



Converts, not ideologues? The Khmer Rouge practice of thought reform in Cambodia, 1975–1978

Kosal Path & Angeliki Kanavou

To cite this article: Kosal Path & Angeliki Kanavou (2015) Converts, not ideologues? The Khmer Rouge practice of thought reform in Cambodia, 1975–1978, Journal of Political Ideologies, 20:3, 304–332, DOI: [10.1080/13569317.2015.1075266](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2015.1075266)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2015.1075266>



Published online: 25 Nov 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Converts, not ideologues? The Khmer Rouge practice of thought reform in Cambodia, 1975–1978

KOSAL PATH

Brooklyn College, City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY 11210, USA

ANGELIKI KANAVOU

Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics & Morality, University of California, Irvine, CA 92697-5100, USA

ABSTRACT While mistaken as zealot ideologues of Marxist ideals fused with Khmer rhetoric, the Khmer Rouge (KR) cadres' collective profile better fits that of the convert subjected to intense thought reform. This research combines insights from the process and the context of thought reform informed by local cultural norms with the social type of the convert in a way that captures the KR phenomenon in both its general and particular dimensions. Relying on textual analysis of KR party cadres' notebooks and their own self-confessions during state-sanctioned 'lifestyle' meetings, this article provides new insight into how conversion and radicalization happened at a mass level. This process of conversion allowed the KR to establish its social influence over the mass and to carry out its social engineering plans. These KR notebooks provide a window to peer into the everyday practices of KR thought reform and assess its social-psychological impact on lower level cadres at that time. Towards the end of the KR regime, thought reform degenerated into terror.

Introduction

Much has been written about the genealogy of Khmer Rouge (KR) communism in the 1970s. The main debate in the scholarship centres on the extent to which external and indigenous sources influenced KR communist ideology. At one end of the spectrum, historian Ben Kiernan concludes that KR communism has no parallels and should be regarded as a *sui generis* phenomenon.¹ At the other end, David Chandler, Karl Jackson and Elizabeth Becker argue that the intellectual genealogy of KR communism was derived from multiple sources, including Maoism, European Marxism, Stalinism and certainly Khmer nationalism.² More recent anthropological studies by Alexander Hinton, Ian Harris and Eve Zucker among others take a middle ground, but with emphasis on local cultural frames, allowing the infusion of external and indigenous sources to account for the KR revolution.³

The KR revolutionary ideology, they contend, is the fusion of foreign communist ideologies (Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism) with local understandings and meanings deeply rooted in Khmer cultural traits and Buddhism. Notably, Buddhism scholar Ian Harris draws a direct connection between Buddhism and Khmer Rouge communism. He argues: ‘Buddhist categories were [...] widely pressed into service in an attempt to present Marxism to a puzzled population.’⁴

While this study builds on existing works on the sources of KR ideology, it attempts to account for a rather different but complementary question: What accounts for the cadres’ overwhelming obedience to the authority of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK)? The article turns to the understudied KR practice of ‘thought reform’ and relies on the untapped collection of KR notebooks left behind by party cadres after their regime was toppled by the Vietnamese in 1979. Rather than trying to read between the lines, this article literally analyses these hand-written private texts to provide insight into the process of conversion and the psychosocial dynamics of thought reform at the individual and group levels. These materials provide windows to peer into the making of the KR thought reform programme, and how large-scale obedience to the state authority developed and evolved during the KR regime (1975–1979). By regarding KR revolutionaries as doctrinaires, we tend to neglect individual-level social and psychological dynamics that operated in this totalitarian regime. Here, we focus on the CPK’s thought reform practices that robustly influenced its cadres, one at a time, and moulded their minds to serve the master plan of purifying Cambodian society. As a method of textual analysis, this article proposes a synthesis of a context-based explanation of how thought reform operated with an examination of the reformed/convert as an ideal type. This context/agent synthesis brings to the surface the interweaving of cultural traits long embedded in Cambodia’s Theravada Buddhist culture, namely mind control. The KR constructed a self-reinforcing new faith that sought to replace the old one with a new morality while preserving elements that served its lethal plan.

