social transitions as during Sangkum. Reviving Sihanouk's ideology was thus intended to procure a political vision and respond to social change. Thomico sought to remind the divided royalist faction what monarchism in Cambodia would mean, and find them a 'new vision' through the values of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum. In particular, he perceived his challenge to be the transformation of the celebration of Sangkum from advocating Sihanouk *as a person* into a project of reminding others of his *political heritage* by explaining the 'ideology' of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum.

Thomico advanced his own reading of Buddhist socialism and suggested that it could be applied to contemporary Cambodia. A high school student during Sangkum, Thomico based his understanding of the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period on family testimonies and his studies of Sihanouk's writings at the time.⁵⁰⁵ He took 'Buddhist socialism' to mean that Cambodia could find an indigenous way of thought by turning Buddhist philosophy into political ideology. The contents of this 'ideology' included ideas of direct democracy and a national union. Thomico perceived the legacy of the Sangkum to be particularly applicable to the social and political context of the Second Kingdom for two reasons. Firstly, Cambodian society desperately needed to find an 'indigenous and unique ideology' to guard economic development against the perils of globalisation. During Sangkum, Buddhist socialism had represented a middle path to the Cold War split between the free world and communism. In the contemporary context, Prince Thomico turned against models of economic development imposed by international financial institutions, such as the IMF and WTO, which he argued were unsuitable for an emerging economy like Cambodia. Following a middle path in the present context would mean letting Cambodia find her 'own way' of development, whilst steering clear of unchecked capitalist development. Secondly, Thomico stated, the nation was presently facing a

⁵⁰⁴ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

similar societal shift to during the Sangkum era. Sangkum had been a way for Sihanouk to unite the nation through uniting political parties, intellectuals, and the elite. This had entailed unification of a disunited royalty, as the three main political parties during Cambodia's first brief experience of parliamentary democracy were founded by princes.⁵⁰⁶ The present government, Thomico argued, faced the same problem of a conflict of generations, with young people making up a huge majority of the population. As young people are set apart from the older generations by a different range of experiences and a higher level of education, Thomico imagined them to have a different vision of the political content of the Cambodian nation. He believed this new generation to be at odds with what he described as the government's authoritarian style of governing and warned that if their demands were not met, Cambodia would head to further conflict. Thomico proposed to solve this by setting up the National Congress provided for by the constitution, considering it a uniquely suitable mechanism for identifying tensions in Cambodian society through exchanging views in open discussion.⁵⁰⁷ The contemporary challenge, in his mind, was to modify the congress so as to find a way to truly enable the younger generation to speak out, and to mix all different views into one, common vision. For Thomico, the lack of dialogue within political parties today demonstrated clearly that this could not be done through political parties. Rather, the mission was to create dialogue in society, generating ideas that could later be developed by political parties. In this creation of dialogue, he envisaged the monarchy to have a unique opportunity as an overarching, unifying institution, to set up dialogue between all different components of Cambodian society.

'Sihanoukism': Embodiment versus Ideology.

Prince Thomico, in fact, advocated not only the ideology of Sihanouk, but also the man. Shortly after setting up the SJFP, he called for the National Assembly to disband, transferring all powers to Sihanouk to head a Government of National Union. In the ensuing debate, Hun Sen both asserted the limits of a constitutional

⁵⁰⁶ The Democratic Party, Liberal Party and Progressive Democrats.

⁵⁰⁷ Care should be taken to organise the congress slightly differently, Thomico argued, from during the Sangkum, to ensure that it really would provide an opportunity for free speech.

monarchy and advanced a reading of political royalism that precluded the involvement of royal family members in politics. This was a bid to settle the debate between the incarnate versus the ideological in royalist politics in a very concrete manner. Shortly thereafter, Ranariddh was ousted from his Presidency of FUNCINPEC (which came to be headed by more junior royal family members and non-royals) by the party coup widely believed to have taken place with the backing of the CPP. In the ensuing scenario, contestation between the three self-identified royalist parties came to centre on the right to define 'Sihanoukism' as ideology versus embodiment.

In September 2006, Thomico stated that conditions for free elections had not been met and called for the National Assembly to disband, transferring all powers to Sihanouk as Prime Minister of a Government of National Union.⁵⁰⁸ Hun Sen retorted that these demands to dissolve the government equaled a coup against the constitution, and that anyone who wanted to dissolve the National Assembly should 'prepare their coffins'.⁵⁰⁹ Hun Sen recalled the limits of a constitutional monarchy by separating the monarchy as an institution from the monarchy as royal family members, with the words: 'I warn them again that the Monarchy belongs to no one. They should not use its influence for their interests.' In early October, President of the National Assembly and CPP honorary President Heng Samrin called for the introduction of a Bill barring royals from politics, allegedly in order to place royals as politically neutral at the very highest level in society.⁵¹⁰ This was supported by Sam Rainsy, who referred to an international model of constitutional monarchy. In early February 2007, Sihanouk asked royal family members to end their involvement in

⁵⁰⁸ Sisovann, Pin. 'Prince Thomico Plans Petition Asking Assembly To Disband,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 15 September 2006. Thomico later specified that, since conditions for free elections had not been met, democracy could only be re-established through a government of national union until the following elections. Delux, Leang and Soren Seelow. 'Formation of Government of National Union – Thomico is Defending Himself From All Provocation,' *Cambodge Soir*, 25 September 2006.

⁵⁰⁹ Sen, Hun. 2006. 'Visiting the People in Kompong Chhnang Province,' *Cambodia New Vision* 104 (September); see also Sisovann, Pin and James Welsh. 'Hun Sen Calls for Prince's Party Ouster,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 28 September, 2006.

⁵¹⁰ Samean, Yun. 'Assembly Complains of Lengthy Royal Absences,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 5 October 2006.

Cambodian politics.⁵¹¹ A few days later, Prime Minister Hun Sen called on royal family members to, themselves, submit a legally binding Bill banning them from engaging in politics ahead of the 2008 national elections; this, however, did not happen.⁵¹²

Hun Sen has increasingly portrayed himself as the new 'monarchist', precisely by safeguarding the constitutional monarchy within its boundaries and ensuring that it is strictly separated from political royalism.⁵¹³ In his speeches, Hun Sen has increasingly represented the CPP as heir to the Sangkum legacy – claiming, as noted above, that the notion of 'people's democracy' is similar to the Sangkum.⁵¹⁴ Whilst, as noted above, the CPP has claimed to be the successor regime to the Sangkum ever since Sihanouk's 1991 return, this has, following their expressed preference for having royals barred from politics, been accompanied by claims of being 'monarchist'. Hun Sen has supported these claims mainly by portraying himself as the one to have accomplished the Paris peace negotiations by allowing Sihanouk to sit at the negotiation table, and to have been the one to benevolently allow Sihanouk to return to Cambodia thereafter, personally making the arrangements for Sihanouk to stay in the Royal Palace. He has also attributed the establishment of the Second Kingdom and consequent national reconciliation to 7 January, stating that Ranariddh, in a letter, has admitted this to be the case.⁵¹⁵ To be a 'monarchist' now shifted meaning to refer to the protection of a strict constitutional monarchy.

In the new political landscape after Ranariddh's ouster from FUNCINPEC, there were two self-proclaimed royalist parties, FUNCINPEC and SJFP, as well as a

⁵¹¹ Heng, Reaksmeay, 'Retired King Sihanouk Defends PM Hun Sen,' *VOA Khmer*, 2 February 2007.

⁵¹² Sakada, Chun, 'Hun Sen Says Royalists Should Abandon Politics,' *VOA Khmer*, 5 February 2007; See also Hun, Sen, Lor Chandara and John Maloy, 'Royals Could Initiate Political Exit,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 6 February 2007.

⁵¹³ Cp. Hun, Sen, 2007, 'Graduation Ceremony and Diploma Presentation in CUS,' *Cambodia New Vision* 117 (October).

⁵¹⁴ Cp. Hun, Sen, 2007, 'Keynote address.' Hun Sen has also sometimes likened himself to an adopted son of Sihanouk, seemingly trying to tap into Sihanouk's royal legitimacy. Cp. Hun, Sen, 2007, 'Excerpts on Interpretations Concerning Royal Palace,' *Cambodia New Vision* 108 (January).

⁵¹⁵ Hun, Sen, 2011, 'Graduation Ceremony at the Vanda Institute,' *Cambodia New Vision* 155 (January).

faction loyal to Ranariddh that developed into the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP). All three claimed Sihanoukist credentials. Whilst the SJFP was founded on the justificatory claim to bring back Sihanouk's Sangkum, Ranariddh boasted about being Sihanouk's son, whereas FUNCINPEC, in turn, was the party originally founded by Sihanouk. To prove its royalist credentials, FUNCINPEC organised a large ceremony for Sihanouk's 84th birthday, against Sihanouk's express wish.⁵¹⁶ FUNCINPEC also attempted to discredit the SJFP by casting it as Republican, referring to Thomico's previous side-taking for the Khmer Republic.⁵¹⁷ To add to the confusion, whilst Sihanouk was widely believed to have some link to the SJFP, which was also charged by Hun Sen, Sihanouk publicly distanced himself from the SJFP, charging that it was an anti-royalist and anti-Sihanouk political maneuver.⁵¹⁸ Yet, although all parties claimed his support, Sihanouk offered no straightforward public support for either one.⁵¹⁹

The contestation between the three parties came to centre on the possibility of turning Sihanouk's heritage into an ideology. Sihanouk, in his time, had refused references to 'ideology', whilst struggling with the need to create a terminology for his own private thinking, which had been dubbed 'Sihanoukism'. As noted in the introduction, Tep Chhieu Kheng in a 1968 article entitled 'Le Sihanoukisme' in Sihanouk's flagship publication *Sangkum*, examining what Sihanoukism could possibly mean, concluded that:

To define the political line of Samdech Euv, the neologism 'Sihanoukism' has been forged. Is it a doctrine? A new philosophy? Or a new ideology? In fact, Sihanouk had no part in the formation of the new term. Wary of the spirit of system, he fled willingly the words in 'ism' that express a general trend, a little too categorical profession of faith. [...] If not a doctrine or a philosophy, nor an ideology, what is it? 'Sihanoukism' is an attempt, but a

⁵¹⁶ Samean, Yun. 'F'pec Hosts Contentious Birthday Celebration,' *The Cambodia Daily*, Tuesday, 31 October 2006.

⁵¹⁷ Samean, Yun. 'Ranariddh, Thomico to Form Alliance,' *The Cambodia Daily*, 7 November 2006.

⁵¹⁸ Leang, Delux and Soren Seelow. 'Formation of a Government of National Union'.

⁵¹⁹ Author's interview with Khieu Suon. Sihanouk referred to the ousting of Ranariddh from FUNCINPEC as a 'coup de parti', the meaning of which provoked heated debate amongst all factions. Vong, Sokheng, and Charles McDermid. 'FUNCINPEC Prince Hails "Royalist" CPP,' *Phnom Penh Post*, 3–16 November 2006.

successful attempt to apprehend the real, to capture the vivid fact in its authenticity and dynamism. It is also a way of being, a sort of 'way of life' a 'knowing how to behave' for the Khmer people and for all placed in the same situation...⁵²⁰

This resistance against employing 'Sihanoukism' as an ideology was now reiterated by Sihanouk. When Thomico started to claim the Sangkum heritage as an 'ideology' guiding the SJFP, Sihanouk released a statement asking Thomico, the party he would form, and FUNCINPEC, never to refer to either 'Sihanoukism', 'the Sihanoukist ideology', or 'the ideals of Sihanouk'.⁵²¹

The new FUNCINPEC leadership ignored, however, Sihanouk's both historical and contemporary objections to branding Sihanoukism an ideology. FUNCINPEC continued to claim to represent Sihanoukism, referring to it as doctrine. According to Keo Puth Reasmey, new President of FUNCINPEC, Sihanouk could no longer make claims to own Sihanoukism. Sihanoukism should rather be understood as a general theory of leadership:

Sihanoukism – it is not the love of the body of Sihanouk. It is like a theory of leadership of a country. Sihanoukism means neutrality, territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. An ideology of how to lead the country. Serving the people. All these kinds of criteria. We call it Sihanoukist. We claim it. We see Sihanouk as a principle of party. This is Sihanouk for us – a principle. It is an idea that animates our group. We want to implement Sihanoukism in developing Cambodia, because we saw in the 1960s during his 16 years of power that Cambodia was prosperous; there was justice; independence; and sovereignty. Khmers had pride. We were not beggars of money from the international community. Prince Sihanouk has developed a theory of how to lead. Cambodia must develop, thinking of sovereignty and independence. That is what Sihanouk has done in the 1960s, we want to take it to implement it again. Before and after [Sihanouk], it has not been good. Only the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* had Sihanoukism.

⁵²⁰ Tep, Chhieu Kheng. 1968. "Le "Sihanoukisme". *Sangkum* 41 (December).

⁵²¹ Norodom, Sihanouk. 2006. Statement, Phnom Penh, 30 June. The statement was in French and referred to *Sihanoukisme*, *l'idéologie Sihanoukiste*, and *les idéaux de Sihanouk*.

[...] Thomico [...] wrote a letter to me, that I should stop using the name of Sihanouk, otherwise it will affect the name of Sihanouk and the Royal Family. [...] I said 'Why did you say so? Sihanoukism does not belong to Sihanouk. It is not the person. It is the idea that Sihanouk has invented to lead the country. If we think it is good, we take it. It is the book, the theory. Like Buddhism, Christianity, Maoism. [...] There is a difference between Sihanouk and Sihanoukism. And if you do not dare to promote Sihanoukism we do. Sihanoukism will be the spirit in the head of the people. [...] This should not stop me from promoting Sihanoukism. We bring the gospel. Even without Sihanouk, Sihanoukism is still here. It is the principle of the party, one idea that animates us.⁵²²

This was paralleled by FUNCINPEC leaders' support of the appropriation of the 'royalist' label by the CPP. Prince Sisowath Sirirath, new Second Deputy President of FUNCINPEC, thus stated in a press conference that 'Now, the most Royalist party is the CPP — without them this country could not be called the Kingdom of Cambodia. They are the true royalists, because, without Samdech Hun Sen, how can the monarchy survive?'⁵²³

Conversely, for the ousted Ranariddh, it became vital to assert Sihanoukism as possessing an incarnate quality, not reducible to ideology. In a note entitled 'Is the Neo-FUNCINPEC party a Sihanoukist party?' Ranariddh asks how Sihanoukism can be defined and gives the following answer:

Sihanoukism is not an abstract concept or simply an ideology. A real Sihanoukism is what our venerated King Father Norodom Sihanouk, the Architect of the November 9th 1953 National Independence, incarnated. The latter is also the guarantor and the fierce defender of the independence, as far as the national sovereignty and the territorial integrity [sic]. Territorial integrity must be perceived as the defence of our land borders (the East, North and West) and sea limits. It should also be a practice of a real national union and concord. It should also be a practice of social justice, in particular that one of the so-called 'minor people'. It is for that reason that the latter

⁵²² Author's interview with Keo Puth Reasmeay, 8 June 2010.

⁵²³ Vong, Sokheng, and Charles McDermid. 'FUNCINPEC Prince Hails "Royalist" CPP'.

continue to adore and to venerate our beloved Samdech Euv, Samdech Ta and Samdech Ta Tuot.⁵²⁴ A Sihanoukist party must finally be autonomous and being able to freely conclude any alliance with other political parties. Cooperation with the latter, in particular with the ruling party, to the benefit of our country is neither alienation nor a submission. This is the authentic Sihanoukism.⁵²⁵

Sihanoukism is thus necessarily tied to the person of Sihanouk, evident in the further elaboration offered by Ranariddh:

For the people of Cambodia, Sihanoukism means this. Not only royalty, but my father is the father of the nation. He preserved the territorial integrity, the sovereignty of the nation, social justice, development, well-being: it is the practical way to approach Sihanoukism, instead of talking about a simple theory. Even Gaullism, you know, Gaullism, what does it mean? De Gaulle for the French people, for the world, he is the liberator of France. What he represents, it is this. We should, in my opinion, continue to have a practical approach of Sihanoukism. I am a Sihanoukist not only because he is my father, but because of what he represents for us as Cambodians. In particular, you know during my father's era, you have around Cambodia war, war in Vietnam, war in Laos, and for 15 years my father successfully preserved Cambodia in peace. For the people of Cambodia, Sihanoukism is simply like this. But we cannot compare my brother, the King, to my Father ... No one can be compared to my father and so for the people Sihanoukism is this. It is more a practical way of thinking than a theory.⁵²⁶

Sihamoni, as a purely constitutional monarch, cannot continue the political leadership of Sihanouk. As the foremost royal political party actor, Ranariddh is uniquely poised to incarnate these aspirations and continue the organic link between the people and the monarchy. Yet a fundamental problem to Ranariddh's claims to represent Sihanoukism is how Sihanouk has very much been his own presence – although both

⁵²⁴ Epithets for Sihanouk.

⁵²⁵ Sam. 2010. *Note of the Day 5*. This document, together with the document 'Liberal and Advanced Monarchy', was said to form the base of the NRP political platform. See also Sam. 2010. *Note of the Day 15*.

⁵²⁶ Author's interview with Norodom Ranariddh, 2 June 2011.

as a constitutional monarch and King-Father, his liberty to make political statements has been circumscribed. Hun Sen has repeatedly drawn attention to this, claiming that some people are more Sihanoukist than Sihanouk himself.⁵²⁷ This refers precisely to how claims have been made in the name of Sihanoukism – yet these claims have lost force by their lack of corroboration by Sihanouk himself.

Prince Thomico, meanwhile, dissolved the SJPP in 2007 and returned to Sihanouk's side as his head of cabinet. He now declared himself to be satisfied that the CPP had picked up Sangkum as its model, emphasising how the Sangkum provided a national legacy that could be taken up by any political party:

Before 1970, Cambodia was the most advanced country in the region. We were the first to have the Olympic Stadium. We had beautiful architecture, famous landmarks in Phnom Penh were built. These were the symbols of what the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* tried to give to Cambodia. There was the culture of urbanism. Phnom Penh today is in large part a legacy of what *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* tried to give Cambodia. The parks, the urbanism, the boulevards. Those are the models that have to be looked to by all the political parties. They have to take this – it is not the legacy of one singular party – but it is the legacy of the nation. The Cambodian people have to go back to the 1970s to find the heritage that was left by their parents and build a new vision from there, a modern one.⁵²⁸

Thomico now redefined the role of the Cambodian monarchy to advocate a truly constitutional monarchy. He claimed that the task of royalists was now to give this new image and mission to the Cambodian monarchy. Sihanouk, as a reinstated king, had still had a political mission, and the public still considered the king as head of the government. The new task for royalist parties was therefore to explain the circumscribed role of the constitutional monarchy to the people.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁷ For example, in 2005, rebuking FUNCINPEC demands that more power be given to the Supreme National Border Council (SNBC) headed by Sihanouk, Hun Sen stated that 'The problem here is that we have people who have proven themselves more Sihanoukist than the former King himself, or more Royalist than the monarchy.' Hun, Sen. 2005. *Selected Responses to the Press after the June 24th Cabinet Meeting*.

⁵²⁸ Author's interview with Sisowath Thomico, 20 May 2010.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

This redefinition reflected, of course, how Thomico's original intentions had been outmanoeuvred. It was the end of a process that had started with Ranariddh being substituted as FUNCINPEC leader by non-royals, a move that had eclipsed the practice of politics as legitimised by the inherited ability to embody the nation. Whilst Thomico had tried to reverse this process by making royalism relevant through revival of the Sangkum legacy, he had met a dead end. As an ideology, this legacy was easily appropriated by the CPP and a FUNCINPEC under CPP control; both of these parties asserted the mandate of the monarchy as strictly constitutional, and questioned the involvement of royals in politics.

This exposed candidly how references to the Sangkum legacy reflected a royalist failure to invent an up-to-date royalist identity. The backwards look to Sihanouk indicated the royalists' inability to work out an independent identity that transcended his legacy, and developed into nothing short of an identity crisis. In the aftermath of these events, one prominent royalist politician expressed his frustration in these words: 'We are only the derivatives of Sihanouk. We are the brother, the son, the daughter of Sihanouk ... We are not the reference. We are merely the derivative. When Sihanouk disappears, there will be nothing left.'⁵³⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a series of attempts to establish credible links between political royalism and the nation, attempts which ultimately failed. It illustrates how political royalism shifted from being something meaningful at the start of the Second Kingdom, when the FUNCINPEC emerged victorious in the first multi-party elections, to something substantially meaningless two decades on. It suggests that this demise was bound up with thoroughgoing problems in transposing legitimacy associated with the monarchy to a party political form of royalism.

⁵³⁰ Author's interview, 10 July 2011.

This crisis of representation centred on the transfer of regal legitimacy from the monarchy to a party political form of royalism, in general, and, in particular, from Sihanouk to his son Ranariddh, as leader of FUNCINPEC. Ranariddh anchored his claims of representation in historical ideas of embodiment related to the monarchy, attempting to mobilise the electorate around a politicised identity as the embodiment of the nation. These ideas modified both of FUNCINPEC's foundational and oft-repeated claims to legitimacy: representation of the principles of liberal and pluralist democracy, and restoration of a constitutional monarchy. FUNCINPEC did neither unequivocally advocate a strictly constitutional monarchy nor a liberal democracy along Western lines, in spite of elements within the party who would have preferred this to be the case. At the most basic level, the decay of a party political form of royalism can be understood in terms of the royalists' failure to modify their claims to representation through embodiment to fit the far more marginalised way in which they actually related to the modern nation, resulting in a wide, actual discrepancy.

As a reinstated constitutional monarchy, in which political royalism was to be firmly located in the party political context, Cambodian royalists had to handle a series of tensions in drawing on regal legitimacy. Firstly, political royalists had to negotiate a tension between royalism as a suprapolitical force versus royalism pertaining to a particular political party. Whilst a tension between a suprapolitical and partisan role is something monarchies in the region, and elsewhere, have had to confront following the end of absolute monarchies, then in contexts such as Thailand, the claim of Thai royals to be unambiguously 'above politics' has been crucial to support their ability to intervene on the national political scene.⁵³¹ In Cambodia, by contrast, political royalists sought to legitimate their role as party political actors. Yet royalist legitimacy continued to be bound up primarily with royalism as a suprapolitical force, which limited the agency of FUNCINPEC as a partisan political actor. Since royalist nationalism was increasingly bound up with the idea of a supra-political conscience, this eclipsed the political party form of royalism.

⁵³¹ Winichakul (2008): 15.

Secondly, reconciliation of kingship with a party political form of royalism was problematised by how the Sangkum had uprooted the institutional monarchy and compromised the political involvement of royals. Whilst Ranariddh tried to overcome this challenge by alluding to ideas of embodiment and how he had inherited this ability by virtue of his royal ancestry, these claims were not only compromised by the fact that Sihanouk still constituted a formidable presence, but arguably also by changing conceptions of the legitimacy of inherited versus elected leadership. Both the CPP and the self-identified democrats advanced conflicting readings that, in different ways, stressed the legitimacy of elected office.

The failure to agree on the contents and mandate of political royalism helps explain why political royalists took recourse in the legacy of the Sangkum and the notion of Sihanoukism. Caroline Hughes argues that 'FUNCINPEC has attempted little in the way of adapting the inherited rhetoric of Sihanoukism to new realities. The party continues to campaign almost exclusively on the notion that Cambodian voters will always vote for the King, as the lynchpin of the nation.'⁵³² This chapter has suggested a more tormented relationship between political royalists and Sihanoukism. FUNCINPEC and other royalist parties relied so heavily on a Sihanoukist language that they reinvented Sihanoukism in different ways. Sihanoukism provided the language for negotiating change as royalists imbued their reading of the Sangkum-era with particular meanings in order to transpose them onto the present era. Yet reflecting the paucity of underlying vision, the resulting bids were increasingly void of meaning and equally unsuited to new realities. These references meant hugely different things in the contemporary context than during the Sangkum. Ranariddh remodelled Sihanouk's ideas of a national union and middle path to justify cooperation with the ruling CPP. This compromised the royal stance of Ranariddh and split FUNCINPEC internally. The hostility to the idea of an opposition entailed the abandonment of a domestic identity as 'nationalist opposition'.⁵³³ Royalism was left hovering in the middle, neither leader, nor opposition. Moreover, FUNCINPEC under Ranariddh continuously referred to the ability to provide as an integral part of democratic legitimacy, in spite of the fact that the party did not have the means to

⁵³² Hughes (2009): 50.

⁵³³ Hughes (2001c): 311–12.

deliver on it. When the royalists were outperformed by the CPP, who had the material base to fulfill this logic, it therefore led to a real democratic deficit. This highlights the importance of a material base for regal legitimacy and, particularly, to back up claims to embodiment. The real ability to provide, and to make decisions, more convincingly supports claims to embody the nation than references to an intangible, innate ability.

Finally, attempts to inject meaning to royalism through offering an ideological identity highlighted tensions as to what extent Sihanoukism, and the legacy of Sangkum, was able to provide a party political ideological identity, rooted in deeper tensions in the royalist project between embodiment and doctrine. In this, Ranariddh's fear of disembodiment of the Sihanoukist legacy proved well-founded. Ultimately, by turning 'Sihanoukism' into an ideology, the new FUNCINPEC (under the influence of the CPP) could claim to represent Sihanoukism in a way that became complicit in separating political royalism from royal family members. The Sihanoukist legacy, as a practical manual for concrete policies, was easily and credibly taken up by the CPP. Meanwhile, Sihanoukism, as a doctrinal identity for the new FUNCINPEC, was ultimately unengaging, as it corresponded neither to a real ability to provide, nor to legitimacy through an inherited ability to embody the nation.

This suggests a failure by leaders of FUNCINPEC to reinvent their identity to make credible claims to representation. Yet it also asks questions of the limited options available to royalist actors, other than to draw on historical ideas of kingship that were ultimately ill-matched to their actual political role. The discourse of kingship, in this sense, provided a constraint rather than a resource. In particular, Sihanouk's ideological legacies were, in some sense, hopeless. The ambiguous mandate of the modern monarchy and political royalism left by Sangkum unsettled the very idea of political royalism as a separate force, and made it difficult for political party actors to move beyond Sihanouk and the Sihanoukist legacy. The celebration of Sangkum was indicative of a deep crisis of contemporary royalism rooted in questions of embodiment and representation. Representing the nation, to a large extent, became a matter of representing Sihanouk – the irony being that he was, of course, better suited to represent himself.

Democrats: Democratic Discourses and the Post-PPA Nation

Whilst all Cambodian political parties competing electorally in the KOC claimed to be democratic, 'democratic' was the main political identity of a certain set of political party actors. These 'democratic parties' (*konápák pracheathípatey*) included the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP), the Son Sann Party, the Khmer Nation Party (KNP) which turned into the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), and the Human Rights Party (HRP). This chapter identifies the nexus between democracy and the nation as central to their national imaginings, and explores the consequences of their particular understanding thereof for broader political imaginings and practice. It thus offers an examination of their nationalist vision through the lens of the broader reassessment of the relationship between democratic imaginings and the nation in contemporary Cambodian political discourse, which this dissertation proposes. Whilst previous chapters have outlined how democracy remained a crucial notion in rival political imaginings that tied it to distinct national imaginings in different ways, this chapter delves further into this nexus with particular focus on self-identified 'democrats'.⁵³⁴ At a difference from previous chapters, this focus here exposes national imaginings of a primarily future-oriented, utopian character. It also uncovers important similarities between the self-identified democrats and the CPP.

The democrats have disappointed foreign observers looking for domestic bastions of liberal democratic thought. In academic writing on the Cambodian democratic opposition, notions of 'democracy' and 'nationalism' are largely treated as opposites. The democratic opposition is understood to carry out double-faced politics – embracing on the one hand 'democratic', and on the other, 'racist', 'xenophobic', and 'ultra-nationalist' tendencies. Accentuating the contradistinction between the two, Hughes argues that, for the SRP as well as FUNCINPEC, the primary identity at home is that of nationalist resistance, whereas the primary identity abroad is that of democratic opposition.⁵³⁵ These contrasting tendencies in SRP party discourse are generally explained by reference to how the SRP plays 'the nationalist card', pinned

⁵³⁴ In the following, I will simply refer to these as 'democrats'.

⁵³⁵ Hughes (2001c): 311–12.

down as anti-Vietnamese discourse and xenophobia, to triumph over the CPP-led government, which is tainted by its association with Vietnam. The 'ultra-nationalist' rhetoric has been understood to primarily serve a mobilising purpose, as 'a strategic response to Cambodia's constricted political environment',⁵³⁶ or, more specifically, an advantageous strategy in rural campaigning to connect with the rural electorate.⁵³⁷ These accounts depict particularly the SRP as an opposition force that capitalises on xenophobic nationalism and makes inconsistent references to a democratic identity. This has served to cement the notion of 'nationalism' as an opportunistic and shallow category in contemporary politics, which stands in straightforward opposition to 'democracy' and obliterates any remaining hope for it.