This article argues that the practices of KR thought reform programmes—that is, the institutionalized and regularized criticism and self-criticism meetings—enabled the regime to achieve its ultimate purpose: to strictly condition and monitor its cadres’ absolute obedience to the party’s authority by means of psychological domination. Thought reform practices, we further argue, complemented the apparent lack of bureaucratic control by the Central Committee (the ‘Party Centre’) of the CPK at the lower levels of the party apparatus and the army by granting ideologically enlightened party members, especially political commissars, more autonomy and authority in training, educating, and re-educating other cadres and the masses. In this sense, in the KR-style totalitarian regime, top leaders extracted almost absolute power and authority through a mixture of both centralized and decentralized bureaucracy. The efficiency of decentralization of political indoctrination at the local level should not be mistaken for loss of control by KR leaders. Regularized political study sessions and lifestyle meetings functioned as the medium for leaders to educate, mould and convert party members into loyal and ideologically aligned followers, who then went on to indoctrinate other cadres.

This method, we suggest, was perceived by the KR leadership as the most efficient way to convert peasants and cadres into a critical mass of obedient revolutionaries.

In actuality, however, the success of KR thought reform was limited by its extreme demand for absolute surrender of individuality to the collective. The fact that the regime resorted to violent purging, torturing and killing of tens of thousands of its own cadres during 1977 and 1978 indicates that Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and their most trusted colleagues gave priority to Stalinist-style purging over re-education. Yet the new converts who passed the thought reform tests became not only the most loyal and obedient members of the party, but also the most ardent supporters of the regime's systematic purging of those they considered antiparty elements during those years. Like Stalinism and Nazism, the KR revolution was self-destructive.

When Pol Pot and his inner circle came to power in Cambodia in 1975, they sought nothing less than total domination of the new society that they planned to engineer. The KR totalitarian movement fits Hannah Arendt's model of totalitarianism as it attempted to rewrite history, create new institutions, command total monopoly of power and reclaim Khmer glory.⁵ In comparative studies of Stalinism and Nazism, however, functionalists challenged this intentionalist totalitarian theory by revealing with new empirical evidence that lower bureaucrats acted with considerable agency and autonomy vis-à-vis the top leadership and state policies.⁶ In the case of Pol Pot's Cambodia, there have been two opposing views of the mass killing that took place in Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. Historian Ben Kiernan's account takes an intentionalist view that the mass killing was the direct result of Pol Pot's intentions, derived from a coherent and consistent ideology and implemented through an all-powerful totalitarian dictatorship.⁷ Political scientist Steve Heder, however, argues in line with a functionalist view that the mass killing emerged from a chaotic decision-making process in which increasingly radical and murderous improvisations by local officials played a significant role.⁸ The debate between intentionalists and functionalists, in our view, is unduly polarized. With regard to KR thought reform, a middle ground best captures the constitutive embodiment of the state's ideational discourses and agents' practices. KR thought reform was improvised and evolutionary at the local level rather than strictly programmatic, but at the same time, Pol Pot and his chief ideologist Nuon Chea set in motion a general thought reform programme and animated its momentum throughout the party apparatus. Lower party cadres drew upon the leaders' ideological indoctrination and translated it into thought reform practices at the local level.

Evidence from the KR notebooks suggests that middle and lower echelon cadres had significant leeway in interpreting the scope and content of criticism and self-criticism in everyday lifestyle meetings. In practice, though, thought reform evolved from an emphasis on Marxist–Leninist doctrine to witch-hunt sessions in which local cadres accused one another rather arbitrarily. As a result, there was a limitless possibility of calling individuals' actions, speech, emotion and thinking 'antirevolutionary'. The KR system of surveillance and monitoring of the masses

through small-group ‘criticism and self-criticism’ meetings was so omnipresent and invasive that it created an atmosphere of high uncertainty, distrust and fear for one’s life.

The documentary evidence

We mainly rely on a collection of largely untapped KR notebooks left behind by KR cadres and a number of documents from hearings conducted by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC; also known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal) to provide insights into the KR thought reform practices. The contribution of KR notebooks to a deeper understanding of how the regime sought to mould an obedient army of cadres, we contend, rests on two characteristics of these notebooks. First, they were written mostly by political commissars and/or party members whose rhetorical profiles fit those of the converts described by David Snow and Richard Machalek.⁹ More on this will be discussed later. These notebooks contain descriptive notes of day-to-day lifestyle meetings, political study sessions, and criticism and self-criticism sessions. Combined together, they provide valuable insight into the social-psychological dimensions of these cadres’ obedience to authority. The fact that there is little personal reflection or feeling expressed in these notebooks is astonishing. Second, these notebooks were the main medium for recording KR leaders’ teaching in most political study sessions during the KR regime, and also used to record what was discussed in various meetings including lifestyle meetings (*prachum chiveak-pheap*). According to Andrew Mertha, who interviewed Pol Pot’s secretary, Comrade Pun, KR leaders ordered participants (their cadres) to bring nothing other than their notebooks and pens to study meetings.¹⁰ The notebooks are what social action discourse theorist Ron Scollon calls ‘sites of engagement’, through which social practices intersect in real time to form a mediated action.¹¹ Both Lifton and Snow/Mchalek also point to discourse and rhetoric as the defining characteristic to assess thought reform and conversion.¹²

Likewise, KR textbooks provide real-time, unfiltered textual evidence of how lower cadres interpreted or translated the regime’s ideological discourse into thought reform practices in small groups and how individual converts talk and reason in the context of KR thought reform. Simply put, the notebooks textually provide a window for observing the real-time nature of institutionalized practices of thought reform—that is, the regularized lifestyle meetings in which intense exercises of criticism and self-criticism were instituted and strictly enforced by the KR regime. Taking a closer reading, these notebooks are ‘sites of social and psychological engagement’ through which cadres were subjected to constant psychological forging to inculcate a mental model of obedience to authority. In actuality, through lifestyle meetings, the entirety of one’s livelihood and everyday actions and thoughts were to be criticized, and self-criticized, on the basis of the KR ideal of the ‘pure revolutionary man’. Hence, it is through regularized practices of lifestyle meetings that obedience to authority, a higher

level of mediated social action, can be closely observed at the individual and group levels.

This article is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the characteristics and performative functions of the KR thought reform programme in the process of converting revolutionaries. In the second section, the article delves into the practices of thought reform through regularized study and lifestyle meetings. The third section discusses the obedience-to-authority and terror effect of thought reform practices. After the empirical analysis, the fourth section discusses the theoretical and conceptual implication of this study on social theory of conversion, specially the Snow and Machalek model in conjunction with Lifton's social-psychological framework of thought reform. The article concludes by discussing the relationship between KR thought reform and the phenomenon of overwhelming obedience to the authority of the KR regime.

Features and functions of KR thought reform

Khmer source of KR thought reform

Where did the Khmer Rouge communists learn their thought reform skills? Immediately, China's connection comes to everyone's mind. Comparing the profile of KR thought reform with Robert Lifton's and T. Chen's works on Chinese thought reform, the former apparently imitates several aspects of the latter. Similar to leading Chinese ideologues like Mao Zedong, KR political theorists Pol Pot and Nuon Chea viewed thought reform as both a method of purification and a cure for past ills.¹³ Both Mao and Pol Pot drew on the Russian Communist contribution to thought reform in much of the content and many of the forms of the process: the alleged scientific Marxist–Leninist doctrine, the organizational techniques of democratic centralism, methods of small group study meetings and the accompanied psychological pressure on individuals, ritualization of criticism and self-criticism, confession as features of 'ideological struggle', the demands for absolute eradication of individualism and devotion to the collective, absolute obedience, and so on.¹⁴ One major difference, however, is that while Mao saw the need to educate the Chinese people in order to bring them into harmony with the working class's political ideology,¹⁵ Pol Pot at the outset considered Cambodian intellectuals, except for their inner small circle, an outright threat to the regime. They were considered contagious parasites to be eradicated.

In tracing the origins of CPK policy on enemies and practices of thought reform, Philip Short suggests that Saloth Sar (Pol Pot's name at birth), Ieng Sary and others in the Marxist communist circle in Paris in the early 1950s were ideologically influenced by Stalin's 1938 writings entitled *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*, as well as the French revolution.¹⁶ Criticism and self-criticism, Short points out, mark one of the four formative precepts—correct leadership, criticism and self-criticism, eternal vigilance and continuous cleansing of opportunist elements within the party—that shaped the thinking of future KR

communist leaders.¹⁷ Saloth Sar and his colleagues practised Stalin's criticism and self-criticism in their cells in Paris. Yet, as most scholars contend—and as this study upholds with additional documentary evidence—the originality of the KR revolution lies in the Khmerization of these foreign ideas in a perverse way.