To some extent, the distance between the 'democratic' and the 'nationalist' poles has been bridged by the notion of 'populism'. Un writes that, to critics, 'Rainsy is not a genuine democrat, but rather a populist manipulating democratic processes and norms in order to achieve his political objective: the capture of state power';⁵³⁸ whilst Hughes identifies the 'opposition' as heirs to a populist discourse revolving around the relationship between ruler and ruled and the defense of sovereign territory.⁵³⁹ The notion of populism suggests that notions of popular representation are key to SRP discourse, yet stops short of interrogating further into the particular way in which such notions go to the heart of the contemporary opposition – and state – democratic projects.

A look at the historical emergence of the democratic notion and contemporary examples of 'democratic' politics around the globe suggest that the juxtaposition of democracy and nationalism is unsurprising. Rather than a contradiction, the relationship is better thought of as a tension, which follows from the democratic project as it historically evolved. 'Democracy' means rule by the people. But in modern times, Michael Mann writes, democracy has come to mean two things: the first is the ordinary people, the masses; the second is the 'nation', or the *ethnos*, an ethnic group. This conflation between the popular masses and the nation spread

⁵³⁶ Un (2008): 105.

⁵³⁷ Hughes (2002c): 129; (2001c): 306.

⁵³⁸ Un (2008): 114.

⁵³⁹ Hughes (2001a): 54.

worldwide with ideas of democracy, as democracy began to entwine the *demos*, people, with the dominant *ethnos*, generating multiple conceptions of the nation and the state.⁵⁴⁰ The institution of democracy is tied to national forms of exclusion, and the entwining of the *demos* with the dominant *ethnos* has been a hallmark of the spread of democracy.⁵⁴¹ This suggests that surprise at the conflation between the two has more to do with contemporary Western dominant liberal democratic discourses, which no longer celebrate narrow, exclusive notions of the nation, but rather broad, inclusive ones of multiculturalism. Whilst Un and Hughes criticise the assumptions of the Western liberal democratic project informing internationally sponsored Cambodian post-conflict democracy-building, which sees democracy and nationalism as antithetical, they also reproduce these assumptions, or at least remain within their confines, by treating the notions as complementary rather than inquiring into how they are mutually supportive.

The conflation in democratic imaginings between representation of the people and representation of the nation has been a feature of successive Cambodian post-independence political projects. Mann argues that two democratic constructions of the people may be distinguished: a stratified people and an organic people. The view of the people as diverse and stratified underlies liberal conceptions, which posit that the state's main role is to mediate and conciliate between competing interest groups. Organic conceptions, on the other hand, view the people as one and indivisible.⁵⁴² Cambodian post-independence state and opposition projects have shared a largely organic conception of democracy, which views the people as one and indivisible, united, and integral.⁵⁴³ This mass has been imagined as the nation. The notion of democracy has remained tied to ensuring national preservation, whilst ethnic notions have been variously emphasised or downplayed.

In the contemporary context, this dissertation seeks to show that all Cambodian political parties have launched democratic discourses, parallel to appeals to liberal democracy, which share in common with each other – and with many contemporary

⁵⁴⁰ Mann (2005): 2.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 3.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*: 55.

⁵⁴³ Hughes (2001a): 45.

discourses of liberal democracy, whilst not sharing other important characteristics - that they tie together bids for representation of the people as a mass with a national vision.⁵⁴⁴ The CPP, since Hun Sen's rise to prominence which was associated with the party abandoning its previous Marxist-Leninist identity, has been understood not to have replaced their former identity with any other political identity in particular. This chapter argues that the incumbent CPP, under Hun Sen, has advanced 'populism' as a hitherto overlooked regime identity, claiming popular representation through a truly national form of democracy. It then turns to examine the ways in which self-identified democrats similarly conflated democracy as representation of the people-as-mass with the people-as-nation, whilst also emphasising the ethnic dimension of the nation. Their agenda was not an amalgamation of 'democratic' and 'nationalist' concerns, but rather represented an intensification of said nexus. This found expression in their core imagining of representing the 'people's will'. This provides an alternative explanation for why Caroline Hughes finds SRP and FUNCINPEC discourse to 'awkwardly' conflate what she considers liberal views of the people's will as an 'amoral and neutral construct facilitating the delegation of authority', with a view of the 'people's will' as a 'moral imperative to liberate the nation from alleged "traitors"'.⁵⁴⁵ Rather than manifesting a liberal discourse to which has been added morally-based, xenophobic elements, this conflation arguably stems from a political analysis that is rooted in a more fundamental conflation between notions of democracy and notions of the nation. This chapter lays out the negotiation of this nexus in democratic political imaginings and the implications of acting on these imaginings.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ Liberal conceptions that posit the state's main role to be mediation among competing interest groups underlie the liberal democratic conception of elections as expressing the people's will as the aggregate of plural individual choices, whereas organic conceptions of the people in possession of one singular conscience underlie a view of self-determination as the 'collective fulfillment of a moral duty', downplaying elections (Mann (2005): 55; and Hughes (2001): 544-45). According to this definition, all Cambodian political actors advanced discourses belonging to the second category. (Even if applying a minimal and procedural definition of liberal democracy as 'a political system where multiple political parties compete for control of the government through relatively free and fair elections' (Foweraker & Krznic (2000), particularly CPP and FUNCINPEC discourses, as outlined above, have opposed this in different ways.)

⁵⁴⁵ Hughes (2002a): 539.

⁵⁴⁶ Given the limitations of space, this chapter pursues a strict focus on the consequences of imaginings of democracy as popular and national representation, and does not delve

In what follows, I start by briefly sketching the ways in which the shifting meanings of democracy have been tied up with national imaginings in modern Cambodia within this framework. I argue that 'democracy' has been employed to support the nationalist claims of successive post-independence projects, which have in common their tendency to tie democracy to notions of people-as-mass and people-as-nation. I then reassess the way the incumbent CPP-led regime under Hun Sen engages in contemporary discourses of democracy, exploring its 'populism' in terms of how it construes the Cambodian people, the relationship between the people and the political leadership, and the nature of political participation. I then turn to examine the democratic imaginings of the self-identified democrats. These have responded to and contested the practices of 'people's democracy', which, for them, were symptomatic of the regime's alleged mutating communism. Building on their understanding of how the incumbent regime impacts on the chances of national survival, I re-evaluate how this analysis has produced a particular amalgamate of nationalism and democracy as mutually supportive. I then trace the consequences of their particular understanding of the relationship between these notions, in terms of: identifying the people's will, at the backdrop of a growing disenchantment with electoral practices in contemporary Cambodia under the CPP regime; projecting a national democratic agenda, whilst predominantly reading local grievances; and relating to the monarchy, as the relationship between former resistance, democrat and royalist identities evolved. Each of these has been crucial to the negotiation of Second Kingdom democratic identity, deriving from the fundamental problem of representing the nation.

Contested Cambodian Discourses of 'Democracy' and 'People's Democracy' under the CPP

Connors demonstrates how, in neighbouring Thailand, democratic imaginings and national identity have emerged in tandem since the end of the absolute monarchy. The Thai state developed a democratic ideology that transcended Western-style

specifically into related, prominent aspects of the discourses of self-identified democrats, such as territorial imaginings (see, for example, Harris (2010)).

parliamentary democracy, conceptualising democracy as an 'ideal psychological, almost spiritual, condition of the people and their capacity to be self-governing'.⁵⁴⁷ He terms this 'democrasubjection', as a disciplining practice of governmentality that has produced a 'Thai democracy', privileging dependent subjects over popular participation. In post-independence Cambodia, punctuated by discontinuity, there was never one hegemonic, transforming 'national ideology' of democracy such as Connors identifies in Thailand. The notion of 'democracy' (*pracheathipatey*) was firmly integrated in all post-independence political projects and employed to support the nationalist claims of each one of these, in ways following their internal political logic. Whilst there was never one national ideology, these different projects thus still shared the fusion of nationalist and democratic claims. As in Thailand, these different articulations of democracy, phrased as distinctly Cambodian, matched democracy with the needs of the 'people', largely viewed by the state as well as opposition projects as an 'undifferentiated mass of Khmers imbued with a set of inherited and larger than life propensities and dispositions'.⁵⁴⁸

Post-independence Cambodia clearly manifests just how closely notions of democracy are bound up with national imaginings, as subsequent regimes have employed the language of democracy as a bid for identification with the people, constituting regime brands of nationalism. Both Sihanouk and Hun Sen have portrayed their regimes as popular democracies, claiming them to be more truly 'Cambodian' forms of democracy than strict models of parliamentary democracy along Western liberal democratic lines, and sneering at the accompanying notion of a 'loyal opposition'. Sihanouk employed the vocabulary of 'democracy' (*pracheathipatey*) as a legitimising language when proclaiming the dissolution of parliament and assuming all powers through the 1952 Royal Mandate, ending Cambodia's first brief experience of parliamentarism by reproaching the parliamentarians precisely of 'playing with democracy'.⁵⁴⁹ Similarly, Sihanouk, when abdicating in 1955 to enable the institution of Sangkum Reastr Niyum which effectively substituted parliamentarianism, spoke of 'the promotion of a truly

⁵⁴⁷ Connors (2003): 2.

⁵⁴⁸ Hughes (2001a): 45, 48.

⁵⁴⁹ Baruch (1967): 6.

democratic system, putting an end to a situation in which the powers of government were concentrated in the hands of a small group of privileged people which you could not say that they represented the interests of the people, which they were exploiting. My end is to make the powers exercised by the people themselves [...].⁵⁵⁰ Sihanouk's direct democracy was, by definition, opposed to the concept of a 'loyal opposition', making itself out as a national union for all citizens, regardless of their political opinion.⁵⁵¹ Though not formally outlawed, the political opposition was pushed into clandestine action.

The Khmer Republic, Democratic Kampuchea, and the People's Republic of Kampuchea made successive bids for the realisation of democracy, tied in different ways to their nationalist claims. The Khmer Republic 'sought to build a new democratic Cambodia, free from the strictures of the past, and independent of French cultural domination', merging patriotic enthusiasm with democratic ideals in an 'experiment in Khmer democracy'.⁵⁵² For Democratic Kampuchea, relying on universal Marxist-Leninist and communist models, the assimilation of all nationalities into a 'classless Kampuchean people' was integral to the achievement of democracy defined along those lines.⁵⁵³ For the PRK, which emphasised the implementation of Marxism-Leninism as a joint Indo-Chinese agenda, the link to a 'national' form of democracy was more tenuous, yet there are indications that such links were attempted by how the regime built itself through immediately upon seizing control organising the people into the Kampuchean United Front for National Salvation (FUNSK), down to the local level, with the task of popularising government policies through mass movements.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 10.

⁵⁵¹ Sangkum set up its own 'counter-government' in 1966, tasked with making the opposition stance known to the government, which, in turn, was required to cooperate with the counter-government to 'accelerate democratisation'. Baruch (1967): 27.

⁵⁵² Corfield (1994): ix.

⁵⁵³ Heder (1997): 109.

⁵⁵⁴ Slocomb (2003): 161 quotes Heng Samrin in 1979: 'In order to help the people at all levels broaden, deepen, intensify their love of nation, to depend on themselves, to support themselves, to have awareness of mastery over their destiny and the country, to increase solidarity and consensus in activities to push ahead the revolutionary movements of the masses [...] the Central Committee of the Front must open wide and gather the important people, intellectuals, patriotic monks into the Front in all provinces [...].'

In contemporary Cambodia, the CPP-led regime is generally understood to pay half-hearted lip service to liberal democracy, whilst, in practice, contradicting its principles at will.⁵⁵⁵ What has been overlooked is how, parallel to his appeals to liberal democracy, Prime Minister Hun Sen claims 'populism' as the political identity of his regime, and has advanced the concept of 'people's democracy' (*pracheathipatey pracheachun*) as the base of CPP policies, as well as his own political thinking.⁵⁵⁶ The prevalent assumption, that Hun Sen has not put forth a self-identified political identity, is therefore incorrect.⁵⁵⁷ The notion of 'people's democracy' makes claims to popular representation through a truly national form of democracy, which deviates from the liberal democratic model. Despite its recurrence in public discourse, this concept has been overlooked by existing scholarship trying to make sense of the nature and direction of democracy under CPP leadership.⁵⁵⁸ Yet an acknowledgement of this identity is arguably crucial for reading regime practices, in terms of how it construes the Cambodian people, the relationship between the people and the political leadership, and the nature of political participation.

Hun Sen offers the following definition of 'people's democracy':

What I try to do is the best service for the people, the majority of the people who are the poor people. When we started the struggle to liberate the citizenry, we targeted the people so that the majority of the people will get rich after the genocidal regime. From bare hands we made sure that people start living again and that people have better living conditions. Our policy towards the farmers is that we have never taken tax from them. I have told my colleagues not only not to take tax from farmers, but that we must also intervene to help the people. We have to build infrastructure for the people including irrigation, roads, canals, house for the people, schools, and clinics.

⁵⁵⁵ Cp. Heder (2007b): 161–62; Peou (2000); Sanderson & Maley (1998); and Springer (2010).

⁵⁵⁶ Hun Sen, himself, explains people's democracy and populist democracy as interchangeable concepts. See author's interview with Hun Sen.

⁵⁵⁷ As is asserted by Slocomb (2006): 395.

⁵⁵⁸ See, for example, Hun, Sen. 2005. 'Selected Comments at the Graduation and Presentation of Diploma to the Graduates from the Asia-Europe Institute.' *Cambodia New Vision* 90 (July); also Hun, Sen. 2007. 'Keynote Address.'

People acknowledge that we are the one to end the war by himself.⁵⁵⁹ The old generation created the war, but we are the one who put an end to the war. Only this opportunity, peace, provides people in general whatever are political opportunities in order to develop society's economy. These are some of the points related to the basis of our policies, that is, people's democracy.⁵⁶⁰

Three points stand out in this definition. Firstly, the people are conceptualised as the 'poor', and particularly as the majority farmer population.⁵⁶¹ Secondly, social and economic development is cast as service provision in turn envisaged as charity, rather than in terms of the state accountability associated with taxation in liberal tradition. Thirdly, socio-economic development is integrated into the regime's peace-building agenda. The language of service provision as gift-giving, associated with different clientelist and paternalistic regimes in the region, applies here to CPP practices, which have been demonstrated to insert patronage logics into post-reform Cambodia's democratic system in complex ways.⁵⁶² These include the distribution of donations from the CPP to rural communities, known as *choh moulothan* ('going down to the base'). This strategy originated in the 1980s, when party cadres brought pro-socialist, anti-Khmer Rouge propaganda to the grassroots, until, with the advent of a multi-party democratic system, its meaning changed to bringing in donations, which were understood to increase in the event of CPP electoral victory.⁵⁶³ This has

⁵⁵⁹ Hun Sen used the pronoun *yung*, which can be variously translated as 'we' or 'I'. That the official translator at this interview chose to translate the clause as 'we are the one to end the war by himself', was presumably intended to convey some of the ambiguity of this wording, which could apply to either Hun Sen himself, or the FUNSK, which the CPP leadership has emerged from.

⁵⁶⁰ See author's interview with Hun Sen. This definition corresponds to elaborations on the concept given in Hun Sen's speeches (e.g. Hun, Sen. 2005. 'Selected Comments'; and Hun, Sen. 2007. 'Keynote Address'), indicating a consistent usage of the term.

⁵⁶¹ A notoriously imprecise concept, 'populism' is generally associated with mass-level unity, anti-elitism, and, sometimes, a 'trans-class' coalition wherein a charismatic leader appeals to the public with pledges of material redistribution. All of these elements figure, to varying extents, in Hun Sen's definition of his brand of populism, as is explored below. Other defining features of Asian populism, such as anti-intellectualism and anti-foreign sentiments (Mizuno & Pasuk (2009)), do not.

⁵⁶² Hughes (2006). On Thailand, see, for example, Anderson, Benedict. 2011. 'Outsider view of Thai Politics'. Presented at Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai.

⁵⁶³ Un (2005): 221–22.

been shown to be a crucial strategy for the CPP's continued hold on power.⁵⁶⁴ Hughes argues that gift-giving is not merely a transaction that swaps material goods for support, highlighting its coercive and symbolic dimension as a kind of 'invented tradition' that co-opts discursive and material resources whilst adding an element of menace.⁵⁶⁵ The integration of such practices of service provision cast as gift-giving into the discourse of 'people's democracy' means that they are not confined to their own clearly-delineated sphere of harnessing tradition to underpin contemporary political power, but are central to the regime's version of democracy as propagated to the general public. These practices are cast as part of a larger framework of 'people's democracy', providing the foundation of the diverse policies of the CPP-led regime.

The notion of people's democracy rests on an idea of national unity that intimately links such practices of social development with peace-building. Whilst the end of war in the above quote by Hun Sen created the conditions for socio-economic development, this socio-economic development is also vital for peace-building and the achievement of true national reconciliation in the wake of lengthy civil war. Rather than the PPA, Hun Sen therefore credits the socio-economic development associated with people's democracy, alongside the win-win strategy, with bringing about real peace and national reconciliation.⁵⁶⁶ Whilst the win-win policy targeted the reintegration into national society of political opponents starting with the former Khmer Rouge and later including other opposition forces, 'people's democracy' serves to integrate all segments of society into one national whole, and preclude opposition to the regime. Hun Sen claims to have studied how to end war through social and technical development from Malay ex-Premier Mahathir, who used rural development and poverty reduction initiatives, rather than force, to make the

⁵⁶⁴ Hughes (2006); and Un (2005). Since the publication of these two accounts, the CPP working groups have constituted an increasingly important and well-structured channel of assistance. Each of Cambodia's 170 districts has a working group, headed by one Minister. In this top-down structure, a Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the province level, a Minister or Secretary of State (SS) for the district level, an SS or Director General of Ministry for the commune level, and a Director of Ministry (or equivalent rank) for the village level. The working group generally visits their districts on the weekends, together with sponsoring business partners, to offer developmental assistance. Frequently, their achievements are broadcast in the media. See author's interview with Ok Serei Sopheap.

⁵⁶⁵ Hughes (2006).

⁵⁶⁶ Hun, Sen. 2005. 'Selected Comments.'

opposition forces join him, then brought his party to successive electoral victories.⁵⁶⁷ People's democracy is described primarily as the redistribution of land and fishing lots, non-taxation of farmers, and investment in rural infrastructure, including roads, schools, and health clinics.⁵⁶⁸ The *chh moulothan* initiatives, which offer benevolent help from government officials, are the defining feature of such practices.⁵⁶⁹ This link between development and democracy echoes regional discourses of 'developmental democracy' and invokes Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, which Hun Sen describes as 'a similar concept to' people's democracy.⁵⁷⁰ Development and democracy-building are explicitly put as different faces of the same coin, as the democratic political program has to 'respond to the *actual needs* of the people'.⁵⁷¹ Yet, reversely, this frames the very existence of a political opposition as socially divisive and detrimental to socio-economic development. Opposition activities act against the peace-building efforts in the wake of lengthy war, and, thus, serve to perpetuate conflict, perhaps even provoking a relapse into war. By inserting the discourse of war into the democratic debate, a particular understanding of an integrated national community is produced, which contradicts the principle of a political opposition.

The notion of 'people's democracy' can also be understood to provide a discursive and conceptual bridge in regime identity from the PRK to the KOC era of capitalist transformation. Hun Sen first developed the notion in his doctoral thesis on the topic, written during the PRK era, which discussed the evolution of Cambodian regimes and

⁵⁶⁷ Author's interview with Hun Sen.

⁵⁶⁸ Hun Sen has repeatedly stated that no tax will be re-imposed on farmers as long as he remains in power. See, for example, Hun, Sen. 2006. 'Visit to Bridge Construction Sites in Kompong Thom.' *Cambodia New Vision* 100 (May).

⁵⁶⁹ Hun Sen explains the difference between people's democracy and previous Cambodian regimes in terms of this *chh moulothan* strategy: 'The situation of flooding in Cambodia, when I was young I saw my parents crying. It is different from the flooding in Cambodia in 2001, 2002 and 2011. Before, there was no one helping us when we faced difficulties, no one would go to help the people. We have never seen any government officials or members of the national assembly during that time going to help the people.' (Author's interview with Hun Sen).

⁵⁷⁰ See Hun, Sen. 2007. 'Keynote Address.'

⁵⁷¹ Examples abound in Hun Sen's speeches of how he puts democracy-building in an explicitly developmental context. See, for example, 'Interview given by Hun Sen to Sam Borin from Radio Free Asia (RFA): 2 December 2002.

state–society relations since the time of the French protectorate onwards.⁵⁷² In the thesis, a re-reading of Cambodian history using Marxist–Leninist concepts and categories, democracy is firmly integrated as part of revolutionary history as the unchanging goal of 13 decades of a Cambodian revolutionary quest. The Cambodian revolution is laid out as but one continuous process over the last 130 years, whilst changing to respond to various evolving contradictions.⁵⁷³ Yet through these changing contradictions, democracy remained the revolution's goal – from its very first stage in the pre-protectorate era, when the newborn 'democratic revolution' (*padevott pracheathipatey*) is said to have been fighting for 'democratic freedom' (*seripheap pracheathipatey*). To consider just how far back Hun Sen may mean to trace the contemporary notion of 'people's democracy', it is instructive to look at the concept's genealogy. The term people's democracy first appears in the phrase 'the people's democratic national revolution' (*padevott procheacheat pracheathipatey pracheachun*), and refers to how the revolution, gone awfully wrong in the horrors of Democratic Kampuchea (DK), was remade through the December 1978 creation of FUNSK, the front which with Vietnamese backing would overthrow the DK.⁵⁷⁴ The specific meaning of *padevott pracheathipatey pracheachun* is thus defined as the elimination of Pol Pot's 'slave mode of production' to create a new political regime with a new mode of production.⁵⁷⁵ Yet this people's democracy forms a basic continuity with previous stages of the evolving democratic national revolution as one distinct phase of the *padevott pracheacheat*, linking it back to the very origins of the

⁵⁷² See author's interview with Hun Sen, as well as Hun, Sen, 2005. 'Selected Comments.' In the latter, Hun Sen describes his doctoral dissertation on people's democracy as a software, which, since one writes it oneself, one does not forget easily, seemingly casting the dissertation as a manual for later political action. Hun Sen's doctoral thesis was entitled *Lokkhānah pises day laek nei domnaukar-padevott Kampuchea* ('The Special Characteristics of the Progress of the Cambodian Revolution'). Parts of the thesis were published as the book *13 tusevott nei domnau Kampuchea* ('13 Decades of Cambodia's Evolution'), which is quoted here below.

⁵⁷³ Following these contradictions, the revolutionary struggle was directed against feudalism and the French during the protectorate era, against capitalist principles within a feudal framework and French influences under Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, against the continued fusion of capitalism and feudalism and US-neocolonialism under the Khmer Republic, until, eventually, the revolution was betrayed by the 'Pol Pot group'; it was then reoriented under the 'people's democratic revolution'. Hun (1991): 61, 76, 149, 172.

⁵⁷⁴ Hun (1991): 238–39.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

revolution.⁵⁷⁶ The difference from the previous stages of the revolution, rather than anything qualitative, is primarily that democracy is now a heightened priority. Whilst the *pracheacheat pracheathipatey* previously gathered to solve national problems and democratic progress was only gradual, in the *padevott pracheathipatey pracheachun*, national problems and democratic progress are resolved together at the same time.

In the Second Kingdom, the notion of 'people's democracy' perpetuates this close interlinking of democracy, revolution, and the nation, providing the language to negotiate the quality and contents of the transforming regime. Democracy is made out to form a continuity linking past and future regime practices – even though its Marxist–Leninist contents have been wiped away. Whilst the question of whether democracy is also intended to retain a revolutionary aura is more vexed, I would suggest that the answer is yes. By reference to his PRK-era articulation of this concept, Hun Sen puts democracy in an explicitly revolutionary context. Indeed, it would not be far-fetched to think of people's democracy as the latest stage of the evolving Cambodian revolutionary quest towards genuine democracy, in which the Marxist–Leninist stage has been superseded, yet the dialectic moves on undisturbed, so that the practices of 'people's democracy' are best suited to handle the new, emerging contradictions. This is perhaps most succinctly expressed in the phrase quoted by Anderson, 'Revolution is continuity', although in a very different sense to what Anderson imagines.⁵⁷⁷ Anderson uses this phrase to refer to the manifestation of what he understands to be a particular Javanese cyclical intuition of history, which, under Sukarno, turned the idea of revolution into one of restoration. In Hun Sen's account, on the other hand, the revolution is progressing and transforming as it confronts changing realities – so that the only continuity lies in the notion of

⁵⁷⁶ The diverse concepts introduced are *padevott pracheathipatey*, for the pre-protectorate era (p. 21). The term *padevott pracheacheat pracheathipatey* is first introduced for the struggle against the Japanese colonialists (p. 44), then consistently employed until the introduction of the term *padevott pracheathipatey pracheachun* for the remade revolution from 1978 onwards (p. 238). Hun Sen writes that, 'the character of *padevott pracheacheat* and the character of *padevott pracheathipatey pracheachun* has the same meaning and have to be solved at the same time [...] saving the nation and getting rid of the reactionary, controlling head of the machine, getting rid of the influence of Chinese ideology, and of the slave relations of production' (p. 240).

⁵⁷⁷ Anderson (1990): 148, quoting Lance Castles in Castles, Lance. (1966). 'Notes on the Islamic School at Gontor.' *Indonesia* 1 (April): 33.

revolution itself. One of the clearest examples of such a changing revolutionary imagining is the complex image of Sdech Kân, discussed above, who is a revolutionary primarily in the sense that he does away with the notion of hereditary leadership, yet ultimately is a king himself. Indeed, Sdech Kân is said to have introduced precisely 'people's democracy' as the first democratic beliefs in world history.⁵⁷⁸ This narrative thus offers a new genealogy of the notion. It posits social mobility as a central component of democracy, amplifying the CPP leaders' frequent stress on their simple origins. In advancing it, Hun Sen responds to a new contradiction – posed by the principle of the monarchy – which emerged as a novel threat to the CPP in the KOC, arguing in the language of revolution and democracy, if not from the perspective of Marxism–Leninism.

By perpetuating revolutionary language with modified meanings, the notion of 'people's democracy' allows the regime to retain a separate identity from Western liberal democracies – thus responding to the second novel threat posed by the post-1993 framework. The transformation into a new political and economic system is managed precisely through the reorientation of the notion of 'people's democracy' to frame the novel regime practices – such as gift-giving – associated therewith.⁵⁷⁹ Hun Sen contrasts 'people's democracy' with the 'feudal forms of democracy' (*pracheathipatey sâkdephoum*) of capitalists.⁵⁸⁰ This serves to guarantee that no other country can be a democratic model for Cambodia. Yet capitalist development under the regime follows no Marxist model, and, consequently, its language must metamorphose to accommodate the shifting class composition and increasing social stratification resulting from the particular capitalist development under the KOC. Hun Sen reconciles this by arguing that there necessarily needs to be differences in income to carry out different roles in society:

⁵⁷⁸ Hun (2007): iii.

⁵⁷⁹ Hughes (2006): 469 traces the practices of gift-giving to the beginning of Cambodia's political and economic reform processes, around 1989, when policies of resource extraction emerged as an imperative for the government.

⁵⁸⁰ Although the fusion of capitalist and feudal systems may seem odd according to orthodox Marxist analysis, this is in line with Hun Sen's previous analysis of society under Sangkum Reastr Niyum and the Khmer Republic, which were both said to contain capitalist principles within a feudal framework. Hun (1991): 108; 146.

Please don't confuse the people's democracy that we are implementing with that of the Pol Pot regime. Pol Pot used the word democracy in order to make all people live equally. In order to have them live equally, they made the rich become poor. Now we cannot stop the establishment of the middle class. There is still a big gap between the middle class and the poor people, which remain at 26% in Cambodia. But we cannot make the rich become poor. We need to use the rich people to pay tax, and then take this tax to serve the poor people. In the world there is no country where all people live equally and that all people are the boss. If all people are the boss, then no one will become the workers. If there are no rich people to build the factories, how could we have the workers? We need to make use of the rich, so that they use the capital for investment. Then the poor people have work to do, and generate income. [...] We have to try our best to reconcile, so that the rich will not become the enemy of the poor, and the poor will not become the enemy of the rich. We have to make a reconciliation so that the rich and poor share with each other for the sake of national development.

Here, Hun Sen appeals to a middle ground, reminiscent of the Sihanoukist third way, between a full-fledged capitalist system associated with liberal democracies, and the other extreme – extreme communism, such as that under Democratic Kampuchea. People's democracy is formulated in opposition to the 'democracies of capitalist people', and its associated practices, therefore, serve to imply a measure of egalitarianism and conceal resulting tensions.

In spite of how it aims to bestow continuity on the regime from its previous Marxist-Leninist identity, 'populism' can be understood to primarily fill the shoes of this previous ideology. 'Populism' is particularly tied to Hun Sen and his rise within the CPP, which was associated with the pushing aside of Marxist-Leninist ideology. As part of this, pragmatic technocrats came to replace previous Marxist-Leninist ideologues in government.⁵⁸¹ 'Populism' and 'people's democracy' are referred to as the regime identity by the Prime Minister, and the government circles close to him, many of whom were originally part of the pragmatic technocrats rising to power with

⁵⁸¹ Heder (2007b): 159.

him during the PRK.⁵⁸² Meanwhile, parts of the senior membership of the CPP who are not part of these circles, still claim a Marxist–Leninist identity.⁵⁸³

This brand of ‘populism’ can be understood as a kind of supra-ideology, which transcends all other political ideologies and identities. It equates the CPP with the aspirations of the people, and, therefore, incorporates and supersedes any other political identity. This is made clear in the following speech by Hun Sen:

To my value, a true democrat does not have to declare him/herself so. S/he also would not have to claim oneself to be a true patriot or a true royalist. (If one listens to their campaign) we do not have a place because they claimed all – patriot, royalist, Sihanoukist, democrat, human rights activist, etc. What is left for us is populist then. In fact judging from our actions, what we have done so far has truly revealed the nature of populism, which stays as the Cambodian People’s Party’s true policy. It is a part of people’s democracy that is included in my doctoral thesis. We never self-proclaim to be so and so but our actions have clearly defined who we are. Our philosophy is clear that claiming to be so and so is not necessary. We belong to the Cambodian People’s Party and have implemented successfully the policy of populism. We devoted our attention on rural road. By end of the first decade of the twenty first century, we are thinking about making rural roads that we have built (in the past decades) asphalted. Whether the opposition consents to this action or not it is their problem. What we are doing is a true effort for advancement.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² See author’s interviews with Minister of Commerce Cham Prasidh; Minister of Education, Youth and Sports Im Sethy; and Minister of Labour Suy Sem.

⁵⁸³ For example, the Deputy Head of the CPP Commission for Propaganda and Education, responsible for controlling political thinking within the Party, claims that the CPP is Marxist–Leninist. See author’s interview with Ker Bunkheang. By contrast, Minister of Commerce Cham Prasidh, when confronted with this, dismissed this by reference to the CPP party structure, which has maintained a committee responsible for Marxist–Leninist education whilst ‘the government is no more talking about that [Marxism–Leninism]’, concluding that now ‘we have to just dissolve them [the CPP Commission for Propaganda and Education]’. See author’s interviews with Ker Bunkheang and Cham Prasidh.

⁵⁸⁴ Hun, Sen. 2010. ‘2010 Rural Development Review.’ *Cambodia News Vision* 154 (December).

Here, what the CPP has done equals populism, and populism equals what has been done by the CPP. As tied to Hun Sen, populism or people's democracy means anything that the Prime Minister says it does. This works by completely equating the nation and the people with the CPP – or perhaps, given how he is behind the notion, with Hun Sen, its Premier.⁵⁸⁵ Because of this, 'other' ideologies are made redundant. A further strategic reason for avoiding reference to ideology beyond this equating notion is arguably that this provides less opportunity for critics to hold the regime to its own words, using the discourse of the elite as a vocabulary inverted for resistance.⁵⁸⁶ Populism under Hun Sen thus functions to transcend appeals to political ideologies. Yet, arguably, the divide Slocomb places between '30 years of ideology' (1955–1984) and a 'post-ideological' era associated with Hun Sen is meaningful only in a narrow sense.⁵⁸⁷ Hun Sen's notion of populism is, in fact, not dissimilar from Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism. Both notions serve to equate the leader with democratic representation of the people and the nation. Largely self-justifying, both Buddhist socialism and people's democracy have been primarily what Sihanouk and Hun Sen have defined them as. In both, development and service provision have been crucial for cementing the bond between the nation and democracy. There are therefore important similarities in terms of notions of democracy as popular and national representation, rather than ideology, per se, functioning as a core of political discourse which enables the leader to equate his political project with the nation.

This helps qualify our understanding of the CPP's stance versus liberal, multi-party parliamentary democracy. Hun Sen repeatedly claims to defend liberal democracy; and multi-party elections, which are integral to the liberal democratic process, have served as an important legitimising tool for the CPP domestically.⁵⁸⁸ Yet 'people's democracy', which Hun Sen claims as his regime identity, construes the Cambodian people, the relationship between the people and the political leadership, and the

⁵⁸⁵ Hun Sen's personal identification with the nation is also highlighted in his statement, 'Sometimes people wonder what is Hun Sen really [...]. In communist countries I was called a liberalist and in liberal countries I was called a communist. Finally I had to tell myself Hun Sen is Hun Sen. Hun Sen belongs to the Cambodian people.' See 'Hun Sen Moves Ahead,' *Asiaweek*, 21 May 1999, cited in Slocomb (2006): 394–95. This quote also demonstrates how 'people's democracy' transcends the past communist/liberal dichotomy.

⁵⁸⁶ Scott (1990): 103.

⁵⁸⁷ Slocomb (2006): 388.

⁵⁸⁸ Hughes (2009).

nature of political participation, very differently. The 'people' is equated with the 'majority farmer population'. The very existence of a political opposition is seen to pose a threat to an integrated national community, as it is considered socially divisive and detrimental to socio-economic development and peace-building. As a post-Marxist-Leninist identity, it serves to guarantee that the regime can maintain a separate identity from Western liberal democracies. This model of 'people's democracy' can therefore provide an alternative reading of practices that would otherwise be characteristic of the liberal democratic process. The difference between the two logics is not necessarily clear-cut. For example, Hun Sen repeatedly emphasises how his right to rule is a consequence of how he has received a majority of the people's votes.⁵⁸⁹ Yet these claims arguably collapse the distinction between the two logics, given that Hun Sen has repeatedly made out his electoral support as a consequence of the regime's socio-economic policies or its direct identification with the people.⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, elections have been promoted as proof of Hun Sen's ability to organise them;⁵⁹¹ and Hun Sen has repeatedly abstained from participating in election campaigns, suggesting that he is above the electoral process.⁵⁹² These latter dynamics are more closely in line with his 'populist' discourse of democracy. At other occasions, the presence of a logic in clear conflict with the logic of liberal democracy is clearly manifest, such as in Hun Sen's public disdain for the notion of a loyal opposition.⁵⁹³ The DIFID strategy ('divide, isolate, finish, integrate and develop'), originally applied to the Khmer Rouge as part of the win-win policy, is openly recognised by Hun Sen as a strategy he employs towards the opposition in general; and his stress on the need for integration into one, undifferentiated national community has been qualified by an accompanying threat that 'develop' may be

⁵⁸⁹ See, for example, Hun, Sen. 2011. 'Graduation Ceremony at the Vanda Institute.' *Cambodia New Vision* 155 (January).

⁵⁹⁰ See, for example, Hun, Sen. 2011. 'Interview with "Le Point" on July 14, 1998.' *Cambodia New Vision* 8.

⁵⁹¹ Hughes (2009).

⁵⁹² As noted by Hughes (2006): 475. For example, in his 'Interview with "Le Point" on 14 July 1998', Hun Sen refers to himself, Chea Sim, and Heng Samrin not as 'players' but as 'coaches', who, having produced a 'winning team', will not be changed and will not take part in the election campaign.

⁵⁹³ Phoak Kung (2011): 21, notes how Hun Sen lectures the opposition parties on his divide and conquer strategy on televised broadcast.

substituted by 'destroy' if the opposition parties persist in opposing the government.⁵⁹⁴

The contemporary opposition 'democratic' identity and bids to popular representation must be understood in this context of the current, and past, state project's particular ways of synthesising democracy and national identity. With it, the opposition can be seen to share an articulation of 'democracy' based on identification of the will and needs of the people. Like the CPP and royalists, the democratic opposition conceptualises the 'people' as the majority 'poor'; however, contrary to these it does not purport to represent a particularly Cambodian form of democracy, but instead, largely identifies with a global democratic movement - whilst following particular Cambodian conditions. In this, their democratic imaginings turned precisely against the practices associated with people's democracy, and most of all, its revolutionary heritage which they saw in terms of continuity rather than transformation.

Democratic Opposition Starting Points – Dictatorship, National Survival, and Democracy

The framework and institutions introduced by the early 1990s externally encouraged democratisation process, epitomised by the 1991 Paris Peace Accords (PPA) and the resulting 1993 constitution, were celebrated by the self-identified democrats as guiding documents for the new era. The UNTAC-era formation of political parties had been envisaged as a transformation from a conflict over fundamentals to an electoral contest between policy platforms. Yet political party contestation continued to centre on a reinvented civil war-era conflict over fundamentals, now one that revolved around contending interpretations and manipulations of the constitution and

⁵⁹⁴ See, for example, Hun, Sen, 2003. 'Selected Ad-lib Address at the Groundbreaking Ceremony to Build Roads and Bridges in the District of Khsach Kandal, Kandal Province', in which Hun Sen threatens to use the DIFID strategy against the political opposition, changing the meaning of the final 'D' from 'develop' to 'destroy'. This is accompanied by a range of overt measures to weaken opposition parties, including planting the idea of rival opposition parties as puppets of the CPP to sow distrust within and among them. For example, in May 2009, a secret conversation between Kem Sokha and Hun Sen was leaked, which the SRP interpreted as proof of collusion between the CPP and HRP. See the SRP cabinet's message of response, entitled 'The Sam Rainsy Party is the only hope when Hun Sen capitalizes on Kem Sokha's duplicity', dated 31 May 2011.

electoral organisation.⁵⁹⁵ The democratic opposition calls for the correct implementation of the PPA were concerned with establishing the democratic 'rules of the game'. To an equal extent, they attempted to establish the political arena as a forum of debate between the PPA signatories, where each actor would have voice and weight. As part of this, they fought to disseminate a historiography in which the signing of the PPA on 23 October 1991 marked the end of civil war, rather than 7 January, which is celebrated by the CPP as the nation's second birthday. The civil war era anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese framework was perpetuated as democrats continued to analyse the nature of the CPP-led regime as a communist dictatorship (*omnach phdach kar*), pointing to the CPP's KPRK and Khmer Rouge origins and that the regime had been installed with the help of the Vietnamese Communists. Politically, in their analysis, this was demonstrated by: the conflation between the CPP party and the state; the long hold on power by the executive; the interference of the executive in the legislature and judiciary; and the strong power of the executive over the legislature. Economically, it referred to CPP-led development, which left a bulk of the citizenry economically marginalised.

In their analysis, the CPP-led state was a puppet under Vietnamese dominion. Reactive to contemporary dynamics, it also built on deep-seated perceptions of threat to the very survival of the Cambodian nation and territorial state – a discourse that, in its different incarnations, has been crucially bound up with Cambodia's post-independence political trajectory. Students of Cambodia are often taken aback by the strength of these perceptions of threat to national survival.⁵⁹⁶ This discourse of impending national extinction has been traced back to the French protectorate, which constructed a heritage of 'national' culture centred on the cult of the Angkorean era, in which the history of the Cambodian nation ever since was one of gradual decay.⁵⁹⁷ Yet Cambodian nationalism emerged not only in response to French colonialism but was also related to Cambodia's historical experience as a sparsely populated buffer

⁵⁹⁵ Hughes (2002b): 165–68. Hughes draws on Giovanni Sartori's distinction between conflict over fundamentals and conflict over issues, suggesting that consensus over fundamentals, particularly procedures for resolving conflict, permits peaceful conflict over issues.

⁵⁹⁶ Cp. Barnett (1990): 101.

⁵⁹⁷ On protectorate-era myth-making, see Edwards (2007).

state between the Thai and Vietnamese states, predating the colonial experience.⁵⁹⁸ The resulting fear of national extinction was taken up by all three pre-1979 political regimes, most calamitously by the Khmer Rouge, but also by Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum and the Khmer Republic; and thereafter, as the Vietnamese-installed PRK seemed to substantiate the worst nightmares of Vietnamese hegemony, became associated with the non-communist resistance.⁵⁹⁹ As successors to the resistance, the self-identified democratic opposition came to voice this discourse in the KOC. They were concerned with protecting the territorial boundaries of the Cambodian state, and particularly preoccupied with Kampuchea Krom (the southernmost region of present-day Vietnam), sometimes aiming to 'reclaim' this territory, or, at least, to ensure the safeguarding of the rights of the ethnic Khmers living in that area.⁶⁰⁰

Whilst contemporary territorial imaginings warrant more academic attention in their own right, I limit myself here to consideration of how such perceptions of a threat to national survival inform democrats' understanding of the significance of democracy in the contemporary Cambodian context. Contemporary democrats have a real sense of an imminent threat to the very survival of the Cambodian nation, grounded in both historical and contemporary realities. Asked to define his perception of 'nationalism', prominent democrat Son Soubert defined Cambodian nationalism as a kind of 'self-defense', as opposed to a 'call for grandeur'.⁶⁰¹ This analysis places contemporary dynamics in the longer perspective of neighbouring Thai and Vietnamese historical expansionism, as a primarily geopolitical analysis of the predicament of a small country locked in a regional conflict complex. Sam Rainsy has offered the following comparison:

There are two countries I would like to compare Cambodia to. One is Poland. Poland [once] upon a time disappeared because of two big

⁵⁹⁸ Grabowsky (1997).

⁵⁹⁹ Kiernan (2001): 188. For an account of how the Khmer Rouge envisaged the revolution's role in this 'myth', see Kiernan (2001). See also Thion (1980); and Chandler (1983).

⁶⁰⁰ On Cambodia's borders, see, for example, Chhak Sarin (1966); the publications of the Cambodia Border Commission (2004) (a group of Cambodian exiles in France); and Amer (1997). On contemporary border contestation, see Harris (2010). On contemporary contestation over the Lao-Cambodian border, see Baird (2010). On Kampuchea Krom, see, for example, Keo ([1971] 2006).

⁶⁰¹ Author's interview with Son Soubert.

neighbours, Russia and Germany. You can understand why Polish people are so nationalistic – they fight for their identity, and have lost their country. Cambodia also. Cambodia is squeezed between Thailand and Vietnam, and Cambodia would have lost the country as a nation had the French not intervened under Napoleon III. After the French left, the process started again. The problem with Thailand on the one hand, with Vietnam on the other hand resumed. Another comparison is Lebanon. You cannot solve the problem with Lebanon within Lebanon. There is Syria, Israel, Iran. [...] Cambodia is the same. *Democratic or not, it is beyond the issue of democracy for Cambodia. It is the issue of survival for Cambodia.* It is the balance of power in that region. [...] This is the fate of small countries in the middle of much bigger countries. (Italics author's own.)⁶⁰²

The basic problem facing the nation is a threat to its survival – a problem more fundamental than, and analytically prior to, the question of the implementation of democracy.

Whilst not synonymous, the struggle for national survival and the struggle for democracy are imagined to go well together. This follows the democrats' particular understanding of democracy, which centres on the idea of the 'people's will'.⁶⁰³ Sam Rainsy has offered the following definition of democracy: 'The will of the majority can prevail. You do not oppress people. You cannot go against the will and the interest of the majority.'⁶⁰⁴ Whilst national survival is the most basic priority, democracy is a means to ensure survival. This follows from how democracy is equated to the will of the Cambodian people (who surely want their own survival). This view is laid out by Sam Rainsy, as follows:

Democracy will ensure survival because the will of the Cambodian people is to survive. So if the will of the Cambodian people prevails then Cambodia will survive. In order for the will of the Cambodian people to prevail, we

⁶⁰² Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁰³ Hughes (2002a): 360, studying the 1998 elections, argues that the 'people's will', as a core concept of liberal democracy promoted in Cambodia, has been appropriated by the SRP and FUNCINPEC to 'exclusionary and xenophobic purposes'.

⁶⁰⁴ Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

need democracy. It is interrelated – definitely democracy and survival is the same battle.⁶⁰⁵

Without democracy, on the other hand, the incumbent CPP would continue to cling to power with the backing of Vietnam, which would be continuing its expansionist march westwards, compromising chances of both democracy and survival.⁶⁰⁶

The contemporary period has brought particular complications for how democracy and national survival are to be realised. The situation since 1979 is considered to differ radically from previous periods, insofar as Vietnamese attempts at hegemony, through the power Vietnam is believed to exercise over the KPRP-turned-CPP, have penetrated the core of the Cambodian state.⁶⁰⁷ This has shifted the contemporary democratic agenda, bringing a new set of problems in relation to identifying the people's will in the post-PPA setting of multi-party democracy. This follows from democrats' conceptualisation of democracy as the will and interest of the majority. The power dynamics, whereby the Vietnamese and their 'puppets' control the Cambodian state, are imagined to pull a wedge between the natural harmony between the will and the interest of the people, thwarting the functioning of democratic institutions in the post-PPA nation and problematising the task of popular representation. The following section discusses in greater detail how the KOC's democratic parties have envisaged democracy, popular representation, and national survival. The following four sections then proceed to explore a series of problems and tensions arising from how their above analysis of the post-PPA period has borne on the relationship between democracy and the nation they have envisaged, and how these tensions have played out.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

Democratic Identity and Popular Representation

The BLDP, the Son Sann Party and the Human Rights Party.

The first 'democratic' political party to emerge after the PPA came directly out of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF), 'the democratic faction' of the tripartite resistance during the 1980s civil war, which transformed itself to the Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP) ahead of the 1993 elections under the leadership of 'Ta' (Grandfather) Son Sann. A short-lived enterprise, the party rapidly disintegrated, yet is significant, as the very first self-identified 'democratic' party in the KOC, with ties back to previous democratic projects.⁶⁰⁸ After the implosion of the BLDP, a similar agenda was advanced by the Son Sann Party competing for the 1998 elections. The BLDP political platform included individual freedoms and rights, the rule of law, elections, democracy, private property, and a socially-oriented market economy. The party was dominated by Son Sann, one of the founders of the Democrat Party (DP), a close confidante of Sihanouk's during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum, and later President of the KPNLF.⁶⁰⁹ His close associate, Keat Sokun, later explained Son Sann's idea of democracy as follows:

Son Sann was very clean and democratic. He taught me that doing politics is easy: *just do whatever your subjects want*. He taught me two things. Firstly that *politics should be to do whatever your subjects want*. Secondly that the *economy must be developed from the grassroots, not from the top*.⁶¹⁰

This quote clearly demonstrates an understanding of democracy as following the will of the people. For Son Sann and the BLDP, there was a clear and unambiguous way to establish 'what the people wanted' – through parliamentary democracy. This was to be accompanied by social and political development based on agriculture. The BLDP argued against excessive private sector development and based their envisaged

⁶⁰⁸ The BLDP quickly imploded over a split between Ieng Mouly and Son Sann, over participation in the 1993 elections. With the rift, Son Sann, Keat Sokun, Son Soubert, Kem Sokha, Thach Reng, and Say Bory were expelled.

⁶⁰⁹ Son Sann served as part of Sihanouk's team at the negotiations of Geneva, as Minister of Finance (1950–51), Governor of the National Bank (1964–68), and Sihanouk's Prime Minister (1967–68). He was also one of the signatories of the PPA.

⁶¹⁰ Author's interview with Keat Sokun.

rural development on the idea of providing the majority farmers loans against interest, empowering the rural populace through capitalist mechanisms.⁶¹¹ Whilst the CPP has styled itself as a farmers' party, politicians associated with the BLDP later charged that the CPP had been half-hearted in prioritising agriculture, which reflected the fact that they did not consider the CPP to have properly empowered farmers to be financially independent. Son Soubert, Son Sann's son, later reminisced about arguing that Cambodia should be developed from the agricultural base when debating the 1994 law on investment:

Sok An said that this is Khmer Rouge ideology. I said, you travelled around the world but you didn't see that in the developed world the farmers are the rich? You cannot build a sound economy if it is not based on agriculture. We have the garment sector – but there are conflicts. We have tourism – but it is volatile. We cannot base our economy on these.⁶¹²

The BLDP styled itself the latest avatar of an indigenous democratic tradition. The credibility of this claim was anchored in how the party leadership originated from the KPRLF and the DP. Son Sann was one of the founders of the DP, before becoming Sihanouk's trusted aide and Prime Minister.⁶¹³ The Vice President of BLDP, Ieng Mouly, had been an activist for the DP as a student in Cambodia in the early 1970s, thereafter joining Son Sann in France.⁶¹⁴ Both were founding members of the KPRLF. Apart from through these two individuals, the BLDP could claim continuity with the old DP, primarily through virtue of being the successor of the KPRLF, the

⁶¹¹ This focus was reflected in the portfolios assigned to the BLDP in 1993: 'Rural Development', headed by the late General Thach Reng; 'Youth, Sports and Women's Affairs', headed by Keat Sokun; and 'Parliamentary Affairs', under Say Bory.

⁶¹² Author's interview with Son Soubert.

⁶¹³ Chandler (2000): 188; and Chandler (1991): 167. After Son Sann retired from government in 1969, he maintained a neutral stance between the Democratic Party, which was revived during the Khmer Republic, and Sihanouk, so as to be able to mediate between them. Cp Chandler (1991): 230–31.

⁶¹⁴ Ieng Mouly had worked with Chau Sau, President of the DP since 1973, which convinced Son Sann to make Ieng Mouly a close associate. Author's interview with Ieng Mouly, [17 Nov. 2009].

leadership of which formed more of a direct line with the old DP than that of the BLDP.⁶¹⁵

In leadership imaginations, such a continuity stretching from the DP to BLDP existed. The DP had 'promoted a notion of political authority as appropriately democratically legitimised' with a platform that demanded independence and democracy and attacked nepotism and corruption, and they envisaged the post-colonial state to achieve a 'European-type parliamentary system with a maximum of democratic rights', with constitutionalism the foremost political principle of the nation.⁶¹⁶ In between, the KPRLF's main identity had been anti-Vietnamese and anti-communist, with a platform limited to outlining future parliamentary elections and building a market economy. Son Sann's son, Son Soubert, later identified the continuity stretching from the DP to BLDP in terms of the belief in 'democratic values' based on parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy.⁶¹⁷ The BLDP set out to build an identity as the DP's successor party, manifest in its claim when registering the party to be a descendant of the DP. Even the BLDP party symbol, created by Ieng Mouly, suggested a straightforward genealogy; it was a fusion of the symbols of the DP and the KPRLF – an elephant head with three lotuses, symbolising the three Buddhist gems, or the trinity of nation, religion, king, over Angkor Wat. The search for an earlier democratic identity was also reflected in the party name. According to Ieng Mouly, *Democratic* was meant to reflect that the platform was built around the old DP platform, including the belief in popular rule, whereas *Buddhist* was meant to indicate that it represented the majority-Buddhist people with the connotations of 'traditional' morality this bestowed.

⁶¹⁵ Most of the top leadership of the KPRLF came from the DP, including President Son Sann, former DP Prime Minister Huy Kanthoul, former DP Prime Minister Chean Vam, Chay Thoul, Thonn Ou, and Nuong Kimmy. These were members of an informal committee of 'wise men', established as a consulting body by Son Sann. In this committee, only Sohan Kuyoy had not been a member of the DP. See author's interview with Huy Vora. A majority of these leaders did not become members of the BLDP, both because of their age, as well as the factionalism that had resulted in Sak Sutsakhan breaking away to found the rival Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ahead of the 1993 elections.

⁶¹⁶ Hughes (2009): 35, quoting Chandler (1991): 36, 38 and Vickery (1982): 91.

⁶¹⁷ Author's interview with Son Soubert.

The third keyword, *Liberal*, referred to the belief in a liberal democratic system, of which economic liberalisation was a key component.⁶¹⁸ Cambodia's ongoing transition to a free market system provided the main impetus to fine-tune the party identity to contemporary realities. The party leaders were concerned about how the emerging free market economy threatened to derail into wild capitalism. The BLDP advocated a social market economy, inspired by a German Christian democratic model. They envisaged this to prevent the excesses of an unregulated market and accommodate dialogue between leaders of enterprises and workers.⁶¹⁹

The 2008 creation of the Human Rights Party (HRP), appeared as a resurrected BLDP in terms of its leadership, which comprised Son Soubert and Keat Sokun, rallying behind Kem Sokha.⁶²⁰ HRP has since carried itself as a revived BLDP, carrying on the same reform philosophy indicting corruption under 'communist'-style capitalist transformation, reflected in the party's four main policies: targeting living conditions, economics, and social affairs; protecting human rights and strengthening citizens' power; abolishing 'the dictatorship'; and fostering domestic and international cooperation.⁶²¹ It also refers to a conception of leadership in which the leaders are the servants of the people, reflected in the HRP motto, which is identical

⁶¹⁸ Author's interview with Ieng Mouly, [17 Nov. 2009].

⁶¹⁹ The influence provided to Son Sann and Son Soubert by German Christian and liberal democrats is reflected in their ties to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, associated with the German centre-right Christian Democratic Union, and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, associated with the German liberal Free Democratic Party. Son Soubert also became a member of the Moral Re-Armament movement in the 1970s, a movement with Christian roots that cast off its religious mantle and transformed into a network of people with an animating idea, described by Soubert as, 'a process of change, through changing individuals changing family and then society'. This suggests the broader influence of centrist European ideas of democracy. Author's interview with Son Soubert.

⁶²⁰ Son Soubert was the son of the late Son Sann. Keat Sokun had supported the KPNLF from Sydney during the PRK, returning to Cambodia to become BLDP Minister of Youth, Sports and Women's Affairs in 1993. Kem Sokha had worked for the KPNLF in the early 1980s, and became a BLDP Member of Parliament for Takeo in 1993, then Party Secretary of BLDP in 1994. He later created the Cambodian Commission of Human Rights in 2002, building his reputation through this independent NGO. All three had sided with Son Sann in 1995 and joined in the creation of the Son Sann Party. They were joined by Pen Sovann, the disgruntled former PRK Prime Minister.

⁶²¹ HRP, Policy.

to that of KPRLF – ‘to serve, to defend and to build’.⁶²² The HRP has continued the focus on agriculture, carrying itself as a farmer’s party, and its leader, Kem Sokha, claims privileged knowledge of farmers’ needs by virtue of his farmer’s background.⁶²³

A New Voice: From the Khmer Nation Party (KNP) to the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP).

The group that would become the main voice of the democratic opposition in KOC started as a small group of people without close ties to either the BLDP, KPRLF, or DP. The core was a close-knit, small group of former personal advisers to Sam Rainsy, FUNCINPEC Minister of Finance, around whom friends, acquaintances, and urban intellectuals without previous histories of political engagement quickly gathered. These included Eng Chhay Eang, Yim Sokha, Yim Sovann, and Chamroeun Ros.⁶²⁴ They had supported FUNCINPEC, rather than the BLDP, primarily because the party enjoyed greater popularity and therefore stood a better chance of defeating ‘the communists’; , reflecting how anti-communism was their main political priority.⁶²⁵ In May 1995, Sam Rainsy and his assistants were expelled from the Ministry of Finance. At first planning to return to Paris, where he had lived for most of the last three decades, Rainsy was convinced to stay and set up a new party. Many of those pledging with him were friends, and university and high school classmates of the core group, who became co-founders and members of the new party.⁶²⁶ Eng Chhay Eang later recalled: ‘We didn’t need to recruit members. We knew each other

⁶²² Leaders of the HRP believe themselves to have the support of most of the old KPRLF supporters, as they view their party as a sort of ‘resurrected BLDP’. Author’s interviews with Kem Sokha, Son Soubert and Keat Sokun.

⁶²³ Cp. HRP policy first point (K1).

⁶²⁴ Eng Chhay Eang and Yim Sokha had been close friends since adolescence, studying together from high school to university (both studying medicine), supporting, first, the Sereika, then FUNCINPEC, before both becoming assistants to Sam Rainsy at the Ministry of Finance in 1993. Yim Sokha recruited his brother, Yim Sovann, a graduate from the Institute of Economics, to join as Assistant to Sam Rainsy. Eng Chhay Eang was Secretary General of the SRP from 1999 to December 2005, and September 2007 to the end of 2008.

⁶²⁵ In addition, by 1993, the BLDP had already suffered an internal split. Author’s interviews with Eng Chhay Eang and Yim Sovann.

⁶²⁶ For example, several members were recruited by Yim Sokha and Eng Chhay Eang from the Faculty of Medicine, leading to a high representation of medical doctors in the party. Yim Sovann also recruited his wife, Ke Sovannroth, whom he had met at the Faculty of Economics, who would later become the SRP Secretary General (2008–).

from person to person.⁶²⁷ These university graduates could readily relate to Sam Rainsy's political ideas, which were conceived as support of democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights.⁶²⁸ In November 1995, they submitted the application to found the Khmer Nation Party (KNP) to the Ministry of Interior. When the party was announced, a number of senior CPP, FUNCINPEC, and other minor party leaders joined.⁶²⁹ The party changed its name to the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) in 1998.

Animated by contemporary concerns, the KNP shared with the BLDP a 'democratic identity' strongly equated with anti-communism. Its slightly younger leadership had grown up under the DK and PRK, and their political consciousness had been directly sparked by a bipolar Cold War analysis, which posited a communist system against the free world. Many claim to have been motivated by personal experiences of communism, such as Eng Chhay Eang, who remembers how:

In 1979 I started thinking about the new regime under the Vietnamese control. I thought that maybe it [the regime and its living conditions] was the same in all different countries around the world, because we were like a frog in the well. I researched in school and came to know that other countries were different. I found out that there are two different types of countries: communist and free [serey]. And we live in a communist country.⁶³⁰

In his autobiography, Sam Rainsy writes that his love for democracy is derived from when his father, Sam Sary, showed him photos of the Soviet crushing the 1956 Hungarian uprising, quoting his father's words: 'The absence of democracy is intrinsically bound up with the communist Barbary, this dictatorial regime which respects neither individuals nor the people that it purports to represent'.⁶³¹ Other KNP

⁶²⁷ Author's interview with Eng Chhay Eang.