Although the KR thought reform-induced criticism and self-criticism owes its intellectual influence to Stalinism and Maoism, its characters and specificity were shaped by leaders' personal experiences and worldviews and Khmer culture.¹⁸ In fact, practices of thought reform among the KR cadres can be traced back to the formative years in the 1950s when young Khmer revolutionaries, especially Saloth Sar and Ieng Sary, were searching for ideas that would fix Cambodia's morally corrupt and culturally contaminated society.¹⁹ Brother Number Two, Nuon Chea, like Pol Pot, had a strong conviction that 'the focus on morality as a characteristic of an ideal revolutionary was a major component' of a new society.²⁰ Through indoctrination sessions, the populace would gradually learn party ideology. Like good passionate revolutionaries, they would eventually be guided by proper political consciousness.²¹

Thought reform, in Pol Pot's and Nuon Chea's view, started with washing away any nonsocialist contamination from the minds of intellectual officials within the CPK itself so that they worked closely with the peasantry mass. In October 1975, Laurence Picq, a French citizen, returned to Phnom Penh with her husband, Suong Sikoeun, a KR intellectual and a close aid to the then Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Ieng Sary. Although she was herself a French leftist and KR sympathizer, Picq experienced the psychological shock of re-entering a familiar community only to find that its members now inhabited a different mental plane.²² Picq recalled that lifestyle meetings were a ritual at B-1, a code name for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Picq's first-hand account in her book, *Beyond the Horizon: Five Years with the Khmer Rouge*, shows that Foreign Affairs cadres were already ideologically more advanced than intellectual returnees like herself and that thought reform was already fierce when she arrived in late 1975. There were biweekly study meetings where KR intellectuals had to wash away their intellectual mode of thinking, learn from the peasants and use a simplified and nonhierarchical vocabulary of the peasants.²³ According to Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, an intellectual and leading economist in Pol Pot's inner circle, was ordered by Pol Pot himself to 'frequently visit farmers living in the countryside.' Pol Pot instructed all senior leaders to adopt a simple lifestyle as a model for the masses.²⁴ Hence, Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and Ieng Sary possessed a genuine belief in the power of thought reform.

After they came to power in April 1975, the focus on thought reform manifested in speeches and statements by Pol Pot and Nuon Chea. At the 9 October 1975 Standing Committee meeting, Deputy Secretary Nuon Chea was elected to be in charge of domestic affairs, and by default propaganda and education fell under his oversight.²⁵ In building and cleaning up the party ideologically, Nuon Chea stressed the important task of educating and re-educating cadres to possess correct ideological standpoints and to eliminate incorrect ones. Emphasizing the

importance and perhaps the unique experiment of the KR ideological education, he told his Danish communist comrades in July 1978,

All of these ideological standpoints have been propagated in the branches and cells of the party. This was done not by the reading out of documents, but by analyzing daily activities, determining what was done wrongly, and correcting shortcomings.²⁶

Hence, self-criticism played an important role in assessing cadres' daily activities against ideological standpoints.²⁷

What aspects of Khmer culture did the Pol Pot regime use as a cultural ground in which to plant its thought reform programme? While Chinese communist leaders drew upon the Confucian concept of 'self-cultivation'—i.e. the belief that men can and should remake themselves—to make an ideological fetish of moralistic personal re-education,²⁸ KR leaders drew on the Buddhist concept of 'self-renunciation' for the same purpose. The litmus test for filtering out traditional norms involved respect for KR hierarchy and ensuring blind obedience to authority. Although the KR claimed to institute a new society, as the most recent scholarship reveals, the CPK or Angkar (translated literally as 'organization') recast existing cultural norms, particularly the Khmer traditional concept of Buddhist kingship, to enact the Angkar as 'mother and father' and 'the enlightened Buddha'.²⁹ The quintessential slogan of 'Angkar has the eyes of the pineapple' metaphorically depicted a new locus of supreme power that culturally resonates with the all-seeing eyes of a single head God with four faces watching in all directions at the iconic Bayan Temple (Angkor Thom).³⁰ The omnipresent slogan of 'Long live the correct and extremely clear-sighted leadership of the Communist Party of Kampuchea!' depicts the Angkar's monopoly on foresight. Like the Khmer kings, Pol Pot invoked the traditional Khmer concept of Buddhist kingship as a source of legitimacy, power and infinite enlightenment.³¹ Pol Pot himself absorbed the ideals of 'disciplined personal transformation, rebirth and enlightenment'³² and emulated the disciplined morality of Buddhism to build a cultural and religious foundation for KR communist ideology, demanding a total renunciation of individualism.³³ Ian Harris, though not the first scholar to do so, draws direct ties between Buddhist concepts of 'self-renunciation' and 'self-control' to the KR thought reform method of ritualizing criticism and self-criticism.³⁴ Moreover, to ensure that faith and loyalty were committed solely to the Angkar, the KR leadership fomented distrust among the masses by propagating a discourse of spies, traitors and enemies penetrating the party ranks and the army. Spying on one another was a common practice in the KR-controlled countryside during the early stage of the revolution, and was intensified during the KR's reign.³⁵ The KR discursive construction of distrust in daily social relations, as Zucker observes, atomized individuals and families by breaking the bonds of trust that normally exist in Cambodia.³⁶ This helped prepare the ground for more systematic thought reform programme.