⁶²⁸ The members included Thach Setha, Sok Seng, Kimsour Phirith, Kuoy Bunroeng, Dam Sithy, Yim Sokha, Thun Bunly, Meng Retha, La Thavudh, Haem Vipea, and Hao Sopheap.

⁶²⁹ CPP leaders included Kong Korm, Pit Thach, and Sam Sundun; FUNCINPEC leaders included Khieu Rada and Nguon Soeu; and minor party leaders included Cheam Channy of the Khmer Neutrality Party, and Bouv Heuw.

⁶³⁰ Author's interview with Eng Chhay Eang.

⁶³¹ Sam (2008): 45–46.

leaders who had served under the PRK regime were just as prone to make a communist versus non-communist analysis. Ho Vann had been cultural attaché to the Cambodian Embassy in East Berlin when Germany was reunified. He claimed inspiration from how, in Germany, the people had succeeded in overturning the communist system without bloodshed; thinking of this as a model for peacefully overturning the 'communist' system in Cambodia.⁶³² Kong Korm was another person strengthened in anti-communist resolve by his experience working for the PRK. Korm was recruited to the PRK in February 1979, quickly becoming Head of Political Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ambassador to Hanoi (1981–1982), member of the KPRP Politburo, and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1986 during the time of Vietnamese *doi moi* renovation. He claims to have upset the Vietnamese by wanting to negotiate with the tripartite resistance rather than continue fighting whilst negotiating, as the Vietnamese wanted, leading his position to be resumed by Hun Sen in 1987.⁶³³ In 1991 he left the KPRP because, in his own words, he 'could not live with communism anymore. I had a chance not to live in a communist regime and do things to have a new regime. At that time, I hoped people who came from abroad might help the country install democracy and freedom.' The only high-ranking CPP official to join the KNP, Korm became its Deputy President.

The KNP shared with the BLDP support for parliamentary democracy, constitutionalism, a constitutional monarchy, and agricultural development as cornerstones of their agenda, but radicalised their analysis to primarily focus on emerging economic realities, imagined in economic and moral terms of 'corruption'. Portraying itself as a reform movement of FUNCINPEC, which defended its original principles from the anti-communist resistance, it turned against the FUNCINPEC in considering it to have joined paths with the CPP. At the same time, party leaders widely perceived the party as representing a 'new thinking' to confront emerging realities of rampant corruption victimising the people.⁶³⁴ These political imaginings connected patriotism (*sneha cheat*) and a democratic conscience (*outdomkote pracheathipatey seri*) with protection of the national interest (*polprayoch cheat*), as

⁶³² Author's interview with Ho Vann. Ho Vann returned to Cambodia in 1996 and joined the KNP.

⁶³³ Author's interview with Kong Korm.

⁶³⁴ Author's interview with Eng Chhay Eang.

territorial integrity and natural resource protection. Deriving from their corruption-centred analysis, the KNP set forth 10 core principles (*kol noyobay 10 k*) as its platform, a manifesto on how to develop the country, which included income redistribution, forest protection, and control of illegal immigration and border encroachment in its anti-corruption agenda.⁶³⁵ In 2003, the 10 principles were developed into a list of '100 Practical Measures to be Implemented by a Sam Rainsy Government' under the five rubrics of democracy; justice and human rights; security; improvement of living conditions; a clean and effective government; and national interests and the future of our country.⁶³⁶ These two documents have served as the SRP's political platforms since.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ 1.) To abolish all violence in society, in order to guarantee the complete security to every citizen and real peace to the nation. 2.) To protect and promote human rights, as written down by the United Nations, and to practice free democratic beliefs correctly and truly. 3.) To abolish every form of corruption, especially to re-establish an incorrupt justice system in order to provide justice to victims. 4.) Promote social justice to help the poor so that they have living conditions that are adequate and dignified, increase the salary of all who work, and to help all of the citizenry to have equal opportunities in the building of one's future. 5.) To guarantee the neutrality of public governance (that is state powers in general on all levels), to be independent from all political parties, in order to serve the people without partisan discrimination. 6.) To implement the land reform (that is, reestablishing land administration) in order to protect the property of the people, and to divide the land that is free or that is being controlled by corrupt people and dishonest businessmen so that all farmers have enough rice-fields and land to support themselves and so that all families have adequate shelter. 7.) To protect Cambodia's border in the audacious aspiration to guarantee the full protection of territorial integrity. 8.) To solve the problem of immigration, i.e. foreigners coming to live on Khmer territory illegally. 9.) To end the destruction of forests and to protect and safeguard all national natural resources (such as fish) and cultural treasures (such as ancient temples). 10.) To reexamine and to reform the contract between the government and any independent company that is illegal and unjust for the people or does not serve the national interest. (See SRP, 'Kol noyobay 10 kh robas konabak Sam Rainsy' [10 political principles of Sam Rainsy Party], undated.) The contact person for the drafting of the political principles was the late Chem Chansada, though all came together to discuss them. Author's interview with Thach Satha.

⁶³⁶ SRP, '100 measures to be implemented by a Sam Rainsy government', 2003. This document was drafted and approved by the steering committee, after consultation 'with international and Khmer experts abroad'. See author's interview with Yim Sovann.

⁶³⁷ The party has debated brushing these up but has concluded that they remain as relevant as at the time of writing, suggesting that they are perceived as a conflict over deadlocked 'fundamentals' in the KOC. Among the 10 principles, only the original, first principle, to 'stop fighting between Khmer and Khmer', was modified following the end of civil war to 'abolish all violence in society'. See author's interviews with Tioloung Saumura and Eng Chhay Eang.

The main democratic opposition parties were thus made up of different groups of people with partly different histories. They shared in common a reading of democracy that focused on anti-communism, which, increasingly, centred on protecting those victimised by capitalist development under the transforming regime.⁶³⁸ Whilst the SRP can be understood to have reinforced and radicalised the agenda of earlier generations of democrats, the HRP's agenda was indistinguishable from that of the SRP when it appeared. The following four sections explore a set of tensions resulting from the relationship between democracy and the nation the democrats envisaged at the backdrop of their analysis of power dynamics in the KOC, in terms of identifying the democratic agenda, representing the agenda, and relating to the institutions of elections and the institution of the monarchy.⁶³⁹

'Reading' the People: Identifying the People's Will under New Circumstances

The first problem for the democrats was how to identify the people's will and needs. This was bound up with deeper tensions permeating democratic debates, over the question of to what extent leaders could transcend their personal life stories in their bid for popular representation. It would be hard to exaggerate the significance of social mobility as a component of the symbolic contestation of democratic imaginings in the KOC. As noted above, the CPP leaders often stress their simple origins to deliver the message that, no matter how elevated they may be, each was, from the outset, truly one of the people. The Sdech Kân narrative celebrates social mobility as the 'true' meaning of democracy. This provides yet another solution as to how to relate the body of the national leader to the body of the people – emphasising the

⁶³⁸ Unsurprisingly, the split of 'democrats' into different political parties, and manoeuvrings between them, can hardly be seen in terms of substantial policy differences. Sam Rainsy originally intended to join the BLDP after his expulsion as Minister of Finance, but was recommended by the BLDP to set up his own political party, both because BLDP was in government and because they perceived Sam Rainsy to be too uncompromising. The creation of the HRP ahead of the 2008 elections, according to Son Soubert, was similarly because of a lack of response from Sam Rainsy when Kem Sokha wanted to join. According to Keat Sokun, he and Son Soubert supported Kem Sokha in setting up a new party with the intent to create a balance in the opposition, by having two opposition leaders preferably join up. See author's interviews with Keat Sokun and Son Soubert.

⁶³⁹ In the following sections, particular attention is paid to the SRP as the largest and most influential of the democratic parties.

legitimate leader's birth equality with the people, with only social mobility, ultimately, justifying leadership.

In contrast, the Cambodian self-identified democratic project's claim to democratic representation of the people has been partly contradicted throughout its history by its elite-driven nature, entailing fundamental problems of connecting with the rural masses it has purported to represent.⁶⁴⁰ KOC-era democrats were similarly alienated from the electorate by their elite and transnational backgrounds. This was compounded discursively, by how the CPP made a point of portraying them as returnees who had escaped the sanction-induced suffering during the PRK-era civil war, which the KPRP, by contrast, had shared with the people, and that they were therefore oblivious of domestic realities. It was also compounded materially, by the CPP penetration of rural areas through the conflation of party and state, which made the local state function effectively as an arm of the CPP.⁶⁴¹ Looking back at the demise of the BLDP, Ieng Mouly later stated:

This is why we failed. We didn't make connections with the local pagodas, with the *achars* [Buddhist priests] in the villages. We didn't have the support of the people. We were only an elite group with certain ideas. The CPP, on the other hand, are in power because of their contact with the grassroots. You can say that the CPP are only strong because they wield power and because they have money. But they are in power because they have bases everywhere, on the local level. The government representatives in the village are also CPP representatives. That is why they know what people need and can provide it to them. If they need a school, they can give a school. You can say that they are corrupt, and we, we are not corrupt. But

⁶⁴⁰ The founders of the Democratic Party were a progressive group of French-educated returnees, and the elite-nature of the party was reflected in its motto, 'Use the elite to serve the king and the people'. Cp. Chandler (1991): 30; Hughes (2009): 35; and Corfield (1994): 10–11. Whilst urban intellectuals rallied to the party because of their ideological commitment to democracy, the difficulty of mobilising the rural electorate led the DP to instead employ strategies based on 'exploiting networks of local administrative control and through tapping into customary structures of authority'. See Hughes (2009): 34–36. See also Baruch (1967): 5, who, although writing from an explicitly pro-Sihanoukist perspective, was perhaps not far off the mark in arguing that the DP interested only a minority of civil servants, leaving the people indifferent.

⁶⁴¹ See, for example, Slocomb (2004).

since we don't have any money, we cannot help anyone. You can say that this is the *politics of charity* in Cambodia. They are corrupt and wealthy, but they give a little to the people, and so they help the people – that is why they have their support. People like us, who have no money, cannot even help the people.⁶⁴²

This statement is important because, beyond the awareness of having foundered because of failing to connect with local power brokers, it manifests the closeness, or even intersection, of the CPP and democrat logics resulting from their shared focus on provision. In the context of overwhelming poverty, provision is easily identified as the primary satisfaction of the 'people's will'. This quote underlines how deeply problematic it was for the democrats, following from the nature of the democratic project itself, which posited the 'people's will' as its very *raison d'être*, that the CPP's penetration to the local level gave the party the capacity to identify and satisfy people's actual needs, whereas by contrast, democrats lacked this ability.

The emphasis on birth origin, moreover, has even been employed for partisan rivalry within the democratic camp. Kem Sokha has claimed privileged knowledge of farmers' needs, by portraying himself as a middle ground between the two extremes of the SRP and FUNCINPEC high-class, educated leaders from abroad, and the CPP leadership from simple backgrounds and with low education. Kem has pointed to how, like the CPP leaders, he is of farmer origins, and how he lived in Cambodia during much of the PRK, and, therefore, understands 'the real problems' of the grassroots. On the other hand, Sam Rainsy, he has stated, is, with his aristocratic background, unable to grasp the situation of farmers; even referring Sam Rainsy's work for factory workers to an interest sparked by his higher education in economics.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴² Author's interview with Ieng Mouly, 7 Nov. 2009. Though Ieng Mouly's statement can be read as an attempt to justify his own involvement in the demise of the BLDP and his subsequent defection to the CPP, for whom he now serves as Senior Minister, this is arguably also indicative of more profound tensions in the democratic project.

⁶⁴³ Author's interview with Kem Sokha.

Ever since the beginnings of KOC multi-party politics, however, the leaders of the self-identified democratic parties were acutely aware of how they were set apart from the general public by their elite status and their transnational life trajectories. Animated by ideas of representing the people's will, they therefore engaged in a range of strategies to identify the needs of the people by understanding their living conditions. When Sam Rainsy and his assistants were expelled from the Ministry of Finance in 1994, their first move was to travel around Cambodia to learn about living conditions in different provinces, before establishing the KNP.⁶⁴⁴ Similarly, KNP co-founder and wife of Sam Rainsy, Tioloung Saumura, states that her political interest was awakened by when gradually starting to involve, 'Little by little, I [Saumura] discovered the sufferings of the Cambodian people'. Tioloung Saumura outlines hers and Sam Rainsy's dilemma as follows:

What our party does in really based on the needs of the people. Because we have no idea about it. Cambodian society is very feudalistic. You have a group of people with a very privileged life, who do not even want to interact with the rest of the population. It is like the Indian caste system – you are born in one caste and don't interact with the others. Especially for me, I am Western educated and returned from abroad. How do I know about their [the people's] needs? I have to listen to them, otherwise I have no idea. When I go to meet the voters, what should I tell them? In the beginning, I didn't know. I just had to listen. We have to listen to people, listen to the way they protest. Then we can find out about their way of life and their priorities. Of course we also try to influence them. (Italics author's own.)⁶⁴⁵

This quote vividly illustrates the difficulties involved for Saumura as a returnee, having spent nearly 30 years in France, in identifying the needs of the people that she aimed to represent. It is also significant that it explicitly situates the KNP and later SRP involvement with protest movements as responding to the specific purpose of the party leadership of learning about the people's needs. This, therefore, suggests that a conscious attempt to learn about the people's living conditions in order to help

⁶⁴⁴ Author's interview with Eng Chhay Eang.

⁶⁴⁵ Author's interview with Tioloung Saumura.

articulate their voice guided the leaders of the KNP to identify the party agenda. Just how pronounced a dynamic this was is exemplified by the manner in which the worker's movement – now forming a backbone of SRP support – was effectively created by the young KNP. In late 1995, Saumura was brought to see some KNP female garment workers. This was a wholly new area for Saumura, as she explains: 'None of us was a specialist on workers or unions. In France I always voted right-wing. I always felt very privileged. I had a good education, very high salary, working in banking. I was never interested in strikes.'⁶⁴⁶ At her first meeting with the workers, she was told stories of their mistreatment that defied her wildest imaginations. She convinced Rainsy, who was at first reluctant, to join in organising the 4000 factory workers by electing representatives and preparing them to strike, with the promise to pay their wages in case they were fired.⁶⁴⁷ When this indeed came to pass, a strike was called. The KNP leaders had the workers march the several kilometres long road from the factory grounds near Pochentong to the Royal Palace, in a singing and dancing procession that, according to Saumura, more resembled a feast. A petition was then handed over to then King Sihanouk to demand his arbitration, which was followed by a series of meetings in the Royal Palace between the workers, Rainsy, representatives of the government and the Malaysian Embassy. For Saumura, the significance of this event was the empowerment of workers who had been relegated to what she describes as slavery, reinstating them as citizens. Saumura particularly recalls one of the workers representatives with the words, 'She was just a simple girl working in a factory – she would never have dreamt of ever being allowed into the Royal Palace. This, I think, is really empowerment. This is true democracy. I think that probably we haven't realised yet the revolution this triggered in those girls' minds.' The democrats sought to identify specific needs and realities with the specific purpose of restoring all members of society to equal status as citizens, for democracy to be realised.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Particularly noteworthy, in hindsight, is Sam Rainsy's reaction to this suggestion, in Saumura's words: 'He didn't want to go. He said "What should I say to them?" He wasn't that interested. He didn't see the social worry that could turn into a political movement with repercussions for our party.' This neatly illustrates how crucial the process of identifying the people's needs was in shaping the democrat's political agenda, in ways not anticipated by the KNP/SRP party leadership itself.

This dynamic thus went so far as to some extent determine the selection of issues that would become the very cornerstones of the democrat political agenda. Even the shape the democratic project took – heavily geared towards popular protest – can be understood as a direct consequence of this quest for representation. The KNP and later SRP promotion of popular protest has been understood to inadvertently offer space for individuals to insert their own agendas.⁶⁴⁸ Yet this suggests that it was also embedded in the very nature of the democratic project, at the heart of the democratic attempt at representation, forming a response to one of its challenges. 'Reading' the people, by identifying their socio-economic needs, can be understood as a fundamental 'democratic' imagining of how to relate to the nation. To trigger change necessitated that the democrat leaders insert themselves in people's realities to channel their demands and empower them. In this, democratic leaders built on their selective knowledge to channel the demands they took up. Whereas Sam Rainsy and Tioloung Saumura modelled labour organisation on Western European strike practices, they were joined by an emerging group of workers' movement leaders who had learnt how to organise labour in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.⁶⁴⁹ This strategy of 'reading' entailed its own fundamental problem of 'legibility'. It tested to what extent the 'democrats' could purport to read the people's will beyond identifying the straightforward, immediate needs of particular constituencies – a problem that I turn to now.

The Limits of Electoral Democracy

Another tension emanating from the democrats' particular democratic imaginings was found in the realm of designing institutions that adequately represented the people's will. If we consider the democratic project to be one of 'reading' the people, this dilemma followed precisely from a problem of the 'legibility' of the people. The defense of parliamentary democracy has been a hallmark of successive generations of

⁶⁴⁸ Hughes (2002b): 174–75.

⁶⁴⁹ Progressively, the workers' movement was taken over by young returnees who had studied in socialist countries. The Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) became institutionally independent whilst the personal links between the party and the movement remained strong. Its leaders were strengthened in anti-communist resolve by their experience in socialist countries, whilst, paradoxically, they had also learnt socialist methods of organising labour, which they employed.

Cambodian democrats. Yet consecutive CPP electoral victories posed a formidable problem for the democratic opposition and made it suspicious of the efficacy of elections in guaranteeing democracy.⁶⁵⁰ Levitsky and Way have referred to the contemporary Cambodian regime under the label of 'competitive authoritarianism', defined as 'civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents'.⁶⁵¹ These regimes are 'competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents', through measures such as electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and state power.⁶⁵² In the Second Kingdom, elections have increasingly become the main or, as some argue, sole forum for political competition, yet with their own limitations.⁶⁵³ The democrats are acutely aware of what Heder calls an 'electoral system with many un-free and un-fair aspects', which he suggests, 'together with the CPP's monopoly of force, its control of the courts, its performance legitimacy and the patronage resources generated for it by the resumed economic boom, helped along by Hun Sen's benefactions to society', electorally marginalises the opposition.⁶⁵⁴

The central problem for the democrats was to make sense of why Cambodians would vote for a party that, in their eyes, did not promote the objective interest of the people, but instead pursued inequitable development, which impoverished the majority.⁶⁵⁵ Many of their efforts have been directed at ensuring free and fair elections, to correct

⁶⁵⁰ This suspicion is confirmed by recent scholarship. See above, Slater (2008).

⁶⁵¹ Levitsky & Lucan (2010): 5. The following argument confirms Levitsky and Way's argument that competitiveness is an important regime characteristic that affects the behavior and expectations of political actors under less-than-democratic conditions (Levitsky & Way (2010): 16), demonstrating how elections have served to reshape democratic imaginings and the political game.

⁶⁵² Levitsky & Way (2010): 5.

⁶⁵³ Karbaum (2011): 111.

⁶⁵⁴ Heder (2012): 113.

⁶⁵⁵ For discussions of the impact of current government policies on the poor, cp. Hughes & Conway (2003); and Pou (2012).

this alleged bias.⁶⁵⁶ Yet the problem of representation was seen as one that could not be solved by electoral mechanisms alone, since it stemmed from more fundamental problems at the core of contemporary society. Cambodian democrats explained the in their eyes counterintuitive electoral behaviour of Cambodians with reference to how they thought the CPP-led regime to blind the people of their interests through material as well as ideological modes of domination, creating a climate of fear.

Sam Rainsy and his supporters have repeatedly argued that the Hun Sen regime, in important respects, continues the politics of the Khmer Rouge movement they came out of, with the difference being intensity rather than the nature of the regime. They have summed this up in what is known as the 'three k', so named after the initial 'k' of each of the three component words of the formula: *khlach* ('fear'), *khlean* ('hunger'), and *khlov* ('ignorance'). The 'three k' has been identified by some as a Khmer Rouge strategy of government to ensure complete control of the populace. In public discourse, Sam Rainsy and other democrats have repeatedly charged that the CPP regime purposely emulates this model.⁶⁵⁷ In his 2008 autobiography, Sam Rainsy provides a lengthy elaboration on this, identifying, in contemporary Cambodia: widespread fear, through CPP-led politically motivated intimidation, threats and constraint forming a weapon of political domination; hunger, charging that the CPP prefers to maintain a 'link of subjection' with the people by offering food donations

⁶⁵⁶ The SRP advocates a number of specific measures designed to safeguard the interests of the opposition in elections, such as outlawing coercion into membership of any organisation, including political parties; reviewing the composition of the National Election Committee (NEC); enforcing a rule that Members of Parliament and Senators cannot be expelled for political reasons; allowing independent candidates to run for parliamentary seats; limiting the mandate of the Prime Minister to a maximum of two terms (or maximum ten years); and granting Khmer citizens living overseas the right to vote. SRP 100 measures, nr 6, 8, 11, 12, 14. Similarly, the Human Rights Party (HRP) advocates reforming the NEC; introducing name lists in elections; allowing independent candidates; having the Senate, provincial governors, village chiefs, and judges appointed by general elections; limiting the term of office of Prime Minister to two mandates; and allowing overseas Khmer citizens to participate in elections. HRP policies, principles 11–14.

⁶⁵⁷ For example, at the 2010 passage of a law allowing MPs to be charged with criminal offenses without the lifting of their parliamentary immunity, Sam Rainsy compared this move to the culture of fear prevailing in DK, which he traced to the 'three k'. McDermid, Charles and Cheang Sokha. 2010. 'Gagging MPs likened to Khmer Rouge.' *AsiaViews* 35:3 (September). See also Rainsy, Sam, and Rado Tylecote. 2006. 'Be vigilant' on human rights, warns Cambodian opposition leader. Special report: Rado Tylecote talks with Cambodia's opposition leader Sam Rainsy in Phnom Penh.' April 24. <http://www.conservativehumanrights.com/media/articles/samrainsy.html> (October 26, 2012).

rather than creating viable jobs; and ignorance, charging that the CPP does not invest sufficiently in national education, purposely resulting in the continued high levels of rural illiteracy and the absence of social and political conscience and critical thought.⁶⁵⁸

The purpose here is not to evaluate the plausibility of these claims, but instead to consider how this understanding of the contemporary social and political order, in turn, bore on the democrats' understanding of democracy in this context. Sam Rainsy has offered the following definition of democracy: 'The will of the majority can prevail. You don't oppress people. You cannot go against the will and the interest of the majority.'⁶⁵⁹ This contains an all-important distinction, and possible tension, between the *will*, and the objective *interest*, of the majority. Asked about the democratic prospects in a scenario in which the people are unaware of its objective interests, Sam Rainsy replied precisely by reference to the 'three k':

That is why it is blurred. The trick of the Hun Sen regime is to make the people poor, to kill the human spirit. It is the similarity between the Khmer Rouge regime and the Hun Sen regime, and Hun Sen as a former Khmer Rouge can understand that. There are three words of the Khmer Rouge regime that characterise it: *khlach* – fear, *khlean* – hunger, *khlov* – ignorance. This is typical of extreme dictatorship. To make the people afraid, and hungry, because then they can command the people by just giving people a bowl of rice, because people are so hungry, so poor, and ignorant. Look at Hun Sen. *Khlach*, [now] they are not *khlach* as under the Khmer Rouge, but still, the people are afraid of being supporters of the opposition. *Khlean* – [under Khmer Rouge] they will die of starvation. But the Hun Sen people are making people poor. They lose their land, their fishing zone, with poor salaries like factory workers, with commercial monopolies making an increase in the price of commodities. This is the new system to control the people through the economy, through the basic needs of survival. Then they depend on donations, on handouts, and forget the national issue. So Hun Sen can appear as a good man, giving donations,

⁶⁵⁸ Sam (2008): 228–29.

⁶⁵⁹ Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

while he jeopardises the future of his country. *He blurs the line*. It is why the fight against corruption, the fight to improve living conditions, to allow people to live with job creation, [so that] you depend on your salary, and not on handouts – all these are interrelated, then the human spirit can thrive because you are not prisoner of your stomach. But Hun Sen holds the people's stomachs hostage. (Italics author's own.)⁶⁶⁰

In this analysis there is a rift between the will and interest of the Cambodian people today, caused and obscured by the politics of the 'three k'. As a consequence, the prospects of democracy under the incumbent government are unsettled, and would remain so even if free and fair elections were to be guaranteed. Even elections without any irregularities, that is, would not suffice to express the democratic will and interest of the people. Ensuring the smooth functioning of an electoral democracy is therefore not the endpoint of the political game. This analysis concretely informs SRP political action and strategy, which, since the KNP days, has championed improvement of general living conditions, reflected in a party program that puts strong emphasis on physical security and food security, and includes demands for a minimum salary for teachers.⁶⁶¹ Cornerstones of the SRP agenda, including anti-corruption, improvement of living conditions, and job creation, are, as outlined by Sam Rainsy, above, not only part of a national economic plan, but also measures understood to address a particular democratic deficit caused by the 'three k' distorting the popular will. The larger aspiration of this political program is to bridge the artificial rift between the popular will and interest to set the democratic game straight.

The belief that the government purposely keeps the people in poverty is widely shared among 'democrats'. In this analysis, unequal capitalist transformation serves to cement CPP political leadership as an only superficially revamped communist regime. This, in turn, promotes a 'feudal' mentality under which Cambodian people have lived for hundreds of years. Sam Rainsy has therefore referred to the incumbent regime as 'neo-feudal' or 'feudal-communist'.⁶⁶² In this analysis, the changing

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁶¹ SRP '100 measures', 2003, Sections II and III.

⁶⁶² See, for example, Sam Rainsy's millennium message in Ahmad (2000); and Sam (2008).

political economy of the Cambodian state hid larger continuities in terms of the promotion of a subservient popular mentality. For this reason, the democrats not only objected to Cambodia's present development path, on the basis that it was seen to disadvantage a large segment of the populace, but, of equal importance was how they considered unequal development a direct political tool, uprooting the ability of elections to serve as an expression of the popular will.

This further problematised assessing the people's will, for which election results were irrelevant. Democrats firmly believed their own political faction to enjoy the people's support. Among the democratic opposition, there is widespread conviction that their own group enjoys the support of the vast majority of people. Why this is not expressed in overwhelming success at the polls is explained by a mix of reasons in line with the 'three k', ranging from tangible ones – such as the benefits involved in voting for the CPP – to intangible ones, premised on how the people, kept in poverty and ignorance, are unaware of their actual preferences. In this last line of reasoning, the people are beset by a false consciousness of sorts. This is given proof of in the following quotes by SRP MPs:

This government is not popular. They need the police to help with elections. Village chiefs are appointed by the party, and there are handouts through local government. If people don't support the CPP, they wouldn't benefit. It is a trick that was used by the Khmer Rouge too: fear, starvation, and keeping people ignorant.⁶⁶³

So far, our political platform is still very popular and supported by many. But we could not win anything. Since the CPP control everything, control the NEC. The courts are not independent. There is intimidation. People do not have access to information. Education is limited and the poor cannot afford newspapers. Only a few people in the towns can know what is going on.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶³ Author's interview with Son Chhay.

⁶⁶⁴ Author's interview with Yim Sovann.

Again, the purpose here is not to assess the various and complex reasons for the CPP's consecutive electoral successes weighed by an academic debate, which are to some extent visited above,⁶⁶⁵ but rather to consider how the democrats' analysis of the reasons bears on their democratic imaginings. The difficulties they identified in reading the people's will encouraged a tendency to equate their own agenda with that of the general populace, reflected in their often inflated figures of claimed support.⁶⁶⁶ Undoubtedly of strategic value, self-confident estimates of popular support arguably also reflect a 'democrat' identity that equals the representation of the economic interests of constituencies with enjoying the support of those constituencies. Put differently, there is the expectation that all constituencies whose objective economic interests are promoted by the 'democrats' also support the democrats, in turn; or, at least, were they to receive education on the 'real' situation, they surely would.⁶⁶⁷ It is in this context that we can understand the SRP's exhortations to voters to vote 'according to their conscience'.⁶⁶⁸ More problematically, this also highlights tension in a project self-defined by popular representation in assessing the popular will, seen in a discrepancy between self-perception and validation. In this sense, the democrats can only ever make convincing claims to represent a nation in becoming, rather than an actual, accomplished nation.

Their disenchantment with what they considered a fraudulent electoral democratic game and search for alternative solutions to represent the people's will and interest climaxed in the SRP discourse of 2011 to 2012. In self-imposed exile since 2009, marginalising the opposition ahead of the 2013 national elections, Sam Rainsy took a

⁶⁶⁵ Suffice to say that the academic debate evaluates the different elements of the democratic opposition's analysis. Cp. Hughes (2006); Hughes (2002c); Karbaum (2011); and Heder (2012; 2005a; 2007b).

⁶⁶⁶ Heder (2012): 113 notes that the SRP, in 2011, 'implausibly claimed to have 500 000 members', quoting 'Rainsy Still Atop Party,' *Phnom Penh Post*, 12 September, 2011.

⁶⁶⁷ The equation of economic interest and political support is proven here: 'Development under Hun Sen has made only 2% of the people richer – you will see that those 2% are those who say they are happy with Hun Sen's economic policies, because their living conditions have improved. But 98% say no, we remain poor, and we have become even poorer. [...] We know that the majority of the people are unhappy, so how come the CPP wins a landslide victory? It is through manipulation.' See author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁶⁸ The SRP routinely admonishes voters to cast their ballot according to their *outdomkote* ('ideal') or *monekseka cheat* ('national conscience'). See, for example, Sam, Rainsy, 2012. 'Message to the people for the 3 June 2012 khum-sangkat elections.' This admonition has been documented since the 1990s. See Hughes (2009): 36.

keen interest in the Arab Spring as a model for 'people's power' in Cambodia. In his analysis, growing popular discontent over inequitable 'communist' development created the preconditions for a popular uprising.⁶⁶⁹ The SRP quoted the Tunisian transition as an inspiration for 'countries under dictatorship as Cambodia', said to be awaiting a Lotus Revolution, with Sam Rainsy even paying Tunisia a visit to consult with pro-democracy activists in order to assess the possibility of such a popular uprising.⁶⁷⁰ Hun Sen swiftly retorted that he had come to power through electoral victory and would step down only if voted out.⁶⁷¹ Shortly thereafter, the SRP party congress approved a strategy that listed 'participation in the 2012 and 2013 polls while fighting election irregularities and unfairness according to our means', as well as 'popular uprising inspired by the Arab Spring and other forms of People Power if the forthcoming elections remain fundamentally biased and continue to seriously distort the will of the people'.⁶⁷² Rainsy later repeated his demands for a reform of the NEC and his safe return to Cambodia, charging that the failure to implement electoral reform could help spark a popular uprising, as the population would stop believing in elections.⁶⁷³ This demonstrates the SRP exasperation with the current electoral game, and, in particular, the extent to which the party found itself challenged by how elections contributed to the CPP's overall legitimacy.⁶⁷⁴ Their priority became stripping the incumbent government of electoral legitimacy, both external and internal. In turn, this was premised on their own party – as representative of a nation in becoming – representing the popular will.

Representing the Democratic Agenda: Determining a Political Identity

A further tension concerned the democrats' political identity. This section examines how democratic actors have tried to project their own political project, and, in doing

⁶⁶⁹ Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁷⁰ SRP Cabinet. 2011, *Sam Rainsy in Tunisia to Prepare People Power in Cambodia*.

⁶⁷¹ 'Hun Sen Issues New Warning on the Opposition Regarding the Jasmine Revolution,' *Cambodia Express News*, 22 July, 2011.

⁶⁷² SRP. Fifth Party Congress. 2011. *Resolution IX*.

⁶⁷³ Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Sam Rainsy's pronounced preference for electoral reform, as documented here, stemmed, in part, from his lack of faith in the material conditions for a popular uprising in Cambodia (i.e. lack of internet access).

so, also examines their political identity as understood by democratic actors themselves. This incorporated a tension between the localised and interest-based agenda which became distinctive of the democrat political project, versus the national agenda, which these imaginings emerged from, yet, ultimately, was difficult to project. Although the democratic leaders identified closely with a global democratic agenda, the democratic parties did not prioritise liberal democratic orthodoxy, and were ultimately susceptible to appearing fragmentary and personalistic.

In their search to identify the people's needs, filtered through their political and economic analysis of contemporary Cambodian society, the SRP, in particular, embarked on a process of tracing local grievances to defend the people's interests against the transgressions of transforming communism. In their analysis, Cambodia's economic liberalisation served only the political elite, their business associates, and Vietnam, whilst victimising the overwhelming majority of the population. Whilst they reacted to new realities stemming from Cambodia's recent development, pre-existing perceptions of a threat to national survival resonated powerfully.⁶⁷⁵ The regime and SRP political projects were made out as two different conceptions of development. From an earlier focus on workers' rights, land came to be paramount, reflecting the escalation of land conflict during the 2000s. Under the notion of *apivwoath kos*, 'unjust development', the development path taken by the CPP was made out as a threat to national survival.⁶⁷⁶ The CPP-led government's awarding of farmers' land to companies as concessions was contrasted with an SRP model of reinstating farmers as owners of the land and, instead, inviting investors to buy their produce for processing. At the 5th SRP congress, the party pledged to 'return to the Khmer people all the goods that have been stolen from it'. Land, the property of the nation, was to be returned to its 'true owners', the Khmer people, and individuals and private companies that forcibly seized land were declared 'enemies of the Khmer people'.⁶⁷⁷ Sam Rainsy claimed that, 'this faulty development is in conflict with the

⁶⁷⁵ Cp. Golay (1969). In Aceh, Edward Aspinall (2007): 952 similarly found that claims about unjust exploitation of natural gas resonated powerfully because they reinforced a pre-existing 'discourse of deprivation' that infused Acehese identity.

⁶⁷⁶ Cp. SRP, Fifth Party Congress. 2011. *Resolutions*.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, *Resolution II*.

Khmer people and kills the nation'.⁶⁷⁸ The SRP would, by contrast, realise 'a true development for the people', which included protecting its property, annulling land concessions and giving land property rights to every citizen.⁶⁷⁹

The democrats embarked on a process of tracing local grievances stemming from Cambodia's current development path, seeing each as a representative part of the ailing nation. In what can be understood as a parallel discourse to royalist conceptualisations, which play with the idea of the royal body as a stand-in for the nation, every local suffering 'victim' was interpreted as a microcosm of the 'victim' nation. For the SRP leadership, there was no conceptual gap, as they perceived the conflict over fundamentals in contemporary society as continuously manifest in local issues.⁶⁸⁰ The process of tying local, often rural, grievances to national imaginings was effortless – from the macro-perspective of the leadership, they were local manifestations of a national drama. Participants in urban protest movements with close links to the SRP have been found to be motivated by a variety of grievances. Hughes argues that ideas of 'innocence' and 'guilt' were useful in negotiating participation in such protest movements because they 'linked the problems of the individual into a plurality of narratives with great mobilisational power'.⁶⁸¹ Whilst the framing of specific interest-based and local issues as national ones certainly served to mobilise the populace, this was arguably a direct consequence of the particular democratic imaginings of the leadership. From this followed also the reverse tendency – to dismantle the national agenda into the identification of distinct interest groups, each to be represented separately in order to cater to its needs.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, *Author's Field Note*.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, *Resolution IV*.

⁶⁸⁰ Rural grievances are known to be reframed into 'nationalist' issues by the SRP, as they approach rural protesters in Phnom Penh. See Hughes (2006). Cp. how Hughes (2002b): 165–67 found that, whilst political parties remain mired in a conflict over fundamentals, their main function has been to produce political space for protest movements to press for concrete issues and policy, and interest-based agendas. The above analysis suggests that, in fact, the democratic leadership relied on identifying particular, local issues for identifying the people's will, whilst understanding them to be primarily representative of fundamentals.

⁶⁸¹ Hughes (2001b): 53–55.

⁶⁸² One striking example of this tendency is how, at the establishment of the KNP, Sam Rainsy suggested that Tiouloung Saumura form a separate women's party. She declined, pointing to how women make up a majority of the population. See author's interview with Tiouloung Saumura. This is arguably indicative of a more thoroughgoing tendency to split the political

This national–local nexus stemmed from how democratic contestation was imagined to remain over the fundamental ‘rules of the game’, the constitution and electoral organisation. Local grievances, such as land seizures, were understood in terms of how they ultimately amounted to a violation of the 1993 constitution.⁶⁸³ This had important consequences in terms of how the democrats related to a liberal democratic agenda. Observers have noted the discrepancy between the SRP political program and discourse and liberal democratic ideology.⁶⁸⁴ Yet, in leadership imaginings, there was no substantial conflict. The conflict over fundamentals was considered the national manifestation of a global search for democracy, and they expected Cambodia to join what they imagined to be a worldwide trend towards democracy. Addressing the conflict over fundamentals equaled the translation of global democratic concerns into Cambodian realities.⁶⁸⁵ This was reflected in the SRP’s affiliation with international liberal democratic associations.⁶⁸⁶ The concern for translating democratic concerns into Cambodian realities overshadowed any strict measuring of the SRP party agenda against liberal democratic orthodoxy, which was considered out of tune with Cambodian realities. Asked about the nature of SRP’s democratic beliefs and different tendencies within the party, Sam Rainsy replied:

agenda into representation of particular interest groups, doing little service to the development of one overarching political identity.

⁶⁸³ See, for example, *Cambodia Herald*. 2012. ‘Cambodia Marks Constitution Day.’ September 24. <http://khmerization.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/cambodia-marks-constitution-day-does.html> (October 26, 2012).

⁶⁸⁴ See Un (2008); and Hughes (2001a).

⁶⁸⁵ By contrast, Kem Sokha claims the basis of his ‘democratic’ thinking to be drawn from both ‘our own democratic philosophy’, in terms of Buddhist theory, and, since 1993, from global liberal democratic discourses. According to Kem Sokha, his intention was to change the mindset of Cambodians by educating them in the terms of their past history and Buddhist theory, which would be easily accessible to them. He claimed to include three elements in public speech: Cambodian and international history; Buddhist morality; and ‘international theory’, referring to liberal democratic theory. See author’s interview with Kem Sokha. Similar to the SRP, the HRP thus combined a proclaimed belief in liberal democratic values with a specific twist of adjusting them to Cambodian realities, yet was further removed from the liberal democratic identity than the SRP, which imagined its agenda to completely overlap with a liberal democratic one.

⁶⁸⁶ The SRP is a member of the Council of Asian and Liberals and Democrats (CALD), the Liberal International, and the Transnational Radical Party. Sam Rainsy has emphasised the SRP’s belonging to a ‘world liberal family’. See *Liberal International Newsletter* 228. 2011. ‘Sam Rainsy Meets with Liberals Across Scandinavia’, Senior party officials (Yim Sovann) stress how they have learnt political lessons from participation in these organisations.

This is too sophisticated. I think the base is – do you believe in the human spirit or not? [...] If you are strong, you are in the position to lead the people to stand up against something which is not good. But this ‘perversion of democracy’ is just too intellectual, it is discussing for the sake of discussing.⁶⁸⁷

This clearly shows Sam Rainsy’s weariness of (primarily foreign) accusations of diverting from the liberal democratic path. Further than this, however, it also indicates how the democratic struggle was imagined to go beyond that of implementing an ideology or doctrine. Since democracy was envisaged as transcending a political ideology, most democrats were wary of this language, imagining democracy to be concerned with more basic questions of the relationship between the people and the political leadership. Another SRP MP expressed it this way:

Everyone has an *ideology*, but sometimes you need to change the *mentality* because of great obstacles. We have to help ‘le petit peuple’ to fight against the rich people who abuse them. You have rights, to liberty, to justice, to land, to be confident. It is not Communism or democracy. It is the habit, the habit of how to live, and how to think. Now it is like that of the communists. I don’t want to speak about ideology, but about the habit.⁶⁸⁸

Since the democrats did not recognise their opponents as contenders inside the democratic game, effectuating change of popular attitudes was paramount. The envisaged means of effectuating social and political change through contestation of fundamentals was a call for change in popular mentality to a ‘culture of citizenship’, conceived as an antidote to the ‘beggar mentality’ imagined to be promoted by the incumbent government.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ Author’s interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁸⁸ Author’s interview with Ho Vann.

⁶⁸⁹ This reframes Hughes’ (2001b): 54–55 distinction between a ‘mystic’ approach, which emphasises individual change, and a ‘militant’ one, which ‘aims to ensure the triumph of innocence over the guilt through the reclamation of the agencies of state from the brutal and greedy by the innocent and oppressed’. Whilst she acknowledges that most reform activists are influenced by both, the SRP agenda would correspond to the one she has dubbed as

The SRP is trying to empower people as citizens. Not as subjects, not as beggars. Hun Sen promotes a beggar mentality. A beggar cannot afford to be critical. But a citizen is by definition critical, because he is part of the power.⁶⁹⁰

The discourse of citizenship thus followed directly from the SRP's misgivings about state-society relations, their disenchantment with the electoral system, and their belief that the citizenry, if allowed to develop critical thinking, would free themselves from the blurred vision that the policies of *khlach*, *khlean*, *khlov* had imposed on them, to clearly perceive of their interests and bridge the rift between their will and interest. The SRP has framed this as a pledge to move from an 'elective democracy' to a 'participative democracy', defined as a system 'where citizens continually participate in a decision-making process affecting their daily life'.⁶⁹¹ The SRP pledged to educate citizens about their rights and duties for 'effective participation in good governance and social development', through a civics and democracy education program at school.⁶⁹²

SRP leaders routinely express their belief in the necessity of profound changes in Cambodian popular mentality to achieve this culture of citizenship. In this, they typically invoke Western models:

We have to change the mentality of the people. We think that in Cambodia, the obstacle to social development is corruption. All political leaders when they were in power became corrupt. In other countries, they do not allow impunity, but here yes. So we learn something from developed countries,

'militants'. Whereas the distinction between these two axes of change is no doubt useful, analytically, the above argument suggests that a crucial part of the SRP agenda is to engender change by creating preconditions for the development of individual critical thinking among citizens, collapsing this distinction.

⁶⁹⁰ Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁶⁹¹ SRP 100 measures, nr 2. Relatedly, the SRP advocates measures of a 'direct democracy' type, including the promotion of referenda as a direct means for citizens to decide on major national issues, and the holding of a National Congress as a 'forum for the people to learn directly about issues of national interest, and to raise problems, and to make suggestions to the authority'. SRP measures 3 and 5.

⁶⁹² SRP 100 measures, nr 10.

civilised countries. We should build a new generation of political leaders. Like children when they are small. My son came to Japan with me. Now he still looks for trash bins in the street to throw litter, because he got used to it because of the law there. This is because of law implementation.⁶⁹³

To change the system peacefully, you need to change the mentality of the people. In Cambodia, it is like the traditional, ancient states. We need to educate and say – you are the people, the masters of the country's destiny. Every day, I have to educate the people that I meet to make them change the mentality. If we speak about democracy, they understand nothing. That is my opinion – we need to change people's mentality and especially that of the youth. We need to educate them about anti-corruption, how to fulfill their tasks as citizens. I have the technique, I am a pedagogue.⁶⁹⁴

I think Cambodian people are learning what democracy is all about. We have the exposure to Western thinking and try to introduce it to our members. Then it is up to them to decide, not us.⁶⁹⁵

This didactic element is per se not surprising. Envisaging democratisation as a change of mentality is widespread in regional democratising contexts, where elites have drawn on Western democratic theory to insert new notions of citizenship, in order to remould the relationships between populations and the state. These democratic notions did not straightforwardly emulate a Western model. In Thailand, Connors finds democratic ideology to have transcended the focus on procedures and form for notions of democracy in Western political science, to instead conceptualise democracy as 'an ideal psychological, almost spiritual, condition of the people and their capacity to be self-governing'.⁶⁹⁶ In contemporary Cambodia, as illustrated by the above quotes, the emphasis is similarly on empowering the people for self-mastery over applying a Western liberal democratic model by the book.

⁶⁹³ Author's interview with Yim Sovann.

⁶⁹⁴ Author's interview with Ho Vann.

⁶⁹⁵ Author's interview with Son Chhay.

⁶⁹⁶ Connors (2003): 1–2.

In Thailand, such notions came to underpin 'democrasubjection', what Connors describes as the employment of elite-defined liberal democracy as a disciplining practice to secure hegemony over the population.

In contemporary Cambodia, given that the democrats (unlike their Thai counterparts) are not in power, this dynamic cannot be identified. Yet in other parts, the projects are not dissimilar. Elites are needed to steer the process of this change of mentality; and the common good, which the ideal citizens are envisaged to work towards, remain elite-defined. In this sense, democratic elites have primarily represented a nation in becoming, rather than an existing one; a future nation which they have actively tried to create and shape.

The fuzziness in defining the SRP's brand of democracy was compounded by how capitalist economic development under the alleged 'communists' confounded political labeling. Tioloung Saumura explains this as follows:

You cannot position us within the framework of the western left and right scale. You can say that we are conservative, because we are happy with Buddhism being the state religion. [...] We are also liberal and capitalists, in our work for Human Rights, and in supporting a market economy. We see profit as the engine for human development as well as economic development. You could also say we are also socialist, in that we champion social justice – the reallocation of the fruit of economic growth on a social basis, which liberals and the most extreme right-wing wouldn't like, and champion workers' rights.⁶⁹⁷

In a context where political contestation increasingly revolved around the degree of state intervention in the market, the CPP has alleged that the democrats were interventionist, and, by extension, socialist or even communist. One CPP Senior Minister remarked, 'We are all capitalists. We either have capitalism with state intervention, or laissez-faire capitalism. It is now HRP and SRP that think that the state should intervene more. The old communists support laissez faire more, because

⁶⁹⁷ Author's interview with Tioloung Saumura.

some of them are rich.⁶⁹⁸ Hun Sen has intermittently insinuated that Sam Rainsy's accusations of the CPP-led regime being communist rather apply to himself, as Sam Rainsy is the one to suggest the state to interfere in the free market through centralised price-setting.⁶⁹⁹

This quasi-socialist identity was adopted, if not imposed. Several SRP leaders described the party as reluctantly socialist, solely because the CPP-led government had failed its task of providing for the populace. Whilst the appropriateness of liberal or socialist labels per se is less interesting, it is important in what it betrays about how democrats imagined a lingering contestation of fundamentals to distort the political landscape so that Western-derived political concepts could not be applied without qualification.⁷⁰⁰ The opposition had to first correct fundamentals, before moving on with a further agenda. Asked to define the party identity of the SRP, Son Chhay replied:

Sometimes it is so difficult to answer, because we are missing a kind of responsibility of CPP, because of government corruption. Taking care of farmers, workers, and unions to protect them should be their task. To look at it, our party is kind of socialist then. But as a contrast, we are liberal in our approach.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁸ Author's interview with Ieng Mouly, 17 November 2009.

⁶⁹⁹ Cp. Hun, Sen, 2005, 'Selected Comments.' 'A few days ago some politicians said if he were to get elected he would reduce the price of fuel to 3000 Riel per liter. He accused this and that of being communist but he have proven himself to be the one as he set up the price. You all are economists, taxation experts, accountants and auditors you may have a better judgment from what he'd said - what kind of politician and ideology does he belong to? In market economy, there are no impositions in terms of prices by the state.' See Hun Sen, 2008, 'First Cambodian Bio Energy's Ethanol Factory,' *Cambodia New Vision* 129 (November).

⁷⁰⁰ Recognising the potential diversity of tendencies within the SRP, once fundamentals had been accomplished, Son Chhay foresaw how, in the future, the SRP was likely to split into several groups, such as socialists, liberals, and greens. This reflected a view of Cambodian political society not yet sufficiently developed to contain these debates, and the expectation of a political landscape to which Western-derived political concepts could be applied to develop later. In this view, all these future groups were seen to represent different ways of democracy, according to the Western 'rules of the game'. It betrayed a conviction that each of these would emanate from the SRP (as other political actors played according to fundamentally different logics), which would not allow them to develop into the Western-style directions that the SRP would.

⁷⁰¹ Author's interview with Son Chhay.

Far more serious than Western-derived political labelling, in terms of developing a political identity carrying domestic weight, was how to make the democratic project appear as something more than a protest movement. The CPP regularly accuses the SRP and democratic parties of having little more of a political agenda than simply criticising the government.⁷⁰² The focus on local grievances compounded the risk of the democrat project appearing piecemeal, without the overarching national agenda backing up government development projects. It is in this context that the CPP strategy of pushing opposition parties to rename themselves after their party leaders should be understood, making them appear personalistic. In 1998, Sam Rainsy lost the name 'Khmer Nation Party' to his then pro-CPP deputy Kong Momy by a court order, and the party adopted the name 'Sam Rainsy Party' to prevent the situation from repeating itself.⁷⁰³ In a parallel fashion, the BLDP party name was claimed by two different parties from 1995 until, according to Keat Sokun, CPP Minister of Interior Sar Kheng suggested to rename it the 'Son Sann Party' ahead of the 1998 elections.⁷⁰⁴ Whilst the name change worked better for the SRP than the already moribund Son Sann Party (in terms of bringing party stability),⁷⁰⁵ SRP party officials are conscious of its disadvantage – making the party appear 'undemocratic' to foreign observers and marginalised to the domestic electorate.⁷⁰⁶ Sam Rainsy has tried to counter this by making a point of invoking his name as a stand-in for national values. Discussing the SRP success in the 2012 senate elections, Sam Rainsy remarked:

Hun Sen had been told by his advisors that the SRP with Sam Rainsy being abroad will go down the drain, the party would just disintegrate, because they thought the SRP was a one-man show. [...] But the senate elections are a demonstration that the party holds well, and that there are millions of Sam Rainsys in Cambodia. A Sam Rainsy is any person who believes in the

⁷⁰² See, for example, National Democratic Institute (2010): 9.

⁷⁰³ Roberts (2001): 176–77.

⁷⁰⁴ Roberts (2001): 178; and author's interview with Keat Sokun.

⁷⁰⁵ Years later, Sam Rainsy maintained that this had been the right decision, as it had allowed the party to remain stable, whereas it would otherwise have been split or destroyed. Author's interview with Sam Rainsy.

⁷⁰⁶ To counter this, party officials frequently volunteer to explain the change of party name. See, for example, author's interviews with Yim Sovann, Thach Setha, and Uch Serey Yuth.

values we are talking about – the desire for freedom, the desire for justice, and the desire for human dignity.⁷⁰⁷

The name issue is clearly put in the context of countering perceptions that reduce the party to being representative of Sam Rainsy as an individual. Whilst the SRP volunteered the name change, it has had to consistently counter perceptions of itself as personalistic.⁷⁰⁸ In contrast, the very name of the CPP purports to represent the Cambodian people, whereas the opposition parties appear as the factional groupings of single individuals.

Nation, Religion, King and Democratic Identity: Transforming (Post-) Resistance Identities

The 'democratic' identity in the KOC, as it had in the past, was articulated in a process intertwined with ideas of the appropriate role of the Cambodian monarchy; in this way developing in tandem with royalist ideas. Never straightforwardly correlated with a royalist or republican stance, the tension between limiting the powers of and defending the monarchy has marked the democratic identity throughout the post-independence period. As successors to a shared civil war resistance identity, this tension continued into the KOC between self-identified democrats and royalists who continued to come together in a joint democratic opposition identity over the contestation of fundamentals. Yet democratic and a royalist identities also developed in different directions, cementing themselves as two separate discourses in novel ways. Restricting prospects for cooperation, this would ultimately work out to the disadvantage of royalists.

During the PRK, the KPNLF and FUNCINPEC, although maintaining separate political identities, were united in their shared anti-communist, anti-Vietnamese agenda, which subsumed differences under an overarching resistance identity. In the KOC, political party contestation has been demonstrated to continue to centre on a

⁷⁰⁷ In the 2012 senate elections, the SRP lost no potential seats, in spite of the CPP being expected to attempt vote-buying.

⁷⁰⁸ Author's interview with Yim Sovann.

conflict over fundamentals, revolving around contending interpretations of the constitution and electoral organisation.⁷⁰⁹ The civil war resistance identity was transformed into a shared democratic opposition identity, uniting the opposition now competing under royalist and democratic banners, when there was the perception that those fundamental 'rules of the game' had been violated, such as at the 1997 July events, and repeatedly following national elections.⁷¹⁰ Royalists shared the core 'democratic' starting points, outlined above, which upheld the PPA and constitution as the yet-to-be-implemented-correctly framework for national politics. Yet, as has been argued, there was also a rift amongst royalists between those who stressed a distinct role for the monarchy and royalists, and those who identified more closely with a democratic opposition identity.

It would be incorrect to take the shared focus on fundamentals to equate the projects of self-identified democrats and royalists, even in the limited context of these demands. Even whilst fighting over the same democratic 'rules of the game', in terms of contending interpretations of the constitution and electoral organisation, this was argued by virtue of competing logics. By and large, royalists saw these shared concerns through a prism that, ultimately, accorded the monarchy a saving role in this quandary. For those who primarily self-identified as 'democrats', the PPA had value as a framework that prepared for the drafting of the constitution and the establishment of a multi-party democratic system along Western liberal democratic lines. For royalists, the PPA primarily proved Sihanouk, as President of the Supreme National Council (SNC), to be the father of national conciliation, without whom the contending factions could not have been reunited, and subsequent elections not held.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ Hughes (2002b): 167–68.

⁷¹⁰ The SRP, FUNCINPEC, and Son Sann Party contested the 1998 elections results jointly, and the SRP and FUNCINPEC contested the 2003 elections jointly, resulting in the creation of the 'Alliance of Democrats' (see Heder (2005a)). In 2008, dynamics were different, as the FUNCINPEC was by then under de facto CPP influence following the 2006 ousting of Ranariddh, and because of the rift between the SRP and FUNCINPEC following the 2004 deal between FUNCINPEC and the CPP (see above).

⁷¹¹ See, for example, author's interviews with Norodom Ranariddh and Sisowath Ayrvady.

The shared contestation over fundamentals is but the latest reimagining of an ambiguous relationship between democracy and the Cambodian monarchy, and examining it from the viewpoint of the self-identified democrats sheds light on the criteria that their notion of 'democracy' revolve around. From the outset, whilst democratic discourse targeted the power of an absolute monarchy, it has been a parallel, potentially compatible discourse to that of royalism, which, in its centrist articulations, envisaged the monarchy, if strictly constitutional, as part of its democratic project.⁷¹² Following the ambiguities with which the Cambodian monarchy evolved (particularly Sihanouk's political dominance during Sangkum as an abdicated monarch), the Cambodian democrats' positioning vis-à-vis the monarchy developed in a similarly ambiguous fashion. In this process, the personal stance of Son Sann became particularly formative for democratic identity. Son Sann is generally understood to have been personally loyal to Sihanouk, sometimes distancing himself from the DP that he had helped to found, although opinions are divided as to what extent.⁷¹³ During the PRK resistance, in spite of their shared resistance agenda, a wedge was driven between royalists and democrats by the fact that the KPNLF, headed by Son Sann, included former Republican activists who remained fervently anti-Sihanoukist, making up most of the cabinet and army.⁷¹⁴ The KPNLF was understood as a Republican movement by observers – and by Sihanouk.

It is beyond the scope here to revisit the balance between those neutral to the monarchy and Republican tendencies in the KPNLF. What is of interest is the language employed by contemporary political actors, emanating from the KPNLF and

⁷¹² Whilst the DP centre supported a constitutional monarchy, the party also incorporated anti-royalist rightist and leftist elements.

⁷¹³ Serving as Sihanouk's Minister 1951–68, Son Sann offered to mediate between Sihanouk and Lon Nol during the Khmer Republic, although this never came to pass. At Son Sann's death in 2000, a state funeral was held, attended by Sihanouk.

⁷¹⁴ Whilst the movement was riveted by internal divisions, the 1985 split between Son Sann and Sak Sutsakhan was not primarily a conflict of a Republican versus a Sihanoukist group, as understood by some foreign observers, but instead rooted in personal conflicts of interest. To some limited extent, the split also went back to how some felt that Son Sann had orchestrated the 1952 coup de force against then DP Prime Minister Huy Kanthoul. Regardless of the cause of the original split, when this crystallised into a 1993 split between the political parties Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Sak Sutsakhan and the BLDP under Son Sann, most of those who joined the LDP were young returnees from France and the US who leaned towards republicanism. See author's interviews with Ieng Mouly, 17 Nov. 2009, Dien Del, Huy Vora, and Keat Sokun.

involving in the BLDP, HRP, FUNCINPEC, and NRP, in reinterpreting their past political involvement. Whilst they doubtlessly attempted to smoothen and naturalise how many of them now moved back and forth between the democratic and royalist camps, their reinterpretations also lay out the discursive boundaries they placed on democracy. Firstly, the former KPMLF leadership generally refer back to the KPMLF political identity as 'democratic'. In their accounts, Son Sann remained unfailingly loyal to Sihanouk throughout the civil war – even the creation of the KPMLF was with the intention of handing the movement over to Sihanouk.⁷¹⁵ The former leadership claims that the Republican image of the KPMLF was orchestrated by external actors, and they claim not even to have known why the KPMLF was perceived as Republican throughout the civil war.⁷¹⁶ Secondly, 'democratic' was not taken to entail a choice between royalism and Republicanism per se.⁷¹⁷ These accounts cut across camps. Whilst the group previously around Son Sann continued to stress the compatibility between democracy and the constitutional monarchy, the former, Republican-leaning elements, argue the same compatibility between being democrat and Republican. In both cases, these actors claim to have been 'democratic' by following popular preference.⁷¹⁸ For democrats supportive of the monarchy, their emphasis on 'democracy' meant that their support of the monarchy, rather than expressing the unconditional support of the monarchy per se, was derived from following the popular preference. Republicans, on the other hand, explained their stance in terms of the monarchy lacking popular support.

⁷¹⁵ Author's interviews with Son Soubert and Jeng Mouly, 17 Nov. 2009.

⁷¹⁶ Author's interviews with Son Soubert, Jeng Mouly, 17 Nov. 2009, and Dien Del.