At the operational level of KR thought reform, criticism and self-criticism meetings to build proletarian consciousness or revolutionary merit became a vehicle for daily thought reform struggle. Other Buddhist concepts of renunciation of

self-control and worldly material possessions were pressed into service to present Marxism to mostly uneducated and peasantry cadres.³⁷ Here the Buddhist concepts of mindfulness, self-control and renunciation of the individual self served as crucial cultural frames of KR thought reform.³⁸ The majority of KR cadres and the masses were not familiar with Marxist ideology, but they were familiar with Buddhist concepts. As Buddhist scholar Ian Harris points out, the Buddhist concept of mindfulness or *sati*, which resonated with the KR concept of proletarian consciousness, enabled potential revolutionaries to use their mindfulness to discern the party's line. Self-examination of one's proletarian consciousness, the regime dictated, was a continuous task for every cadre. The idea that proletarian consciousness could be forged independently of a person's economic status or education level became a central pillar of KR communism.³⁹

In Buddhism, purging the self of inner corruptible elements requires continuous effort. The KR emulated this practice and added new intensity to it. Through regularized compulsory lifestyle meetings, cadres were required to produce exhaustive accounts of their inner-self and mental state as they pertained to how they were relating to the revolution, their state of vigilance, regard for their mission and specific tasks. These confessions mirrored their inner thinking; they served to both keep the cadres' minds closely aligned with the revolutionary spirit and frequently expose those who were not mindful enough. With regard to punishment, cadres were not to stop with their actions, which may after all have occurred by mistake, but to look deeper into their motives.

The faceless Angkar and its totalitarian language

Unavoidably, language as cultural expression carries traits embedded in traditional practices. In *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, Henri Locard meticulously documents the KR discursive erection of their own totalitarian language, a linguistic scheme that translates complex foreign ideology like Marxism into the peasants' everyday language and resonates with their class grievances and revolutionary rhetoric at the time.⁴⁰ The ideal-type cadres and also the majority came from the peasant class. They could barely read, let alone converse about Marxist doctrine. With the help of thought reform, the cadres were never a source of ideological wisdom; they instead looked to Angkar to fill in for family, leadership and a new faith. For instance, a guard at S-21, the Party Centre's prison, wrote in his self-criticism, 'The Angkar is more important than my father and my mother'.⁴¹ The mind of the cadre had to be filled with the Angkar. Self-fulfilment came through annihilation of the self and substituting being a member of the Angkar for the self. The suitable language in this context was the language of nonthought. Everyday life was made of two components, constant work assignment and self-examination through reciting Angkar lines like Buddhist mantras. Practices such as lifestyle meetings provided micro-level mechanisms by which the KR achieved its goal of obedience. Obedience to authority was conditioned as much by the regularized processes of coercive socialization and ritual enactment of loyalty and obedience as it was by the social and

material structure of the KR system, that is, its demand for absolute social control and its monopoly on the use of violence.

On the one hand, KR-style thought reform was directly antithetical to some of the most basic Cambodian cultural institutions, such as loss of face, family loyalty and respect for authority and ranks. Most notably, traditionally Cambodians would go to great length to avoid humiliation and loss of face before others, and at the same time attempt to avoid criticizing or humiliating someone else in front of others. To publically denunciate one's parents, older people, teachers and superiors totally violated the long-standing traditional Khmer culture of respect for the social hierarchy. Deference or even submission to those of higher social status and power is the most common code of conduct in Cambodian culture. It is considered culturally inappropriate or rude to talk back to one's parents, argue with one's teachers or challenge one's superiors in front of their subordinates, let alone humiliate them. On the other hand, some aspects of Buddhism and the corrupt morality of the previous regimes provided sociocultural ground and reason for the KR-style thought reform.