Particularly the date of proclamation of the KPMLF on 9 October, the date of proclamation of the Khmer Republic, was claimed to have given Sihanouk the wrong signal. According to Son Soubert, it was their Thai hosts who made the group proclaim the creation of the front on 9 October 1979, after having refused it on 5 October, Son Sann's birthday. Son Soubert later claimed this to have been orchestrated by the international community, wanting to set up the resistance in such a way as to be able to rely on people from as different backgrounds as possible. According to Son Soubert, Son Sann never understood why Sihanouk thought the KPMLF to be 'republican' rather than 'democrat', and it was not until after Son Sann's death that Sihanouk alerted Soubert to this issue. Yet Republicans in the KPMLF were certainly aware of its symbolic significance. According to Dien Del, former Republican Prime Minister in Tam, who rejoined Sihanouk after 1979, purposely informed Sihanouk about the day of the creation of the KPMLF to make him distrustful of the front.

⁷¹⁷ Author's interview with Jeng Mouly, 17 November 2009.

⁷¹⁸ Author's interviews with Kem Sokha and Dien Del. Admittedly, such statements by former Republicans who later defected to royalist parties could be seen as a later invention to naturalise their changing side-taking. Yet arguably, the very language they chose to employ is significant in the distinction they establish between 'democratic' and Republican.

This reasoning was also offered to explain dynamics in the Second Kingdom. When the Son Sann Party dissolved to merge with FUNCINPEC, an important reason for the merger was the shared resistance background now again called on following the July 1997 events, which made it critically important to take sides between Hun Sen and Ranariddh. In this, assumed popular support for the monarchy was a crucial consideration, a logic also offered by previously staunch Republicans joining camps with the royalists.⁷¹⁹ Former Republican General Dien Del, joining FUNCINPEC and later the Norodom Ranariddh Party, referred to how non-communist nationalism necessarily meant a union between self-identified democrats and royalists, given the popular support for the monarchy.⁷²⁰ In such statements, the logic of following the popular will was indistinguishable from strategic calculations. They also reflect former Republicans' easier acceptance of a weakened monarchy. This was later facilitated by Sihanouk emerging as a strictly constitutional monarch, whilst their republicanism was made out, perhaps reinvented, as primarily anti-Sihanoukist, rather than anti-monarchical per se.

By the same token, this same set of political actors evaluated royalist parties as either 'democratic' or non-democratic, with the criterion being the perceived extent of representation of and responsiveness to grassroots voices. Son Soubert outlines the difference between different royalist projects as follows:

FUNCINPEC is not democratic – it does not work from the base, it does not listen to the grassroots. If royalists are democratic – then they are ok. Some royalists are democratic, not all. We have to go along *in the way of the people*. Prince Thomico is a democrat. Sihanouk was a democrat when he set up the National Congress.⁷²¹

The ties between royalists and self-identified democrats thus reflected lasting bonds from their former shared resistance identities and political imaginings that these implied, thought to constitute a shared identity variously conceptualised as

⁷¹⁹ Author's interview with Huy Vora.

⁷²⁰ Author's interview with Dien Del.

⁷²¹ Author's interview with Son Soubert.

'democratic' or 'nationalist'. The interaction between Prince Thomico's Sangkum Jatinium Front Party and the group of former BLDP leaders before the establishment of HRP further testified to the strong links between the former BLDP group and royalists who self-identify as 'democrats'.⁷²² The blurring between royalists and democrats was evident in the fluidity between the factions, which was also found at the level of the top leadership. Kem Sokha joined the BLDP rather than FUNCINPEC, because only Son Sann (and not Ranariddh) accepted to meet him.⁷²³ Meanwhile, Sam Rainsy and his close associates came out of FUNCINPEC. Conversely, several of the royalists who remained close to the democratic parties had belonged to the KPRLF and/or sided with the Khmer Republic, and now fluctuated back to the royalist side of the divide – perhaps out of a newborn sense of family loyalty. The fact that previous staunch Republicans joined them also testifies to the weakness of party loyalty, and the strength of shared resistance identities, over forging links with a new generation of democrats dominating the SRP.⁷²⁴

The relationship between the SRP and political royalists shifted the democratic identity to one that was in more open conflict with that of the royalists. The decline of trust between the SRP and FUNCINPEC followed its own distinct trajectory, mirroring power machinations between Ranariddh and Hun Sen. When Ranariddh called off the Alliance of Democrats in 2004 to again enter into a coalition government with the CPP, trust was fundamentally ruined, marking the end of prospects for cooperation; this was later compounded when Ranariddh agreed to have Sam Rainsy exiled. When, in 2006, Sam Rainsy, after being allowed back in Cambodia, signed the constitutional amendment requiring a simple majority rather than a 2/3 majority to pass laws in the National Assembly, making FUNCINPEC a

⁷²² According to Keat Sokun, the SJFP was set up by Thomico as a party that Ranariddh could take over and change into the Norodom Ranariddh Party. Ranariddh wanted Son Soubert or Keat Sokun to be Vice President and they were both initially involved, but after it was clear that the SJFP had failed, they decided to instead support Kem Sokha in setting up the HRP.

⁷²³ Author's interview with Kem Sokha.

⁷²⁴ In the KOC, there have been some attempts at commemorating the shared resistance heritage. This has included yearly commemoration at a stupa in Kien Svay district, Kandal province, with the inscription of the names of KPRLF fighters who fell during the resistance. Cf. Brady, Brendan and Kouth Sophak Chakrya, 'KPRLF Commemoration: Former Resistance Leaders Stand by Antagonism Towards Vietnamese,' *Phnom Penh Post*, 6 March 2009.

redundant coalition partner for the CPP, this was understood as his revenge against Ranariddh.

As the group around Son Sann, Sam Rainsy's political views did not differ greatly from the group of royalists who identified closely with a shared democratic agenda.⁷²⁵ Yet the attitudes of SRP members differed from those of the group around Son Sann. A majority became politically involved specifically because of their support for Sam Rainsy's agenda. They associated more closely with global liberal democratic identities than the former resistance did, and, in this spirit, they supported a constitutional monarchy along Western lines. Political royalism seemed outdated to them, and they treated such ideas with disinterest.

The single most important factor shaping the SRP's relationship to royalists was Sam Rainsy's family's tormented relationship to Sihanouk. Both Sam Rainsy's and Tiouloung Saumura's fathers had been close allies of Sihanouk, and their families were closely socially linked with the royal family.⁷²⁶ A prominent politician and Deputy Prime Minister in Sihanouk's government in the 1950s, Sam Rainsy's father, Sam Sary, suffered a fall from grace and became deadlocked in a public confrontation with Sihanouk, ultimately escaping underground to join the Republican 'Khmer Serey', before disappearing. Royalists understood Sam Rainsy to blame Sihanouk for his father's disappearance and death, privately quoting Rainsy's perceived vindictive ulterior motives as precluding any closer cooperation.⁷²⁷ Just to what extent this hampered contemporary collaboration was testified to by Sihanouk's attempts to restore Sam Sary's reputation when trying to unite the opposition. In April 2003, ahead of national elections, Sihanouk released a royal communiqué referring to the incident that caused Sam Sary's fall of grace as a misunderstanding; in it, he called Sam Sary 'a great and genuine patriot' who had given proud service to Sihanouk and

⁷²⁵ Rainsy and Norodom Sirivudh had been ousted at the same time in 1995, whilst not for the same reasons, and maintained friendly links. It was Norodom Sirivudh who proposed the 2003 'Alliance of Democrats' between the SRP and FUNCINPEC. As noted, Sisowath Thomico, Tiouloung Saumura and Sam Rainsy had also militated together in Sereika.

⁷²⁶ For example, Ketty Tiouloung, Saumura's sister, married Prince Chakrapong in 1965. See 'Royal wedding,' *Kambuja* 19 (November) 1965. Sam Emmarane, Rainsy's sister, danced in the Royal Ballet and served as a lady-in-waiting at Suramarit's coronation. Sam (2009): 24.

⁷²⁷ Author's interviews.

the nation during the first years of Sihanouk's reign and of Sangkum.⁷²⁸ Royalist suspicions of lingering rancor appeared to be confirmed by the publication of Sam Rainsy's 2008 autobiography, *Rooted in Stone (Des racines dans la pierre)*, which was sharply critical of Sihanouk. In the book, Sam Rainsy tried to restore his father's reputation, and outlined his father's painful quest to placate a relentless Sihanouk. He described how his father's escape could not contain Sihanouk's fury, who continued persecuting the family, forcing Rainsy's grandfather and uncle to resign from politics and imprisoning his mother, before having the whole family thrown out of Cambodia in 1965.⁷²⁹ 'Too much power can become perversity', Rainsy concluded.⁷³⁰ Together with a book by his sister, Sam Emmarane, which was published in 2009, Rainsy's book was important for confirming royalist suspicion of Rainsy to be anti-royalist for these personal motives.⁷³¹ This cemented a rift between SRP-brand democratic and royalist identities.

⁷²⁸ See letter from Norodom Sihanouk, 26 April 2003, in Sam (2009): 14. A second letter from Sihanouk, dated 28 April 2003 (ibid.: 14–15), confirms the important role played by Sam Sary in the Royal Crusade for Independence (1952–53), the Geneva Conference of 1954, and the first years of Sangkum, and concludes with Sihanouk's intention to give justice to Sam Sary for all he has done for the nation and for Sangkum.

⁷²⁹ Sam (2008): 52–56, 43. For Sihanouk's account of the London incident, see *Réalités Cambodgiennes*, 20 January 1959, partly reproduced in Sam (2009): 57.

⁷³⁰ Sam (2008): 58–59.

⁷³¹ Sam Rainsy's sister Emmarane, in her 2009 book *Cambodge: Histoire d'une vengeance royale (1958–65)*, takes an even tougher stance as she sets out to map Sam Sary's fall from grace and the tragic consequences for his family. She states that 'the principal cause of the Cambodian tragedy was the too personal participation of Sihanouk in national politics and the overlapping of Sihanouk and the Khmer nation. Sihanouk considered himself infallible because he incarnated "Cambodia", both country and nation, particularly through the National Congress' (pp. 70–71). She describes Sangkum in the following damning words: 'Once upon the time there was Cambodia, a country blessed by heaven where everyone could live happily and where everyone knew that the price to pay was to ignore the political and social problems of the country. There reigned a skillful and charismatic Prince. Demagogue, he practiced towards his people a politic marked by "paternalisme bon enfant". A majority of the people were peasants with little education and used to hear nothing by the prince, who they venerated like a God-King and gave him the name Samdech Euv (Monseigneur Papa). This one vested himself with a sacred power, personal and political which provoked a vivid reaction from the intellectual elite of the country. To channel it, he created the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community) destined to be the only political party born of the dissolution of others, except from the Democrat Party and Pracheachun. The opponents of the princely regime were thrown into prison or subject to intimidations. He showed his faith in Buddha, but to his adversaries he ignored magnanimity and compassion taught by our Master' (pp. 15–16). Emmarane's book, like Rainsy's, was taken by royals as a proof of how inflamed the question of Sam Sary's death and Sihanouk's presumed involvement in it remained for the Sam family.

The SRP advocates a constitutional monarchy, whilst remaining largely silent in its party program on the mandate of royals beyond this.⁷³² SRP relations with royalists were fundamentally tied up with the changing debates on a constitutional monarchy. In his autobiography, Sam Rainsy reappraised his father as consistently supporting a *constitutional monarchy* – thereby dismissing allegations of republicanism, and referring to a pro-monarchist heritage. Rainsy set out to prove how Sam Sary remained resolutely loyal to the constitutional monarchy until his death. Sam Sary's criticisms were directed at Sihanouk's 'antidemocratic' stance, rather than the monarchy as such, referring to how Sangkum approached 'personalistic rule' through the national congress and his Buddhist socialism, which both outflanked parliamentary democracy. Instead, Sam Sary wanted Cambodia to be a real parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy along the lines of Thailand or Great Britain.⁷³³ Key to this was forming an opposition loyal to the Crown under his leadership.⁷³⁴ The king's exit from politics would confer upon him 'a great symbolical, immutable power for the whole nation' to make him unanimously respected, and a suprapolitical arbiter of conflicts.⁷³⁵ Sary sought to ensure the survival of the monarchy through diversifying its basis of support beyond that of the personal popularity of Sihanouk, by educating royal family members to enable them to take on leadership roles based on their formation, rather than birthright.⁷³⁶ Meanwhile, Sam Sary's love for Western-style democracy and anti-communism led him to criticise Sihanouk's rapprochement with North-Vietnam and China, economic dependence on China and the Soviet Union, acceptance of Vietnamese communists on Cambodian territory, and the 1960s nationalisations.⁷³⁷

⁷³² Out of the SRP's 100 measures, only number five mentions the monarchy, advocating a National Congress presided over by the king. The 10 principles remain silent on the topic.

⁷³³ Sam (2008): 47.

⁷³⁴ Sam (2009): 225.

⁷³⁵ Sam Sary resisted Sihanouk's political influence, since he considered Sihanouk to be king even after his abdication. See Sam (2009): 19.

⁷³⁶ Cp. how Emmarane quotes a 1959 letter from Sam Sary to Sihanouk: 'I recognise the necessity of the monarchy and my duty is to defend it.' Sary aims to give a special education to princes that will replace the inequality of birth with their superior intellectual and moral formation. He pleads with Sihanouk: 'Your present politics builds the prestige of the monarchy only on your personal popularity without a solid and durable base. Father of independence, don't be the destroyer of the monarchy.' See Sam (2009): 223.

⁷³⁷ Sam (2008): 46–48.

Yet the meaning of constitutional monarchy in the KOC, as argued above, was not straightforward. Supporting a constitutional monarchy in the early days of the KOC primarily meant defending the very existence of the reintroduced monarchy, and this was high on both FUNCINPEC's, and the BLDP's (as the then democratic alternative), agendas. Yet the contours of this constitutional monarchy were always fuzzy. Most crucially, whilst royalists pledged their support of the reintroduced constitutional monarchy, they did not envisage a constitutional monarchy that limited their political involvement, as argued above. Whereas a more purely constitutional monarchy has been in place since the 2004 ascension to the throne of Sihamoni, the CPP pushed the idea of a 'constitutional monarchy' further, to mean the overall end of involvement of royal family members in politics increasingly vocally from 2006 onwards. The CPP's call for a bill barring royals in politics, making them politically neutral 'to ensure all people's respect', was supported by Sam Rainsy, who referred to an international model of constitutional monarchy.⁷³⁸ That Sam Rainsy chimed in with this particular understanding of 'constitutional monarchy' testifies to his fundamental suspicion of the involvement of royals in politics. The implosion of political royalism in the aftermath of Ranariddh's ouster has further reinforced the rift between 'democratic' and 'royalist' identities.⁷³⁹

Reassessing his father as an advocate of constitutional monarchy thus chimes in with Sam Rainsy's contemporary objective to limit the political mandate of royals, argued on pro-monarchic grounds. Claiming that his father after his 1958 demise represented

⁷³⁸ Sam Rainsy stated that: 'I want to see Cambodia with a strong and noble monarchy respected by all people. [...] I want Cambodia to have a monarchy like in Thailand, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Japan and so on. In those countries their people pay very high respect to the monarch and to the royal family. However, most countries have a stipulation for this respect - members of the royal family are not involved in politics. [...] For people to respect the royal family, the royal family must not participate in politics. If you want people to look to you as the symbol of national reconciliation and national dignity you must not dabble in politics.' See DPA. 2006. *Cambodian Opposition Joins Calls for Royalty to Quit Politics*.

⁷³⁹ For example, when in July 2012 the SRP and HRP formed an electoral alliance ahead of the 2013 national elections (later transformed into the Cambodia National Rescue Party), Kem Sokha stated that neither the HRP nor the SRP had ever called FUNCINPEC or NRP 'democratic' parties, and that what was distinctive of the 'democratic' political project was that it centred around 'democratic principles' rather than a prince or strongman. 2012. 'Human Rights Party Stance on Merging with Sam Rainsy Party.' June 7. <http://ki-media.blogspot.com/2012/06/human-rights-party-stance-on-merging.html> (October 26, 2012).

the democratic opposition, made Rainsy the successor in straight line to this agenda. This entails a competing national historiography to the Sihanoukist one, which emphasises the importance of the 1954 Geneva conference over Sihanouk's Royal Crusade for Independence in achieving national independence.⁷⁴⁰ Sam Rainsy has reappraised his father, as a representative at the Geneva Conference, as one of the main architects of Cambodian independence.⁷⁴¹ This further points back to a common legacy between Sam Sary and Nhiek Tiouloung, Sam Rainsy's and Tiouloung Saumura's fathers, as 'artisans of national independence' who sat together at the negotiation table at the Geneva conference, then 'marching together for more than 20 years' – something Sam Rainsy underlines in his autobiography. In this vein, some SRP MPs trace the party ideas from Sam Sary and Nhiek Tiouloung:

I think the ideas of the party came from Sam Sary and Nhiek Tiouloung, through Sam Rainsy and Tiouloung Saumura. They have similar biographies and objectives. At the moment we are just taking their ideas. Both tried for independence from the French colonisers. Maybe Nhek Tiouloung was too loyal to king Sihanouk. Sam Sary was freer.⁷⁴²

The SRP identity is strongly defined by confrontation of contemporary realities over establishing continuity with earlier political projects, and this particular historiography has not been very actively disseminated. Still, this statement testifies to an understated yet pervasive self-perception among the SRP leadership, which contrasts the democratic agenda with a Sihanoukist one.

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched a different layout of the democratic discursive field in contemporary Cambodia than commonly understood, by examining how notions of

⁷⁴⁰ Still, the KNP was founded on 9 November, the day of independence from France which concluded the Royal Crusade for Independence.

⁷⁴¹ Sam (2008): preface. Emmarane also emphasised Sam Sary's role in the 1954 Geneva conference, which 'concretises Cambodian independence and Indochinese peace'. Sam (2009): (preface).

⁷⁴² Author's interview with Kong Korm.

democracy intersect with notions of the nation, or, more specifically, how discourses of democracy conflate popular and national representation. Observers have noted that the CPP's alleged commitment to liberal democracy is little more than half-hearted lip service, whilst the democratic opposition is understood to carry out double-faced politics, embracing democratic tendencies on the one hand and ultra-nationalist tendencies on the other.⁷⁴³ This chapter reorients these understandings by showing how, in contemporary Cambodia, the incumbent CPP-led regime and democrats, alike, have launched democratic discourses which share in common with each other, as with many contemporary discourses of liberal democracy, whilst not sharing other important characteristics, that they conflate democracy as representation of the people and of the nation. The CPP-led regime under Hun Sen claims to represent 'people's democracy' as a uniquely national form of democracy. For the democratic opposition, democratic and national imaginings are intertwined.

This suggests that the nexus between democracy as representation of the people and of the nation may be understood as a sort of core of contemporary political discourse, which can be employed as a prism for bids to political representation, rather than 'ideology' per se. Populism under Hun Sen can be understood as a 'supraideology', which transcends appeals to other political ideologies and identities. Meanwhile, self-identified democrats do not primarily conceptualise their political project in terms of 'ideology', but as a more fundamental project of salvaging democracy and the nation. At the same time, this also highlights difficulties in Slocomb's branding of the post-1985 era as 'post-ideological', contrasting sharply with a previous era of 'ideology' (1955–84).⁷⁴⁴ In fact, there are important similarities in regime projects both before and after this divide, anchored in the continued centrality of this nexus. Hun Sen's notion of 'people's democracy' is not dissimilar from Sihanouk's Buddhist socialism. Both notions served to equate the leader with the nation and with democracy. Largely self-justifying, both were primarily what Sihanouk and Hun Sen defined them as. One could argue that only the language of ideology is missing from Hun Sen's brand; yet

⁷⁴³ On the CPP, see Heder (2007b); Peou (2000); Sanderson & Maley (1998); and Springer (2010). On the democrats see Un (2008); and Hughes (2001c).

⁷⁴⁴ Slocomb (2006): 388.

even Sihanouk, in his days (as discussed above), was partly suspicious of the label 'ideology'.

It is therefore significant that the self-professed CPP-regime identity under Hun Sen builds on notions of democracy and the nation, to which the notion of revolution can be added. It has been argued that these three notions served as a bridge in regime identity from the self-professed Marxism-Leninism of the PRK era to the KOC era, in which a socialist identity has been abandoned, and large-scale capitalist transformation is under way. Whilst it bestows continuity in terms of linking back to democracy as the goal of a 130-year-old Cambodian revolution, today carried on by the CPP, it serves to substitute the previous Marxist-Leninist identity, yet retains from it a dialectic analysis of changing contradictions in society. This revolutionary democratic language is adapted to confront new challenges posed by the monarchy (through a discourse of equal opportunity), and new practices bound up with a changing political economy (through claiming to oppose 'feudal' forms of democracy of 'capitalists'), whilst engaging in capitalist development. In this, it serves to guarantee precisely that the regime can retain an identity distinct from Western liberal democracies.

The self-identified democrats did not, therefore, differ from the incumbent regime in tying democracy to popular and national representation, but only in the way they did so. For them, democracy meant the will and interest of the people, which naturally desired national survival. This blurred the boundaries between the 'democratic' and the 'national'. Since they considered the contemporary Cambodian nation and democracy to be crumbling under mutating communism, the threats against democracy and national survival had but one and the same cure. Following from this analysis, however, a number of priorities and notions emerged significantly problematised. Identifying the will of the people, that the democrats purported to represent, was difficult, given that they were distanced from the grassroots both by their elite and transnational backgrounds, and by lacking the privileged everyday closeness of the CPP-dominated local state. Regime ideological and material domination was alleged to have driven a wedge between the people's will and interests, so that neither elections could be considered representative of the people's

will. Whilst local grievances were considered local manifestations of the larger victimisation of the nation, democrats were susceptible to appearing as a protest movement without a national agenda. This was compounded by the way democrats also imagined themselves to be locked in a struggle that was larger than one between competing 'ideologies', a more basic change in popular mentalities to a culture of citizenship. Moreover, the creation of democratic identity through tracing a democratic genealogy was never a priority, at the same time as the democrat identity increasingly evolved to contest political royalism. In different ways, this problematised the political identity of the democrats.

Conclusion

The findings of this dissertation can be considered on a number of levels. This conclusion begins with an assessment of the implications of the findings from a theoretical perspective, with particular attention paid to how the empirical findings of the preceding chapters inform the theoretical framework set out in the introduction. This is followed by a discussion of the implications for the study of contemporary political contestation in Cambodia. Lastly, the discussion is expanded into the regional Southeast Asian context.

Competing, Unfinished Imagined Communities: Theoretical Implications

This dissertation finds political contestation in Cambodia following the 1993 introduction of a multi-party democratic system to involve a contestation between different articulations of the nation, making up competing, unfinished, imagined communities. To make politics mean something in post-PPA Cambodia, all political party actors turned to the nation as the most important part of the answer. This testifies to the strength of an Andersonian 'imagined community' in contemporary Cambodia, in the sense that these diverse projects appealed to an overarching Cambodian national identity, imagined by the general public to unite them in 'deep, horizontal comradeship'.⁷⁴⁵ Yet, in so doing, political actors equaled the nation exclusively with their own political projects, whilst denying the shared nationality of their political adversaries, so that they thereby advanced rival 'imagined communities'. These 'imagined communities' were elite alleged, supposed, and desired versions of the Khmer nation. They were *competing* imagined communities insofar as each strove to make a particular understanding of the true characteristics and contours of the nation hegemonic; they were *unfinished* insofar as they were continuously subject to practices of reimagination of their particular histories.

Whilst these dynamics have been shown to be particularly pronounced in Cambodia, they are not necessarily exclusive to Cambodia. Around the world, one finds

⁷⁴⁵ Anderson (1991): 7.

'unfinished imagined communities', where discourses of national belonging remain contested with varying intensity. Imaginations of the nation, building on earlier histories of imagination, are necessarily reimaginings. Whilst striving to homogenise, they inevitably make up contentious imaginings. The 'imagined community' thus remains a model for the modern nation, rather than a *fait accompli*. By consequence, a main challenge for the study of contemporary nations is to conceptualise reinventions of unfinished imagined communities, which (in Cambodia as in many other contexts) take place within a multi-party political framework, with electoral victory being the main objective of political action.

The findings of this dissertation confirm the relevance of Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of the nation as an 'imagined community', whilst simultaneously proposing modifications of his framework, for theorising the making of the contemporary Cambodian nation and by extension perhaps also other similar contexts. Firstly, the national imaginings advanced by the contending actors discussed here all conformed to Anderson's definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community', imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.⁷⁴⁶ They were imagined, in the sense that the members, they claimed, 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. These actors imagined the Cambodian nation as limited, in the sense of having 'finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations'.⁷⁴⁷ Each imagined the nation as sovereign, seeing (in conformity with Anderson's theorisation) the 'gauge and emblem' of its freedom as the sovereign state; therefore, each competed electorally to lead the state. They also each imagined the nation as a community, in Anderson's sense, that 'regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship'.⁷⁴⁸ These parallel efforts testify to how the imaginative boundaries of the nation hold sway to delimit the collective political imaginings mediated and promoted by the full range of party political actors.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.: 6.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.: 7.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

Secondly, these findings reconfirm the constructivist insistence on the need to pay attention to historical processes in creating and shaping national imaginings and identities. This dissertation has outlined, in detail, the contentious makings of the Cambodian nation as an empirical, historical question, tracing contemporary debates to define the nation in relation to earlier elaborations on sometimes straightforward, sometimes meandering ways. Much scholarship in the constructivist vein has been dedicated to revisiting the impact of colonial state formation on local societies' national imaginings, and Cambodian studies have benefited from Penny Edwards's worthy contribution in this respect.⁷⁴⁹ Yet studies on contemporary Cambodian national imaginings have been largely unconcerned with tracing out the longer historical context these are situated in, in favour of the immediate, mobilisational value and function associated therewith.⁷⁵⁰ One of the consequences of this has been the neglect by these studies, important in their own right, of more deep-seated debates, negotiated across the political spectrum, which this dissertation argues are central to current negotiations of the nature of the Cambodian nation. In particular, this dissertation has shown how events and debates just preceding independence, and in the immediate post-independence era, have crucially shaped subsequent imaginings, rewriting and introducing tensions that are still negotiated today. Hun Sen's revival of Sdech Kân can be understood as the latest reconfiguration of a contested relationship between 'nation, religion, king', which is characteristic of post-independence Cambodia, following on and interacting with earlier such reconfigurations. Meanwhile, Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, and the tension between merit and genealogy, and inherited and embodied leadership it entailed, left an indelible mark on the search for national legitimacy by royalist parties.

Thirdly, these findings reconfirm Anderson's insistence that nationalism is best understood as being on par with categories such as kinship or religion, and that it is not an ideology, yet still needs to rest on an ideological base. This gives analytical space to explore the flexibility of Cambodian nationalism, which was never one, unitary project, but instead linked to a successive, co-existing and interlinking string of political projects, each animated by more or less genuinely held ideological beliefs.

⁷⁴⁹ Edwards (2007).

⁷⁵⁰ See, for example, Edwards (1996); Jordens (1996); Hinton (2006); and Poethig (2006).

Existing scholarship on nationalism in contemporary Cambodia concentrates its study to the political opposition.⁷⁵¹ Yet, this thesis lays out how contemporary Cambodian nationalism is a widespread logic shared equally across the political spectrum; something that the plasticity and reach of nationalism, as conceptualised by Anderson, can account for. This is not to argue in favour of the reification of a separate notion of 'ideology', no more than we should capitalise 'nationalism'. On the contrary, this dissertation has outlined how the very concept of 'ideology' has remained hotly debated as part of efforts to define the nation, offering a reassessment of the limits and meanings of notions of 'ideology' in the contemporary Cambodian context. Yet Anderson's approach accounts for the close intertwining of national and other political beliefs, consistently framed in the language of ideology, in the political projects discussed here.

Yet, in this regard, the Cambodian example also highlights crucial omissions in Anderson's theorisations. These contending pairings of national and ideological beliefs form the fabric of contemporary rival imagined communities, and are therefore bound up with division and contestation. To the extent that Anderson pays attention to conflict, he mainly confines himself to ethnic politics and the creation of majorities and minorities, which he contrasts against the allegedly more benevolent politics of nationalism.⁷⁵² This distinction has been criticised by postcolonial scholarship, pointing to how nationalism has become contaminated by ethnic politics.⁷⁵³ The empirical evidence in this dissertation offers a further critique by outlining cleavages not within the nation among ethnic lines, but rather between rival imaginations of the same nation. Anderson's locating of contestation to a sphere separate from that of the nation does not address the emergence of rival national imaginings that is observed here, with each positing alternative ones as fraudulent. In Cambodian articulations of nationalism, notions of genuineness and authenticity were, as outlined, central; political actors competed over defining the nature of true representation, true democracy, and, what was truly Khmer. This concern with notions of authenticity conforms to a pattern which John Sidel identifies as common

⁷⁵¹ Hughes (2001a; 2001c; 2002a; 2002b); Edwards (1996).

⁷⁵² Anderson (1998): 29–45.

⁷⁵³ Chatterjee (1999): 130.

to mainland Southeast Asia, where existing nation-states, as well as those aspired to, are 'understood to represent the timeless existence and time-tested endurance of core ethnies', and assumptions of a common identity or nature are widespread.⁷⁵⁴ By contrast, in island Southeast Asia, Sidel finds identities to generally be considered to be incomplete and in the making.⁷⁵⁵ In the Cambodian context, where a common Khmer identity is assumed and the underlying premise of nationalism is the 'continuity and conservation of identities', political contestation has come to centre on defining the contents of this assumed shared identity. This is achieved through invention and aspiration, making up contentious imaginings.

Offering a critique of Anderson's assumption of the spread of national imaginings as an agent of homogenisation, the empirical evidence presented here also suggests avenues for extending his framework to theorise difference and contestation. Reframing the question, 'whose imagined community?', posed by post-colonial scholarship, it demonstrates the need to shift the focus from passive to active imaginings by outlining the role of political elites in reimagining the nation.⁷⁵⁶ This dissertation has outlined how the rival imagined Cambodian nations moved in 'salvational', rather than calendrical, time, showing how processes of recovering, reassessing and redeeming the past was an integral part of the making of all contending national imaginings. Yet, it also finds that Anderson's theorisations contain possible solutions for its shortcomings. Anderson's insistence on the structural and material rootedness of nationalist discourse supports the consideration of contemporary nationalisms as existing in a dialectical relationship between their particular histories and the practice of imagination.⁷⁵⁷ This, in turn, opens the field of research to contemporary diversity and contention between *competing* imagined communities, as elite imaginings strive to become hegemonic and gain popular acceptance. It gives analytical space to examine how these imaginings are necessarily *unfinished*, being continuously subject to practices of reimagination of their particular histories.

⁷⁵⁴ Sidel (2012): 116-117.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid. Sidel traces these two patterns of trajectories of nationalism to diverging patterns of state formation.

⁷⁵⁶ Cp. Chatterjee (1993): 220.

⁷⁵⁷ Roepstorff & Bubandt (2003): 16.

Reassessing Political Contestation in Post-PPA Cambodia

Two decades after the PPA, which were intended to transform the civil war conflict between combating factions to political competition between political parties that recognised each other as legitimate contenders on the electoral arena, difficulty of reconciliation between political parties persists. The failure to turn elections into a basis for agreeable power sharing between political parties has been traced back to the original forcing of domestic parties into a political 'shotgun wedding' through the PPA.⁷⁵⁸ The multi-party elections that followed have come to exacerbate conflicts of identity, leading political parties to mobilise around politicised identities.⁷⁵⁹ Meanwhile, political parties do not primarily phrase their programs in the language of ideology, and policy differences between parties are obscure to voters.⁷⁶⁰ This dissertation sheds new light on the continuous failure of political parties to reconcile by charting how identity-based conflict, exacerbated by the new multi-party system, was tied up with competing national imaginings. Political, or politicised, identities were defined by their competing constructions of the nation, and the corollary ways in which those flaunting these identities were made out to represent the nation. Rather than a battle of ideologies or policy platforms, this contestation over national representation involved questions of embodiment and incarnation, the elected leader versus genealogy and the moral requirements of leadership.

This reassessment of political contestation in the KOC has important consequences on a number of levels. I explore these below, firstly, with regard to the implications for reassessing internal legitimisations, the role and status of elections, democratic debates and how these, in turn, provided resources and constraints on Cambodia's democratisation. Secondly, I turn to assess the implications for questions of continuity and change in Cambodian elite-level political imaginings. Demonstrating the structural and material rootedness of national imaginings, I show how they transformed in important, yet hitherto overlooked ways from the previous PRK era.

⁷⁵⁸ Croissant (2008): 661; and Roberts (2001): 47.

⁷⁵⁹ Hughes (2002b): 167.

⁷⁶⁰ Un (2005): 222; and Öjendal & Lilja (2009b): 303.

Thirdly, I assess the implications in terms of the very categories in which political contestation took place, by examining contemporary ideas of 'ideology', doctrine and embodiment. This is followed by, fourthly, a discussion on the popular appeal and acceptance of these elite-level imaginings.

Legitimacy, Discourses of Democracy and Cambodia's Democratisation

National imaginings were linked to a search for political legitimacy. This dissertation argues that bids for internal legitimacy, of the regime and its opponents alike, thus continued to revolve around national imaginings, as they had in the past. This contradicts the assumption of international policymakers that the holding of elections with proper procedures of electioneering is the hallmark of internal legitimacy.⁷⁶¹ It also contributes to previous scholarship that has agreed that, whilst procedural democratic legitimacy has given the CPP a degree of external legitimacy, it is a more vexed question whether this has also bestowed internal legitimacy.⁷⁶² Showing that the holding of elections per se is not sufficient to settle questions of internal legitimacy, this dissertation has laid out how all competing political party actors within the electoral framework turned to strategies of establishing unique bonds with the nation as the ultimate object and means of legitimation. Whilst this served as a means to gain votes and thereby ensure success within the electoral framework, it also served as an alternative basis of legitimation that went beyond the legitimacy of the electoral process per se.

The contending sources of legitimacy discussed here were all aspiring 'democratic' forms of legitimacy in the sense that they were firmly integrated into contending democratic imaginings and phrased in the language of democracy (*pracheathipetey*). This dissertation thus provides a reassessment of Cambodian domestic political debates. Cambodian political parties did not merely pay occasional lip service to liberal democracy, whilst deviating from it in practice. The main political parties also advanced alternative articulations of democracy. Whilst these discourses certainly addressed and had a crucial bearing on notions and issues contained in liberal

⁷⁶¹ Hughes (2009): 32.

⁷⁶² Ojendal & Lilja, eds. (2009a).

democratic discourse, they were engaged, to some extent, in a parallel debate over the proper organisation of national society and the relationship between the people and the political leadership, phrased in the language of democracy. Caroline Hughes writes that, in a bid to retain distinctiveness and party identity, the SRP and FUNCINPEC have denied the CPP the status of an equally 'democratic' contender, refusing to admit the CPP into the legitimising 'democratic' arena.⁷⁶³ The above case studies show that flaunting a democratic identity was so crucial that Hun Sen and the CPP also constructed their own 'democratic' arena, inaccessible to political contenders, in order to retain distinctiveness and legitimacy. Moreover, the SRP and FUNCINPEC, in spite of intermittent attempts by some to create one such common arena, ended up creating largely separate ones, each casting their own political project as the only truly democratic one. The reshaping of democratic identities was therefore a more far ranging and crucial dynamic than hitherto believed.

Since they turned to the nation to imbue politics with meaning, all political parties relied on democratic imaginings that were tied up with national ones. Each of these discourses referred to national imaginings that accorded their own political party or party actors a unique role in fulfilling the nation's democratic aspirations. This can be understood as a consequence of how the KOC era was nominally democratic. Political imaginings were therefore readily phrased in the language of democracy. Another reason for this goes further into the national project, relating to how national imaginings provide a definition of the political community, the boundaries of which all democracies need to establish. National and democratic imaginings, therefore, readily partner. As Michael Mann has shown, the conflation between the popular masses and the nation spread worldwide with ideas of democracy.⁷⁶⁴ This dissertation shows, in contemporary Cambodia, that the main political parties, in line with a historical pattern, share a largely organic conception of society, making the people out as an undifferentiated mass, in resonance with the Andersonian imagined community characterised by a sense of deep, horizontal comradeship. This 'organic view' of the people enabled all contemporary competing political parties to make claims to the unique representation of the homogenous, indivisible people. The

⁷⁶³ Hughes (2001c): 302.

⁷⁶⁴ Mann (2005): 2.

particular claims to representation of this made-out-to-be organic people were, however, vastly different. The CPP's notion of people's democracy assumed the uniform needs and desires of the people. Whilst this could have been unsettled by parallel notions of social mobility, it rather served to reverse a hierarchy that nonetheless remained in place. An organic conception of the people underlay the royalist portrayal of the people as one body, indivisible from the monarchy, enabling the people's embodiment – as it did for Hun Sen. Whilst self-identified democrats separated the population into different interest groups, the will of the people was still assumed to be harmoniously consonant; this assumption was doubtlessly aided by how the democrats represented not an accomplished nation, but rather a hazy one in becoming.

Charting these domestic political discourses helps reframe current scholarship on ongoing political change in Cambodia. Providing an account of how different political party actors associate concepts such as democracy with a multitude of different meanings, this dissertation's epistemological premises differ from the bulk of scholarship on Cambodia's political development. This scholarship predominantly employs democracy as a stable benchmark following universal understandings of what democracy entails, in order to analyse Cambodia's 'democratisation' following the introduction of a multi-party democratic system and, particularly, why liberal democracy, according to its universal understanding, has failed to consolidate.⁷⁶⁵ The domestic elite imaginings here discussed, however, certainly provide resources and constraints to political change in Cambodia, which help put these debates into perspective. The shared 'organic' view of the people, which this dissertation has identified, arguably underlies political party leaders' views of democracy as 'comprising the co-optation of the broader population into elite-determined political trajectories'.⁷⁶⁶ The national articulations associated with the incumbent CPP corresponded to actual practice, linking democracy to the de facto curbing of royal power, and the notion of 'people's democracy' addressed real practices of regime–people interactions. The national articulations by royalists and self-identified

⁷⁶⁵ E.g. Brown and Timberman, eds. (1998); Karbaum (2011); Croissant (2008); Peou (2000); Roberts (2001); Sanderson & Maley (1998); and Un (2005; 2006).

⁷⁶⁶ Hughes (2002c): 126.

democrats, in turn, defined the nature and boundaries of their demands for 'democratic reform'.

This empirical evidence shows that, if considering democratic legitimacy as procedural democratic legitimacy, these bids for legitimacy were not democratic. Different political party actors did seek to harness legitimacy primarily in order to ensure success within the electoral framework. Yet their legitimising discourses cannot be said to add up to procedural democratic legitimacy. This is not, primarily, because of their content. Discourses that include ethnic chauvinism and stereotyping of insiders and outsiders of the national community are part of election campaigns worldwide. As Hughes argues, whether these contending sources for legitimacy add up to, or are at least compatible with, procedural democratic legitimacy, is a question of whether they are used to mobilise support *within* the confines of the election process or whether they are used to *trump it*.⁷⁶⁷

The preceding chapters have outlined how contending sources for legitimacy have been used, by all political party actors, to undermine the legitimacy of electoral politics as such. This was not a straightforward rejection of the electoral process – a process that all political actors indeed gave support to in different ways. The CPP has, after all, decided to stick with elections, which remain crucially important for the party's (and Prime Minister Hun Sen's), legitimacy. Royalists and democrats, meanwhile, by regularly contesting election processes whilst claiming to advocate freer and fairer elections, clearly and publicly give value to the electoral process. Yet the preceding chapters have outlined a more ambiguous relationship to elections across the political spectrum, compromising and attenuating the legitimacy of electoral politics. Through his reincarnation as Sdech Kân, Hun Sen replaces the ailing monarchy and plunges himself into a series of associations, ultimately representing the nation. Whilst the narrative celebrates elected, non-hereditary leadership, it is firmly tied to the person of the Prime Minister, whom it posits as the legitimate national leader by virtue of his personal merit, and is part of the personalisation of symbolic and political power given to the Prime Minister. His

⁷⁶⁷ Hughes (2009): 32.

leadership role can therefore be understood to be confirmed by, but not reducible to, the legitimacy bestowed by elections. On their part, Ranariddh and other royalist actors have spoken out against representative democracy and the institution of the political party as a basic unit of popular representation. Ranariddh has criticised 'elections' as the instrument of representative democracy, charging that they have scope only to the extent that they reflect a 'real consensus' by the people. Democracy, here, stands to signify organic unity and national consensus, unflinchingly tied to the Cambodian monarchy. The self-identified democrats, meanwhile, not only considered electioneering practices skewed and election results therefore biased, but, moreover, charged that the people were blinded of their real interests by CPP material and ideological domination. Therefore, whilst their intention was to reform the electoral system, electoral reform, alone, was deemed insufficient to achieve democratic representation. Meanwhile, their reading of the people's will depended on their own efforts to identify what they understood as the people's objective interests rather than results in the polls. Support for the electoral process was therefore neither straightforward nor unconditional, but qualified, contingent, subordinate, secondary and derivative.

Moreover, this analysis suggests a different interplay between external demands for democratisation and the domestic realm than is commonly understood. Changing perceptions and realities of democracy in the Cambodian context of post-conflict reconstruction are generally analysed in terms of the Western-led democracy-building project, initiated in the early 1990s, which was largely 'imposed, enforced, inserted and disconnected' and, therefore, 'to some extent artificial'.⁷⁶⁸ The discursive landscape laid out in this thesis demonstrates the presence of a contestation over what democracy must mean in the contemporary Cambodian context, which is not solely, or even primarily, representative of a process of 'localization' of external demands for democratisation. That the Western-led democracy-building project has by no means defined contemporary realities is a point made elsewhere by writers pointing to the failure to achieve liberal democracy.⁷⁶⁹ This dissertation shows that, whilst faced with an international discourse in support of liberal democracy, with which they

⁷⁶⁸ Öjendal & Lilja (2009b): 2.

⁷⁶⁹ Heder (2007b): 162.

interacted in different ways, domestic actors engaged in a contestation over the meaning and nature of democracy quite on their own terms. This shows an even further discrepancy between liberal democratic language and domestic political party agendas. As repeatedly argued, Cambodian elites were not democrats at heart, in the sense that they did not endorse liberal democratic principles.⁷⁷⁰ But neither did they purport to be. Yet democracy, articulated on quite different terms, remained an important language for negotiating political developments and change in contemporary Cambodia.

These domestic discourses also testify to the importance of moral claims in party political contestation in contemporary Cambodia. A key assumption of the international community involved in the peace and democracy building project in Cambodia was that the holding of elections would gradually erode different moral claims to power.⁷⁷¹ This thesis shows that this has not been the case, and that, on the contrary, contending moral claims to power remain important within and beyond the multi-party electoral system. The second chapter has outlined the importance of the incumbent power holder to create a *moral* political identity for himself, to accompany his identity as a strongman. Hun Sen's challenging of the royalist parties on moral grounds demonstrates a rivalry over a morally based political identity, shifting party political contestation to a moral arena. Suitability for national leadership is determined exclusively on moral grounds, which weighs heavier than results at the polls. This dissertation thus shows how the 'remaking of moral worlds', which scholarship has traced in the aftermath of decades of violent conflict, went straight to the heart of party political contestation. It adds to the small emerging body of scholarship concerned with how politics, religion and moral order are interwoven in contemporary Cambodia,⁷⁷² by demonstrating how moral debates are an integral part of party political contestation. It shows how party political actors engaged in active attempts to redraw and reshape the moral order of the national community. This study thus opens up new research directions by offering avenues for exploring the interaction between popular, rural imaginations, which scholarship on processes to

⁷⁷⁰ Heder (2007b): 155; and Gainsborough (2012): 38.

⁷⁷¹ Hughes (2009): 32.

⁷⁷² Marston & Guthrie, eds. (2004); Kent & Chandler, eds. (2008); Harris (2001); Kent (2007); Heng (2008); Gyallay-Pap (2007); and Edwards (2008).

recover moral order in Cambodia has been mainly concerned with,⁷⁷³ and elite imaginations.

Continuity and Change

By charting the discourses of the Cambodian political elite, this dissertation is intimately concerned with larger questions of the role of political culture in shaping contemporary political realities. Accounting for democratic outcomes post-PPA, the large bulk of scholarship has stressed Cambodian political culture, understood to be based on absolutist notions of power, rigid social hierarchies and patronage systems, as unreceptive to and incompatible with Western-style democracy.⁷⁷⁴ In these analyses, such phenomena are typically cast as stemming from a 'traditional' conception of power. Gainsborough identifies elite political culture, next to money politics, as the single most important factor for explaining the lack of commitment to liberal values in contemporary Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. Understanding elite political culture to be informed by elitism and paternalism, he argues that this sheds light on the character of elections in all three countries, as power holders here 'treat voting less as a contest of alternatives than as a chance for the citizens to confirm the intrinsic merits of their leaders'.⁷⁷⁵ By offering a fine-grained study of the discourses of competing political actors, this dissertation also suggests a lack of commitment to liberal values in contemporary Cambodian elite imaginings. Spelling out, above, the precise and different ways in which Cambodian political actors treat elections, it offers nuanced and empirically solid evidence in support of Gainsborough's assertion that these are treated primarily as confirmation of the intrinsic merit of leaders. Further, important similarities across the political spectrum, such as a shared 'organic' view of the people, are identified.

Yet the findings of this dissertation also problematise the notion of 'political culture', if understood as static, unitary, singular and uncontested. This is done, firstly, by outlining the important differences between competing political actors; and secondly,

⁷⁷³ E.g. Guthrie (2004); Ledgerwood (2008a); Satoru (2008); and Zucker (2008).

⁷⁷⁴ Mehmet (1997): 676; Kim (2007): 4; St John (2005): 415; Mabbett & Chandler (1995); and Blunt & Turner (2005).

⁷⁷⁵ Gainsborough (2012): 39.

by demonstrating the malleability of concepts and the innovativeness of political actors. This calls into question the emphasis on what Gainsborough reads as 'cultural assumptions about the proper relationship between the state and its citizens, or between rulers and the ruled', which he sees to define elite political culture, in favour of an emphasis on how such culturally embedded notions are picked up and remoulded for political gain.⁷⁷⁶ Hughes and Öjendal have called for a reassessment of the role of 'culture' in Cambodian political life, challenging scholarship to engage with 'the ways in which Cambodians understand the process of reform and link this understanding to internally reproduced notions of "culture"'.⁷⁷⁷ This dissertation contributes to such a reassessment by outlining the ways in which Cambodian political actors negotiate the interplay of culture and power by linking their agendas to competing reinventions of culturally transmitted notions. Whilst my analysis stresses the differences between the contemporary Cambodian political scene and a liberal democratic model, grounded in unique Cambodian historical and cultural realities, it does not support an interpretation that ascribes Cambodia's contemporary political development to the unrelenting workings of a particular political culture. The insistent message that has asserted itself throughout these pages is the dynamic manipulation of historically inherited notions by political actors. Competing domestic democratic discourses, it shows, built on the selective revival and reinvention of Cambodian historical and cultural notions in order to promote vastly different political orders. Their sheer diversity indicates the presence of many competing historical logics in a cultural and political context marked by discontinuity, so that no single one could be deemed more 'traditional' than another. This highlights not only the adaptability and flexibility of Cambodian 'political culture', but also the presence of competing cultural notions that are neither static nor homogenous. This is more in line with how Steve Heder, invoking the richness and complexity of historical models, has argued that 'traditional' in the Southeast Asian context would mean today's men of prowess embracing the global model of liberal democracy in line with a historical pattern outlined by Clifford Geertz and Oliver Wolters.⁷⁷⁸ Rather than contemporary Cambodian elections being representative of a 'traditional' political

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid.: 38.

⁷⁷⁷ Hughes & Öjendal (2006): 417.

⁷⁷⁸ Heder (2007b): 155.

culture, as in Gainsborough's analysis, Heder finds them to radically deviate from historical models and instead serve as 'a cosmetic cover for an ugly metamorphosis', whereby election violence displays unchecked bureaucratic might.⁷⁷⁹ This dissertation charts how contemporary political projects, whilst often appealing to tradition or history, imbued supposedly traditional notions with novel meanings to serve contemporary purposes. It therefore demonstrates the need to historicise continuity and change within different national imaginings, calling into question preconceived notions of 'traditional' versus 'modern'. Secondly, it outlines how, whilst the redefinition of cultural notions was partly constrained by their historical meaning, there was also space for their renegotiation. Hughes and Öjendal write of culture and tradition 'as landscapes of struggle in which certain historical features are embedded, preventing the free play of interpretation, but in which, equally, space is available for differences of perspective, emphasis and engagement to meet in conflict and negotiation, and to combine over time to comprise significant trajectories of change'.⁷⁸⁰ This dissertation charts the limits of reinterpretation, outlining constraints by history and contemporary material circumstances.

Political party actors reinvented historical concepts to respond to changes pertaining to the contemporary era. Each sought to reconcile particular tensions and contradictions specific to the KOC period. For the CPP and Hun Sen, this tension centred on the mandate and nature of legitimate leadership in a post-socialist context whilst building on their revolutionary legitimacy of the recent past. For royalists, their central dilemma was how to reconcile the reinstated constitutional monarchy with political royalism. Self-identified democrats, in turn, struggled to represent a nation not yet existing, but rather in becoming, by voicing the will of a people blinded by CPP ideological and material domination. To confront these new challenges, the political parties reinvented national imaginings and corollary bids for representation, with the result that these differed in important ways from the previous PRK era.

The CPP invented a complex post-socialist identity, to replace what observers have noted as a particularly hollow self-professed Marxist-Leninist regime identity under

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.: 162.

⁷⁸⁰ Hughes & Öjendal (2006): 419.

the previous PRK. Heder has categorised the PRK regime as an 'ideological fake, constructed on insincere play-acting and theatrics, and a cover for rising personalised networks of Cambodian bureaucratic, military and economic power'. This was tied to the rise of Hun Sen, who oversaw a shift from bureaucratic socialism to nascent authoritarian crony capitalism.⁷⁸¹ Apprehensive of communism and the Vietnamese presence, Hun Sen sidelined cadres who genuinely believed in Marxism-Leninism and replaced them with a group of pragmatic technocrats – many of whom, today, hold important government positions.⁷⁸² In 1991, the notion of revolution and the remaining pretence of socialism was publicly dropped.⁷⁸³ Still, in working out a post-socialist regime identity for the CPP under Hun Sen in the KOC, this dissertation finds, notions of revolution and democracy remained central – only in novel ways. The CPP under Hun Sen continues to posit these notions as interdependent, whilst remodeling their contents. The revolutionary language was thus never dropped, merely lying dormant for a while before being reinvented. The notion of 'people's democracy' serves as one such discursive and conceptual bridge in regime identity. Democracy, during the PRK, was integrated as part of Cambodian revolutionary history, as the revolution's unchanging goal. The precise notion of 'people's democracy' referred to the 1979 defeat of the Khmer Rouge and the PRK regime that this hailed in. People's democracy, in its contemporary incarnation, then, is nothing less than the latest stage of the evolving Cambodian revolutionary quest towards genuine democracy. This provides another take on Anderson's phrase, 'Revolution is continuity'.⁷⁸⁴ The contemporary Cambodian revolution invoked by the regime is a revolution that has outlived Marxism-Leninism; a revolution that has been voided of its Marxist-Leninist contents. In line with a Marxist-Leninist dialectical analysis, it tackles new emerging contradictions in society, yet the solutions offered are not Marxist-Leninist. The notion of 'people's democracy' engages with the newly introduced nominally liberal democratic framework and new capitalist transformation under CPP direction. It serves to guarantee that the regime can maintain a separate political identity from Western liberal democracies, at the same time as practices of

⁷⁸¹ Heder (2007b): 158–59.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*: 159; and Gottesman (2003): 212–16.

⁷⁸³ Heder (2007 b): 159; and Gottesman (2003): 345. On PRK-era KPRP historiography, see Frings (1997).

⁷⁸⁴ Anderson (1990): 148.

gift-giving and patronage central to the new economic system that has emerged, are framed as an integral part thereof. Neither of this is Marxist–Leninist, *per se*, yet these practices are phrased in the language of revolution and democracy. Another changing revolutionary imaginary is that of Sdech Kân. Kân is a revolutionary in the sense that he does away with the notion of hereditary leadership yet he is ultimately made king himself. Whilst drawing on historical Cambodian ideas of overturning leadership deemed unjust, then as a king, he is hardly an orthodox Marxist–Leninist hero. This narrative also engages with new contradictions in contemporary society, particularly the restoration of the monarchy and the return of royalists to the political stage. It ties the revolutionary imaginary to a distinct articulation of democracy, by positing social mobility and non-hereditary leadership as central components.

This contained layers of continuity, as the new political identity was based on notions of democracy and revolution that interacted strenuously with the socialist discourse they originally emanated from. It also involved thoroughgoing change, as these notions were employed in new ways to engage with novel realities. In this, the KOC-era rearticulations of notions of ideology can be understood to be more intimately bound up with actual political developments than their articulations during the preceding PRK regime ever were. In 1989, the year that the PRK crumbled, Hun Sen asserted that the external appearance of his regime should be understood as a mere costume.⁷⁸⁵ Two decades later, whilst a pragmatic approach to politics has been retained, the external appearance of Hun Sen's regime communicates important messages about ongoing political developments. This is not to say that emerging narratives and remodelled self-professed ideological tenets should be understood at face value as strictly defined ideology firmly guiding political practice. Just like during the PRK, these narratives and ideological constructs act as a cover for (and, as demonstrated, even promote) the politics of personalised networks. Yet, unlike the PRK era, this ideological facade is not dictated by the Vietnamese, but defined by the incumbent power holders, themselves. Whereas notions of revolution and democracy struck a false note in their PRK-era articulations, their KOC-era rearticulations are thus more representative of actual intents and political practice than (a largely

⁷⁸⁵ Heder (2007b): 159.

externally defined) socialism ever was. These narratives and constructs, as has been demonstrated, are directly associated with real regime practices. The revolutionary language was reinvented to support Hun Sen's increasingly personal hold on power and to champion new regime practices particular to a new capitalist economy; thereby, it was actively used to negotiate change. All of these practices are consistently phrased in the language of democracy, in an attempt to influence domestic understanding of what democracy must mean in the contemporary Cambodian context.

The political identity of actors coming out of the civil war-era resistance factions changed substantially from their PRK-era articulations. In contradistinction to Hughes, who has stressed the similarities between FUNCINPEC and the SRP sharing dual identities as democratic opposition, internationally, and nationalist resistance, domestically, this dissertation has outlined how royalists primarily engaged in political contestation from within the parameters of a separate, royalist, identity.⁷⁸⁶ FUNCINPEC and political parties such as the NRP and SJFP first and foremost self-identified and portrayed themselves to the electorate as *royalist*. This is important because the wide-ranging differences between the self-identified royalists and the self-identified democrats provide an explanation for their failure to come together as one political force, and because it allows for exploration of the negotiation of separate royalist and democrat identities.

For royalists, establishing historical continuity was crucial. On the most basic level, they attempted to establish the historical continuity of nation, religion and king in a way that gave meaning to political royalism. Their most celebrated model to this end was Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, which they claimed as the blueprint for their contemporary political project. Yet royalist politics was characterised not by continuity, but by discontinuity. Second Kingdom conditions were new, in that it was the first time that political royalism had to stand completely separately from the monarchy. Ironically, considering the increasingly desperate references to Sihanouk's Sangkum Reastr Niyum, it was precisely the rupture of the Sangkum that proved

⁷⁸⁶ Hughes (2001c): 311–12.

impossible to overcome. Political actors revisited the Sangkum to find a solution for how to imbue political royalism with meaning, drawing on the monarchy, yet the Sangkum had partly suspended such questions. Political royalists failed to move on from this paradox. As a result of this incongruence, their resulting political bids were all phrased in Sihanoukist language, yet referred to vastly different things from those advocated by Sihanouk during the Sangkum.

Tracing these 'Sihanoukist' reinventions is important because they unmask problems internal to royalist politics. Whilst the CPP reinvention of notions of revolution and democracy can be understood to be laden with meaning, in that it informed concrete regime practices, the reinvention of Sihanoukist language fared differently. Whilst this language was also used to frame distinct political moves, no consensus on the form, nature or contents of Sihanoukism was reached among royalist actors. It could thus never offer an authoritative bid for remodelling ideas of legitimacy. Ultimately hollow, the failure of reviving Sihanoukist language in a meaningful way and the more thoroughgoing lack of a common royalist vision this evidenced was therefore bound up with the decay of a party political form of royalism.

Self-identified democrats, in comparison the most unconcerned with establishing continuity with imagined predecessors, were also those who most self-consciously styled their political project as finely attuned to changing realities. They turned against what they understood to be transforming communism, representing those victimised by Cambodia's capitalist development. This understanding guided their attempts to 'read' the will of the people, whilst the peculiarities of Cambodia's electoral democracy blurred the line of how this was to be assessed, and unjust development called for an interventionist stance. This is important because it shows the shifting challenges pertaining to their political project, as compared to earlier, self-identified democratic projects. Parliamentary democracy, the cornerstone of successive Cambodian self-identified democratic projects, was put into question. How to identify the people's will thus emerged significantly problematised.

Political Ideology, Politicised Identities and Representation of the Nation

This dissertation also shows a contemporary contestation over the very categories to define the national visions of political party actors competing electorally. Contemporary political contestation does not primarily employ the universal language of ideology that spread with the idea of the nation.⁷⁸⁷ Transnational ideologies such as liberalism and Communism were once important motors of nationalist struggles across Southeast Asia,⁷⁸⁸ and left their indelible mark on Cambodia.⁷⁸⁹ In contemporary Cambodia, these transnational ideologies have lost much of their power. This is less emphatic in the case of self-identified democrats, who associate closely with a liberal democratic identity, and to some extent can be said to be driven by the 'transnational networks, movements and horizons' Sidel identifies as long having driven Southeast Asian nationalisms.⁷⁹⁰ However, the democrats considered their mission to transcend the implementation of liberal democratic ideology. Indeed, contemporary actors routinely employ categories other than ideology to express national political imaginings, such as historical ideas of embodiment. Western-derived political notions readily partner with other such forms of claims to representation. Notions seemingly phrased in the language of ideology, such as Sihanoukism, differ substantially from the concept of ideology in the Western sense. Moreover, the very notion of political ideology and its applicability to contemporary political contestation was debated in the KOC, and came to be directly poised against notions of representation through embodiment.