Despite KR distaste for Buddhism, some Buddhist beliefs inspired the Angkar's desire to purify society and facilitated KR social domination. Particularly, the Buddhist concept of 'renunciation of personal belongings to live a life free from greed, decadence, desire, and the lure of material kinds'⁴² provided a moral foundation for the puritanical culture, as Nuon Chea explained to Chon and Thet, 'void of vices that degraded past society.'⁴³ KR thought reform was set in motion to eradicate these elements of individualism. As Short puts it, 'The destruction of 'material and spiritual private properly' was Buddhist detachment in revolutionary clothes; the demolition of personality was the achievement of non-being'.⁴⁴ Consistent with the Buddhist notion of renunciation of the Self, familyism (*krua-sa-niyum*)—caring about one's family rather than exclusively thinking of the collective—and emotional bonds with family were to be eliminated as part of KR thought reform.⁴⁵ A complete extinction of all sexual desires, one of the goals of Buddhist asceticism, sat comfortably with the anti-sexual-desire precept of KR indoctrination.⁴⁶ Sexual acts without the Angkar's expressed approval were considered moral offenses punishable by death. This concept is not alien to Buddhism; in fact, the notion of internal purification from all desires and sins in life is, as Ponchaud notes, 'the supreme virtue of Buddhism'.⁴⁷ Hence, the KR cult of confession has deep roots in the ontology of Theravada Buddhism, i.e. the concepts of self-renunciation and self-examination.

After coming to power in April 1975, Pol Pot and his inner circle replaced traditional Khmer language with their own revolutionary language of totalitarianism, one that replaced individualism with collectivism, family ties with the all-seeing Angkar, honorific hierarchy with equality, and gentleness with militaristic overtones.⁴⁸ For instance, the word 'we' was substituted for 'I' in the name of abolishing individualism.⁴⁹ As the KR notebooks reveal, criticism and self-criticism sessions were filled with repetitive and loaded language of total obedience, anti-individualism, antirevolutionary morality, and nonrevolutionary activities and thinking.

Survivors report that the verb *Kosang*, literally meaning ‘rebuild or reconstruct’ meant ‘Angkar singles out a person’s wrongs’ during Pol Pot’s regime.⁵⁰ Also the Khmer phrase *yok tov rien-saut*, meaning ‘taken to be educated’, was commonly understood as ‘taken to be killed’ during the KR regime. Although the CPK’s Central Committee had a policy of ‘educational instruction’ or re-education for small transgressions such as stealing food, the evidence of the regime’s preference for the former method is reflected in its slogan, ‘Executing in error ten innocent persons is better than releasing a single traitor.’⁵¹ That is not to say that the regime did not believe in re-education, but in practice it easily degenerated into terror because lower cadres had the incentive or were driven by a natural instinct of self-preservation to favour excess. The slogan ‘Everyone must know how to conduct self-criticism and criticism of one another’, which constituted basic mental exercises in this communist society, assigned a sacred duty to every cadre.⁵² In addition, in nightly lifestyle meetings the KR leadership encouraged people to spy on one another and report to the Angkar through slogans such as ‘Report everything to the Angkar!’ and ‘Secretly observe the slightest deeds and gestures of everyone around you!’⁵³ The slogan ‘Comrades, the Angkar already knows your entire biography’ constitutes the purest totalitarian language, demanding that all cadres openly self-confess and reform or the Angkar would reveal their past and mete out punishment.

The metaphoric KR slogan ‘When pulling out weeds, remove their roots’ is instructive of the need to dig out and destroy the enemy’s family and networks. ‘Boil water and pour it over fermented fish. Only then will you see the worms come out!’⁵⁴ was a slogan which metaphorically and culturally resonates with the peasantry populace, and was used to call on the masses to be constantly vigilant and trust no one including one’s family members and friends, thus galvanizing distrust in the society. Such strikingly unrefined metaphors relating to peasants’ everyday experiences of familiar domains including foods (worms in fermented fish) and farming (rooting out weeds that undermine crops) provided the regime’s local cadres—even those who were uneducated—with practical, commonsense guidelines for thinking and acting without written instructions or directives from the top leadership.

Thought reform as a purification system

After completely destroying the Sihanouk regime’s educational system, the KR regime recognized and harnessed the power of education as a social force to construct a new revolutionary society.⁵⁵ In Article 10, Chapter 7 of the KR constitution, ‘constructive re-education’ is specified as a correctional method in its system of justice.⁵⁶ However, the KR concept of education should not be understood as merely an ideological project of creating a new person in the sense of a revolutionary utopia; the regime aimed at nothing less than society’s absolute obedience to its authority and relentless elimination of dissent. District, sector and zone party secretaries were called to regularly attend political study sessions in Phnom Penh,

directly taught by Nuon Chea himself and occasionally by Pol Pot.⁵⁷ According to Nuon Chea, 'In Phnom Penh, criticism and self-criticism sessions were held every week for various cadres, soldiers, workers and leaders who lived there', and top leaders also practised self-criticism among themselves.⁵⁸ In the diary of the KR foreign affairs ministry, Ieng Sary emphasized self-criticism as one of the three movements to build the party.⁵⁹ In July 1976, at the Foreign Ministry congress, officials were warned about 'the pests buried within. In our country, one to five percent of [the population] are traitors who are infiltrating. So we must investigate their biographies clearly and have them self-criticize'.⁶⁰

In cooperatives, political education meetings were held frequently, sometimes every day. Students, teachers and professors were killed because they, as the product of the old social order, were barriers to revolutionary change. In other words, these types of people could not be constructively re-educated or refashioned for a new revolutionary society. Many others who possessed power, status and knowledge from the old regimes were deemed (un)-re-educatable and became targets for *komtech* or smashing (the KR euphemism for killing). The ease with which the purging of bad elements was carried out at the local level was expressed by a widely used slogan, 'Keeping you is no gain, removing you is no loss'.⁶¹

The KR leadership viewed criticism and self-criticism as a dual method of thought reform and purging—an attempt to re-educate contaminated cadres and root out traitors within the party ranks.⁶² Thought reform in this sense functioned as security screening to defend the party against enemy infiltration. In a revealing notebook, a senior aide to Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary wrote that the party (meaning Ieng Sary himself) spoke of the role of criticism and self-criticism as follows:

The Communist Party of Kampuchea uses criticism and self-criticism as daily means to struggle to build up the internal forces of the party. Criticism and self-criticism refers to learning to make lifestyle criticism and to assess political strengths and shortcomings. In every meeting, we single out advantages and disadvantages and find the correct solutions; this is what we call criticism and self-criticism. If you keep doing constructive internal criticism and self-criticism through the political, consciousness, and organizational standpoints of the party, and bring the masses in line with the political consciousness and organizational standpoint of the party, enemies cannot undermine us.⁶³

In general, the party's Central Committee identified three categories of transgressors for re-education and punishment: (1) dangerous reactionaries had to be smashed; (2) ordinary 'free spirit' (*serei-niyum*) individuals had to be continuously educated in the regime's re-education schools or centres; (3) those who were newly contaminated or misled by the enemy had to be educated to rid them of their contamination.⁶⁴ The first category refers to 'enemies burrowing from within' who were considered by the regime as more dangerous than the easily identified external enemies, namely the CIA, KGB, and Vietnamese agents. As party secretary, Pol Pot announced in 1977, 'External enemies have been successfully blocked by our courageous combatants and the help of our great Chinese friends. What is

difficult to solve are the internal enemies'.⁶⁵ The regime's re-education centres or schools were to provide political and ideological training to help them break free from their families and their 'dirty, obscene friends' and help cure the contaminated or misled cadres.⁶⁶ In practice, as Karl Jackson observes, these re-education and labour camps 'resembled death camps rather than institutions in which hard labor and intensive study might hold the prospect of enlightenment and eventual reintegration into Cambodian society'.⁶⁷

Institutionalization and routinization of thought reform

The regularized practices of criticism and self-criticism themselves were regarded by the regime as the most important component of the KR thought reform programme. In *Behind the Killing Fields*, authors Gina Chon and Sambath Thet report that Nuon Chea told them,

To ensure that cadres maintained the revolutionary spirit and correct political thought, self-criticism sessions were held on a regular basis. In Phnom Penh, sessions were organized every week for the various cadres, soldiers, workers and leaders who lived there. Nuon Chea usually presided over these meetings. Self-criticism sessions were seen as a crucial component in encouraging cadres to be better people, to improve their revolutionary stance. ... The purpose was to eliminate individualism and selfishness.⁶⁸

The top leaders held their own self-criticism sessions once a month. Nuon Chea often commented on (criticized) the behaviour of Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and South-west Zone leader Chhit Choeun (alias Ta Mok), and once in awhile, Pol Pot. Although he told his colleagues to criticize him, very few dared, except for Pol Pot. Apparently, criticism and self-criticism at this level was less terrifying because it was done within the small circle of intellectual leadership. No one feared arrest or disciplinary punishment as the consequence of such practices. However, criticism and self-criticism sessions at lower levels, as the content of KR notebooks reveals later, resembled internal witch-hunts or cross-examinations, producing intense fear and distrust among cadres.