Previous scholarship has shown ideas of embodiment to have continued relevance in contemporary Cambodian society, by considering contemporary statuary, spirit performances and, to a lesser extent, how such ideas have been reflected by Sihanouk's political activities as reinstated king and in FUNCINPEC discourse.⁷⁹¹ This dissertation has shown how a debate over ideas of embodiment goes to the very core of contemporary political contestation, remaining an important claim to political

⁷⁸⁷ Anderson (1998): 29.

⁷⁸⁸ Sidel (2003): 23.

⁷⁸⁹ Heder (1997).

⁷⁹⁰ Sidel (2003): 23.

⁷⁹¹ Thompson (2008): 203–6; Thompson (2004): 108–10; Hang (2004); Kent (2008); Hughes (2001c): 308; and Hughes (2002c): 119.

legitimacy. Since Cambodia's first elections in 1946 and up through the post-colonial period, these questions of whether political contestation was to be based on ideology or embodiment remained unresolved. In contemporary Cambodia, this tension between ideas of ideology and embodiment has come to a head. These categories are not mutually exclusive. Claims of embodiment are accompanied by appeals to a doctrinal identity, both by royalist actors and Hun Sen. Yet whether doctrine is used to accompany claims of embodiment, such as for Hun Sen, or to supplant these, increasingly the case for royalists, seems to be the defining difference. The first formula is the successful one, testifying to the relevance of claims of embodiment.

Developments in royalist discourse, with the increasing sidelining of claims of embodiment in favour of a doctrinal identity, would seem to indicate an increasing move towards the necessity to phrase politics in the language of ideology or doctrine. Perhaps in line with democratisation, this would do away with the exclusivity of embodiment. Yet the continued salience of embodiment is evidenced by both Ranariddh's repeated use of the language of incarnation and Hun Sen's claims to it. That embodiment failed as a strategy for royalists, historically associated with such ideas, does not therefore mean that the idea of embodiment was necessarily anachronistic or redundant in the KOC. Rather, the royalist failure can be traced to the Sangkum paradox, which firmly tied legitimacy to the body of Sihanouk, and, moreover, the royalists' lack of a material base to back up their embodiment claims. Therefore, their claims were exposed as fictional. By contrast, Hun Sen, with his overwhelming dominance over the body politic, could credibly claim to incarnate the nation, with claims made in the language of reincarnation. This suggests the need for a material base to support claims of embodiment of the nation.

The allegiance to embodiment as a form of political representation helps explain why political party actors did not predominantly phrase their programs in the language of ideology, and why political parties' policy differences, views and ideologies did not appear well-defined to voters. Secondly, this further demonstrates and explains the continued role of individual strongmen, rather than political parties, as mobilisers of

opinion.⁷⁹² These strongmen were holders of legitimacy, firmly invested in their individual bodies, and only by extension did this personal legitimacy reflect on the political party they were associated with. Because of the continued personal nature of claims to political legitimacy, legitimacy-building was not primarily associated with party-building. This helps explain the continuous weakening of the institution of political parties as objects of popular loyalty.⁷⁹³

Attention to these levels of contestation parallel to 'ideology', policy differences and policy programs, also shows Cambodian contemporary politics to be heavily preoccupied with a debate between inherited and elected legitimate national leadership. An age-old stand-off in Cambodia, this issue gathered new urgency after 1993. The debate has arguably been at least temporarily settled in favour of elected leadership. Hun Sen's narrative of Sdech Kân exalted the idea of social mobility and the designation of the leader on the basis of relative merit rather than hereditary right. Whilst royalists made appeals to genealogical lines, these appeals to hereditary power turned out to have little or no legitimacy. Ranariddh's attempt to link democracy to the Cambodian monarchy by pointing to the elective nature of the Khmer Crown shows how the idea of elected leadership had become widely hegemonic. Yet, whilst these claims could perhaps support the legitimacy of a constitutional monarchy, they did not support that of political royalists. Royalists attempted to transfer legitimacy from Sihanouk to Ranariddh and the wider family not by emphasising an elected element, but through creating a doctrinal identity of 'Sihanoukism' ultimately susceptible to hijacking by the CPP; and through embodiment, claimed by genealogical lines, which, since they lacked the material base to support this idea, ultimately also was a dead end. As noted above, the idea of elected leadership was advanced in a broader sense than liberal democratic multi-party elections, both by Hun Sen and royalists. Whilst the designation of leadership is based on individual achievement, it is not primarily determined by results at the polls, but through a different nomination process. For royalists, the election of the monarch is through the throne council. For Hun Sen as Sdech Kân, his achievements and the ability to lead

⁷⁹² Hughes (2000): 121.

⁷⁹³ As Peou notes, 'Cambodia's party and party system institutionalization remains extremely limited'. Sorpong Peou, 'The Cambodian Challenge for Party and Party System Institutionalization'. Cp Hughes (2002b): 170; and Hughes (2002c): 117.

the nation that these evidence single him out as the national leader. His leadership role is confirmed by national election results, but not reducible to a mere consequence of it. Secondly, the idea of elected leadership is firmly situated in ideas of possessing moral qualities. The Sdech Kân narrative constitutes, ultimately, a claim to possess merit; that it is the moral qualities of Hun Sen that designate him as personally chosen to leadership. The weakening of political royalists, on the other hand, is traceable to widespread corruption pre-empting any credible counter-narratives from royalists in moral terms.

This is not intended to mystify contemporary Cambodian political discourse by suggesting that it has yet to catch up with a 'modern' vocabulary of politics. Rather, it testifies to selective attempts by contemporary actors, particularly the CPP and royalists, to vest their political projects in historical legitimisations that enjoy widespread social legitimacy, whilst using these to subtly manipulate their contents. Hun Sen's reincarnation of Sdech Kân can be understood as a bid to articulate and cement an interpretation of legitimate leadership, to define the present era and negotiate future developments, a concern that goes beyond that of convincingly aspiring to be a *neak mean bon* or *Preah Bat Thommik*. Ranariddh's belaboured claims to embodiment attempted to shift the basis of such claims to follow genealogical lines.

Public Appeal

This dissertation has outlined elaborate ways in which members of the political elite interpret the nation and attempt to make their particular readings of the nation hegemonic. Caroline Hughes has spoken of a 'hazy vision of Khmerness', articulated by successive regimes from Sangum Reastr Niyum onwards.⁷⁹⁴ The visions outlined here were hazy in some ways, yet in others not. They were hazy in the sense that they retained a fantastical aspect, in that they reflected elite visions and attempts to manipulate public discourse, rather than an accomplished reality, as well as in their internal tensions and ambiguities. On the other hand, they were clearly anchored in

⁷⁹⁴ Hughes (2009): 45.

and bound up with real political developments and ongoing political processes. Hun Sen's narrative was complicit in circumscribing the role of the monarchy and the political royalists, and was accompanied by other political moves to the same effect. The changing ideas of the monarchy advanced by royalists, meanwhile, reflected and were employed to negotiate these real changes.

One of the most striking paradoxes that emerges from this study is how all these discourses were very much articulated from above, whilst purporting to exclusively represent actual grassroots concerns, as well as how self-contained some of the debates were, never completely filtrating down to grassroots awareness. These case studies illustrate how far removed elite imaginations were from ordinary people, and the extent to which these debates remained, ultimately, an intra-elite struggle. A major reason for this is arguably the sheer ignorance of the elite regarding the political preferences of the electorate. Caroline Hughes has drawn attention to the 'social and political opacity of Cambodia's post-war rural electoral heartland'.⁷⁹⁵ Referring to Cambodian voters as the 'silenced majority', she writes that 'Very little is known about the demographics of Cambodian voter preferences in terms of class, gender or ethnicity, or the motivations for voting', so that 'political parties continue to operate blindly in this key site of democratic politics'. Voters were, from the first democratic elections in 1993, encouraged not to speak openly about their political preferences, in a strategy to reduce security problems and spare international democracy promoters from engaging with local level political party structures. Introduced by international democracy supporters, this strategy of silence has been promoted by Cambodian political parties, including the political opposition, which support it as a strategy to avoid intimidation by the CPP.⁷⁹⁶ Cambodia's characteristics as an 'electoral democracy' have further obscured popular political preferences, as expressed either at the polls or in everyday political behaviour between elections, making it difficult for politicians to assess the popular will.

The imaginings of the nation and strategies of its representation outlined in this thesis can be understood as a consequence of this opacity, which has added up to a veritable

⁷⁹⁵ Hughes (2001b): 298.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*: 303-4.

crisis of representation. The distance between political parties and the general public, which Hughes has referred to as 'the politics of non-representation', has catalysed the emergence of these strategies of purported national representation as an attempted 'politics of representation'.⁷⁹⁷ In this sense, they are attempts at 'reading Cambodia', made equally by the self-identified democratic opposition, royalists and the CPP. All party actors faced the dilemma of how to make national democratic politics meaningful in a context of overwhelming rural poverty in which a majority of the population found itself on the lower end of a steep socio-economic divide. The 'real problem' for Sangkum, Ranariddh writes, was not to caricature Western democracy but to integrate the peasant masses who were very far removed from classic democratic values into a system that listened to people and their real needs.⁷⁹⁸ These words could have been echoed by any political party representative speaking about the contemporary context. To make their projects relevant in this context, their discourses all picked up on new exigencies that they could expect to resonate with the times, and, in this sense, included attempts to some extent to follow what they could expect to be changing public attitudes. This is seen in Hun Sen's emphasis on social mobility and equal opportunities. Royalist actors placed their hopes on what they believed to be the people's nostalgic yearning for Sihanouk and his Sangkum Reastr Niyum, envisaging its institutions to address contemporary issues. An example is the plan of Sisowath Thomico, in setting up the SJFP, for the National Congress to tackle what he assumed to be a contemporary conflict of generations and changing social composition. The self-identified democratic opposition tailored their agenda to champion the rights of those suffering under Cambodia's current development path. In this sense, these discourses are also elite fantasies of the elusive Cambodian nation. Ultimately, though, they were constrained, if not straitjacketed, by particular ideological heritages and historiographies, and articulated as attempts to direct the masses into elite-defined trajectories.

This begs the questions of to what extent different actors have consolidated their nationalist discourses and how successful these discourses are as legitimising attempts. The imaginings of the nation and strategies of representation outlined in this

⁷⁹⁷ Hughes (2002b): 170.

⁷⁹⁸ Norodom Ranariddh (1998): 136.

thesis do not make the political preferences of the Cambodian electorate any clearer. The other 'unspoken' half of the story presented here is the interaction and renegotiation of these elite-level discourses in society. As they interact with the understanding of groups within society, they are subject to reinterpretation, renegotiation and, perhaps, resistance. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the wider societal penetration of these discourses, this thesis nonetheless suggests the shared limitations in claims to popular representation and consequent 'democratic legitimacy' of the different actors. The political opposition and scholarship characterising Cambodia as an electoral democracy agree that election results do not accurately represent popular preferences. Yet, even further, this dissertation shows, all competing democratic imaginings were used to trump the election process. Electoral victory, *per se*, did not suffice to constitute democratic legitimacy for any political party, which all sought democratic legitimacy also by other means. This suggests a more shaded and nuanced character of internal legitimacy that cannot be easily determined and can only partially be possessed. By offering a finely tuned picture of elite-level discourses and imaginings, this study opens up the detailed and precise study of the interaction between these elite-level discourses and general society as a new direction for further research.

Implications in Southeast Asian Perspective

The findings of this dissertation add to Southeast Asian literature's criticism of the assumption in 'globalisation literature' of there being a general move from a Westphalian to a post-Westphalian world order, where allegiance to nation states has been replaced by globalism and cosmopolitanism. In Southeast Asia, these assumptions have been shown to be erroneous, as 'notions of nations, state-building, sovereignty and bordered territories have not been abandoned'.⁷⁹⁹ This dissertation shows not only the continued prevalence, but also the heightened centrality of national imaginings in contemporary Cambodia following the introduction of multi-party elections – one of the main effects of globalisation. Since globalisation has

⁷⁹⁹ Öjendal (2005): 361; Sutherland (2010); Sutherland (2011); Brown (2009); Kuhnt-Saptoedewo, Grabowsky & Grobheim, eds. (1997).

resulted in the promotion of procedural democracy (i.e. elections) in different national contexts region-wide, this dynamic could be more widespread.

These findings confirm that, whilst the discourses and practices associated with the global spread of the liberal democratic model undoubtedly impact upon Southeast Asia, they do not immediately erode institutions and values historically embedded in domestic contexts;⁸⁰⁰ instead, they encounter earlier democratic imaginings, the historical emergence of which are bound up with national constructions. This dissertation therefore suggests that democratic discourses be examined through a historicised account of the entanglement of notions of democracy and national identity. A comparative regional account of the arrival and subsequent development of these notions, and how this has played out in later democratic and national discourses and realities, would arguably help illuminate national and regional trajectories of political development.⁸⁰¹ Attention to this nexus in domestic imaginings could also help uncover otherwise neglected domestic discourses of democracy. Democracy has been shown to dominate political imaginings in various national contexts in Southeast Asia, such as in Thailand and the Philippines.⁸⁰² Applying this approach in this dissertation has unveiled the extent to which this is also the case in Cambodia – and potentially an even more widespread dynamic.

This dissertation thereby adds to the Southeast Asianist criticism of the widespread assumption that globalisation causes convergence to liberal policies, joining the criticism of scholarship that 'exaggerates the depth, scope, and determinism of globalisation in Southeast Asia'.⁸⁰³ In the region, the promotion of procedural democracy has not produced unidirectional political trajectories and there has been no given outcome of these processes.⁸⁰⁴ Whilst this dissertation does not take elections, per se, as the object of study, it provides an account of how the introduction of a multi-party democratic system with multi-party elections has played out in a domestic

⁸⁰⁰ Öjendal (2005): 346–47; and Willford & George, eds. (2005).

⁸⁰¹ This is so far limited to Michael Connors's (2003) study on Thailand.

⁸⁰² Sukatipan (1995): 222–23; Franco (2004); and Guerrero & Tusalem (2008).

⁸⁰³ Öjendal (2005): 346.

⁸⁰⁴ See, for example, Taylor, ed. (1996); Loh & Öjendal, eds. (2005); Aspinall & Mietzner, eds. (2010); Croissant (2004); and Sidel (1996).

Southeast Asian context. It can thus be read as a Cambodian case study of a more widespread pattern of Southeast Asian indigenisation of elections, both during and after the Cold War. Thereby, it responds to the question posed in a volume edited by Robert Taylor, which asks how elections are indigenised in Southeast Asia. Concentrating on whether the indigenisation process is part of the defanging of the potential empowerment of the people promised by elections, this volume provides a tentative yes, suggesting that, in the final case, it crippled rather than empowered the electorates. Taylor writes that, 'We do this thing this way here and always have, so shut up' is the answer often given to those who raise doubts about the appropriateness of prevailing political patterns.' This leads Taylor to conclude that:

In order to understand the meaning and role of elections in any society, one needs to contextualise the election process. Elections have meaning only within a particular historical space and time, and to see them outside their context is to deny them any significant meaning. Discovering the meaning of elections is a genuine comparative project [...] The meaning and role of elections can be interpreted differently ... within the same political structures.⁸⁰⁵

Whilst refusing the language of culture as an explanatory variable for political processes in the region, this volume highlights the symbolic and contested importance of the electoral process across the region and the various meanings attached to that process, set in the context of each country's political economy.⁸⁰⁶ Similarly, the introduction of elections in Cambodia did not entail a unidirectional political trajectory. Cambodian domestic elites, this dissertation shows, attached multiple meanings to elections, confirming the need for a finely contextualised approach to find meaning in domestic election processes. In Cambodia, each competing construction of the nation posited the role and mandate of elections differently. Since all, ultimately, relativised the importance of elections, if popular empowerment is defined as the people being able to exercise their will at polls, then all, in this sense, contributed to its defanging. Yet, there was also considerable diversity among the competing constructions, each entailing its own intrinsic possibilities of popular empowerment and/or disempowerment, if understood more loosely in terms of how these envisaged popular political involvement. This suggests that we need to locate

⁸⁰⁵ Taylor (1996): 8–9.

⁸⁰⁶ Cp. Kelly (1997): 461.

questions of the weakening versus empowerment of electorates in exact processes of contestation. 'Indigenisation' did not produce uniform outcomes of disempowerment, and the precise outcomes of such processes are ultimately an empirical question.

The introduction of multi-party elections was thus not unequivocally a milestone on a presumed road to democratisation, but related in a much more complex manner to issues of political change. As a consequence thereof, this dissertation shows, in Cambodia, following the introduction of elections, a 'democratic' stance shifted to be bound up with scepticism towards elections, similar to other national contexts in the region. It thus offers a further case study of 'pro-democratic' political imaginings that are sceptical of electoral democracy.⁸⁰⁷ In Thailand, Laothamatas identifies conflicting expectations of democratic government between rural farmers, for whom democracy 'is a means to bring greater benefits and official attention to themselves and their villages' and the urban, educated middle class, which 'firmly believes that electoral venalities result in the return of unqualified politicians to the corridors of power'.⁸⁰⁸ Voting is determined by patron-client networks, as voters elect politicians who help them cope with problems, attend village functions, make donations and bring in public programs, rather than on the basis of election platforms.⁸⁰⁹ The penetration of patron-client dynamics in voting behaviour has shaped the 'democratic' imaginings of the Thai middle class and the political parties they overwhelmingly support, to view electoral democracy as the rule of the corrupt, turning instead to support the military.⁸¹⁰ In Cambodia, the penetration of money politics and the effects of patronage incentives on voting behaviour have similarly led self-identified democrats to highlight the shortcomings of electoral democracy. However, this has produced political imaginings quite different from those in Thailand. The disappointment with electoralism, whilst emanating from similar concerns, produced demands for electoral reform and resulted in a search to identify and represent the 'authentic' will of the people. The people were imagined to suffer from false consciousness, resulting from CPP ideological and material domination. Therefore, the political strategies of the 'democrats' were aimed at actively

⁸⁰⁷ On Thailand, see Laothamatas (1996); and Winichakul (2008).

⁸⁰⁸ Laothamatas (1996): 202.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: 206-7.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 220-21.

attempting to identify the objective interests of the people, rather than preventing perceived democratic vices such as in Thailand. This indicates the importance of paying attention to particular ways in which political imaginations develop under similar conditions, and the resulting different meanings of democracy produced.

The Cambodian case also highlights the importance of monarchies, and royalist ideas more generally, in defining understandings of democracy in the region. Whilst these dynamics are often overlooked in analyses of national politics in the region, this dissertation shows that, in contemporary Cambodia, the 'spectre of the monarchy in politics' remains strong.⁸¹¹ In the main study to date of the role of Southeast Asian monarchies in contemporary politics, Roger Kershaw suggests that Southeast Asian monarchies 'may offer special assets to a polity in transition towards democracy'.⁸¹² Monarchies can promote democracy by restraining the excesses of either the power elite or the 'excesses of an open democracy', abilities, in turn, derived from how the monarchy represents continuity with the nation's past, its charisma, and how it is a separate institution from legislatures.⁸¹³ Whilst this is an analytical model from which Kershaw expects empirical cases to diverge to differing extents, he identifies this 'rosy ideal' as 'clearly confirmed' in the case of Thailand, followed next by Cambodia, where the main factor precluding the monarchy from realising its potential to act as a moderating force is how it is subject to the 'whims of a well-organised power elite'.⁸¹⁴ Yet the findings of this dissertation show a more complex role of the Cambodian monarchy in 'democratisation', whether considered in terms of Kershaw's understanding thereof, or in terms of more commonplace understandings of solidifying a procedural democracy – a role that is derived from the political stance and perceptions of the Cambodian monarchy and royalists, themselves, rather than the repressive force of the incumbent power elite.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ Even in Thailand, where the monarchy arguably has played an unrivalled role in shaping Thai democracy since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, harsh *lèse majesté* laws and a view of the royal family as standing above politics have largely precluded unbiased scrutiny thereof. Some exceptions are Winichakul (2008); Hewison (1997); Handley (2006); McCargo (2005); and Streckfuss (1995; 1996).

⁸¹² Kershaw (2001): 159.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*: 159, 162.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 160, 164.

⁸¹⁵ Kershaw never provides a clear definition of democracy, and it is unclear what the 'excesses of an open democracy' refer to and whether it incorporates electoral democracy – in

These findings are more in line with a literature that has outlined a similarly complex, even problematic role of the monarchy and royalist ideas in other national contexts in the region, particularly in terms of promoting an anti-electoral view of democracy. Thailand, which Kershaw takes to prove his framework, is a case in point. Kershaw lauds the Thai monarchy as having an 'extraordinarily creative function', groundbreaking in terms of how the King has facilitated democracy not only by restraining its 'excesses' but also mobilising his authority to actively intervene, so that the monarchy has emerged 'somewhat above the level of' constitutional monarchy' in European states.⁸¹⁶ His analysis omits what is perhaps the most noteworthy influence of Thai royalists – their distaste for electoral politics and how they have undermined electoral democracy by supporting the discourse outlined above, which casts electoral government as corrupt, in favour of 'clean politics', which builds on a view of the monarchy as the moral authority above other political institutions.⁸¹⁷ In Cambodia, royalists displayed a similar distaste for electoral politics, which they undermined in the name of a politics of consensus. Building on a Sangkum-derived understanding of democracy propagated by Ranariddh, these ideas have had heightened resonance in the contemporary era of national reconciliation. Just as in Thailand, the Cambodian royalists' legitimacy was partly derived from how the constitutional monarchy transcended, or in Kershaw's words were 'somewhat above the level of', the constitutional monarchies found in Europe.⁸¹⁸ At a difference from their Thai counterparts, however, the Cambodian royals did not exert their influence from a position claimed to be unambiguously 'above politics' – what has been identified as crucial to the Thai royals' power to intervene on the national political scene.⁸¹⁹ Instead, in the KOC, a long-standing debate of whether Cambodian

which case 'democracy', for Kershaw, would mean just about anything that national monarchies say it does. Regardless, my argument still stands, in that the Cambodian monarchy's and royalists' political stance and perceptions did not unambiguously act to uproot the legitimacy of the power elite, and, whilst they were anti-electoral, notions of 'direct democracy', the 'social opening' and the 'national union' did not seem to counteract the excesses of an 'open democracy' that Kershaw refers to.

⁸¹⁶ Kershaw (2001): 160, 162.

⁸¹⁷ Winichakul (2008).

⁸¹⁸ The current Thai constitutional monarch, Bhumibol, is widely perceived as a *dhammaraja*, a righteous King with particular moral power, *barami*. See Winichakul (2008): 21.

⁸¹⁹ Winichakul (2008): 15.

royals were 'above politics' or part of it, was resumed. Royalists tried to assert themselves as party political actors whilst simultaneously building on earlier discourses of regal legitimacy bestowing the moral high ground. Compared to their Thai counterparts, they therefore faced a formidable task, since they had to justify their political involvement as party political actors. As equal political contenders, the CPP was in a position to overtake their appeals to legitimacy and advance them more forcefully. Meanwhile, political royalists advanced a political agenda that opposed and undermined the legitimacy of electoral democracy. The Cambodian example, therefore, highlights how deeply problematic it was for contemporary Southeast Asian monarchies of a Theravada Buddhist tradition to relate to the electoral democratic framework. Even in Cambodia, a context in which royalists transformed themselves into a party political force, their discourse served to undermine electoral democracy by drawing on ideas of legitimate leadership ultimately derived from regal legitimacy.

These discourses of Buddhist kingship also influence contemporary ideas of leadership. Just as in Thai democracy, this dissertation shows, in contemporary Cambodia, the moral character of the leader is considered an important element of leadership, transcending policies and ideas – perceptions closely associated with historical ideas of kingship.⁸²⁰ In Thailand, as disillusion with electoral politics has grown, the monarch's moral authority has come to be considered superior to elected ones. In Cambodia, on the other hand, royalist political discourse has reinforced the importance of moral legitimacy, making their failure to successfully imbue these moral claims with meaning even more devastating. Meanwhile, Hun Sen's claims of moral superiority have bestowed him with a regal aura. This shows the flexibility of such discourses of moral legitimacy associated with the monarchy, which do not necessarily remain confined to the monarchy and royalists but can also work to the detriment of royalists.

The findings of this dissertation thus help shed light on aspects associated with processes of reconfiguration of legitimacy through changing conceptualisations of

⁸²⁰ On Thailand, see Winichakul (2008): 18; and McCargo (2002): 5.

historical kingship observed throughout Southeast Asia. In the region, the revival of ideas of kingship has been understood as part of a larger move towards 'retraditionalization'. Cambodia differs from other countries in the region in two respects. Firstly, this renegotiation of kingship took place within the framework of a reinstated constitutional monarchy, which was unique in Southeast Asia. Secondly, different meanings of kingship and legitimate leadership were offered by different competitors in a multi-party democratic system. This differed from Laos and Vietnam, which are one-party states where these reinventions were tied to the party state and encountered no political party opposition.

At this backdrop, the Cambodian case can add to the regional debate in several important respects. Firstly, the Cambodian example highlights certain characteristics of employing kingship as a historical model. In Laos and Vietnam, the communist one-party states used ideas of kingship to provide a political identity after the end of the Cold War, in a bid to appropriate earlier, regal legitimacy.⁸²¹ In both these countries, the royal families had long been outmanoeuvred, prominent royal family members exiled or killed and royalists extinguished as a political force. The scholarly debate has therefore centred on making sense out of attempts to transfer earlier, 'exhausted' regal legitimacy to contemporary political actors of a post-communist brand, who replace monarchies and face no serious political challenge. The Cambodian reinvention, by contrast, took place in the context of circumscribing a reinstated monarchy and royalist political party. It thereby uniquely shows how ideas of kingship can be used to trump a king on the throne. This highlights how kingship, or ideas thereof, is not something absolutely, or even primarily, tied to the monarch. It rather serves as a historical model of leadership and is therefore superbly flexible. This explains the ease with which such ideas have been appropriated by communist projects in the region. Grant Evans has argued that, in Cambodia and Laos, 'because of the historically close relationship in these countries between kingship and Theravada Buddhism, any cult of personality drifts dangerously in the direction formerly occupied by the former monarch'.⁸²² The Cambodian case confirms that, indeed, legitimisations did drift towards kingship as the historical model of

⁸²¹ Grabowsky & Tappe (2011); and Jellema (2007).

⁸²² Evans (1998): 31.

leadership. Yet, this shift was hardly dangerous for the Cambodian regime – a country with an actual reinstated monarch; let alone, then, this suggests, in Laos and Vietnam, where the regimes faced no such challenges.

Secondly, following from how kingship is a flexible historical model of leadership integrating different connotations and tensions specific to each historical context, kingship is not one indivisible entity but rather an aggregate of components. In the Cambodian context, kingship is bound up with ideas of embodiment, inherited versus elected leadership and moral achievement and merit. This disaggregation of kingship opens the research agenda up to reinventions of kingship in other Southeast Asian contexts. Reinventions do not have to buy the whole 'package' of all that kingship entails. In the Theravada Buddhist countries, similar questions of embodiment are entailed in reinventions, and can perhaps be pursued as a research direction.⁸²³ More broadly, this points to the importance of distinguishing between what aspects or qualities of kingship are emphasised in different reinventions, to chart their exact meanings.

Thirdly, the Cambodian case demonstrates the importance of regional influences and regional models in this regard. Hun Sen has referred to Laos under former President Kaysone as a major influence for his reinvention of the role of the monarchy. This shows the need for charting regional flows of ideas and political models in contemporary Southeast Asia. Whilst, once underway, these reinventions follow distinctly national trajectories, they do not take place in self-contained national contexts but are influenced by regional developments.

⁸²³ In Burma, it is rumoured that Than Shwe believes himself to be the reincarnation of a Burmese monarch, and analysts point to how the General styles himself this way. See 'Burma: The End of an Era or a Dynasty's Beginning?', *The Irravaddy*, 28 Jan. 2011. In Thailand, Irene Stengs (2009) finds that the cult of King Chulalongkorn, peaking in the 1990s, not only contributed to the general promotion of the Thai monarchy but exalted expectations on kingship under King Bhumibol, so that images of and veneration for Bhumibol gradually came to replace those of Chulalongkorn; this testifies to the interconnectedness of the two figures as ideal personifications of 'modern Buddhist kingship'. Worthy of note is that General Sonthi, leader of the 2006 anti-Thaksin coup, had been identified by a 'political' astrologer as the reincarnation of a general under King Taksin who had saved the nation after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767, and therefore destined to save the Thai nation yet again. Pasuk Phongpaichit & Chris Baker, 2008.

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- Author's interview with Anand Noranariddh, 4 June 2011, Phnom Penh.
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- Author's interview with Dien Del, 14 June 2010, Phnom Penh.
- Author's interview with Ek Sereyvath, 30 May 2011, Phnom Penh.
- Author's interview with Eng Chhay Eang, 24 March 2010, Phnom Penh.
- Author's interview with Eng Mary, 19 June 2010, Phnom Penh.
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Phnom Penh.
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Author's interview with Sisowath Ayravady, 18 November 2009, Phnom Penh.
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Author's interview with Yim Sovann, 26 March 2010, Phnom Penh.
Author's interview with You Hockry, 15 June 2010.

The following interviewees have asked to remain anonymous:

Author's interview, 12 July 2010.

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Field notes

Author's field notes, NRP campaign speech in Oudong, 4 June 2011.

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