What is striking is that this wholesale self-purging was directed at all Party cadres. In Ea Meng-Try's study of security and re-education centres in the South-west Zone, re-education and security centres (prisons) were organized at four levels: commune militia centre, district, region and zone. Re-education could lead to reintegration or elimination. Those who failed re-education attempts at the subdistrict military centres would be transferred to district re-education centres where they were subjected to heavy punishment ranging from harsh labour, torture and starvation to violent execution.⁶⁹

Pech Chim, former district secretary of Tram Kak (South-west Zone), affirmed at the ECCC hearing, 'If cadres do not obey the Angkar's rules after being educated, the commune or sub-district would ask for an opinion from the district committee, with himself as a member'.⁷⁰ Most prisoners ended up dying in these re-education centres at the district levels. High-level offenders considered 'unrefashionable' or

enemies of the Angkar were sent on to regional security centres.⁷¹ The zone security centre, though not tightly linked to the lower level security centres, served as the conduit of the Party Central Committee, where the zone secretary received arrest orders from the committee itself and S-21.⁷² S-21, the most secret security centre of the CPK, was at the top of the security pyramid. There, enemies who threatened the security of the party and the state were imprisoned and brutally tortured to extract confessions before execution.⁷³ Not even S-21 staff were spared from purging; at least 563 S-21 guards and other members of the prison staff were arrested and killed.⁷⁴

In the KR regime, thought reform took the forms of study meetings (*veak rien-saut*), lifestyle meetings (*prachum chiveak-pheap*), experience-study meetings (*prachum pi-saot*) and work meetings (*prachum ka-ngea*). These meetings were institutionalized and regularly practised across the nation from the top leadership level to the cooperative level. The regime believed that these practices would clean up any nonrevolutionary and class contradictions in the minds of its cadres in such a way that enemies could never influence them.

The CPK's obsession with the enemies burrowing within the party was paramount, and Vietnamese agents were the most dangerous to the party. The regime's security priority shifted from a war with external enemies to infiltration by enemy agents and internal purity. The CPK identified two types of class contradictions: (1) nonantagonistic contradictions among the masses and within the party which were correctable and (2) antagonistic ones, which were irreconcilable, life-and-death kinds of conflict.⁷⁵ In everyday practice, how and where did the CPK identify class contradictions and revolutionary contamination? They were sought out in the everyday livelihood and lifestyle of individuals. As former Tram Kak Secretary Pech Chim testified, 'Class contradictions refer to contradictions in daily living, that is, how people live their life.'⁷⁶ To determine whether a prisoner was an enemy agent, five aspects of a detainee's life and career had to be examined: (1) biography, (2) class (education, rank and social status), (3) career track, (4) family, friends and social networks and (5) association with foreign organizations such as foreign media groups or NGOs such as World Vision, a Christian humanitarian aid organization. If anyone was affiliated with these agencies, it was very likely that they were CIA agents.⁷⁷ A revealing example of self-examination can be found in this self-critique of Comrade Sin Kren, whose revolutionary name was Sin Im. He admitted in his autobiography to possessing the faults of 'hot temper, foul eating habits, possession of private property, coveting nice clothes and personal comfort, poor leadership skills, laziness, a pacifist standpoint, and lack of high respect for the party'.⁷⁸ As a solution, the party made it clear to its members the necessity of absolutely complying with its quintessential organizational discipline (*angkar vinei*), that is, firm commitment to excellence in politics (*noyobay*), consciousness (*sati-arom*) and one's work assignment (*chat-tăng*). The criticism and self-criticism practice functioned as a system for monitoring members' compliance with this organizational discipline.⁷⁹

In early 1976, the party instructed cadres to include criticism and self-criticism as a major part of lifestyle meetings. Nuon Chea, in his role of educating party members, emphasized the importance of 'continuing to self-criticize and criticize others.'⁸⁰ Before undergoing criticism and self-criticism, it was mandatory that cadres answer a biographical questionnaire to reveal their entire life history, and as a result their bad tendencies were exposed to other members' scrutiny.⁸¹ A lifestyle meeting generally consisted of seven components: (1) general activities or situation, (2) activities of outside enemies, (3) the situation of the masses, (4) the situation of cadres and youth leagues (politics, consciousness and assignments), (5) socialist construction in all fields, especially agriculture, (6) criticism and self-criticism and (7) other issues.⁸² A criticism and self-criticism session was conducted on three fundamental aspects: politics, consciousness and assignment. In a political study session, cadres were expected to self-criticize their own political standpoint as well as criticize others with respect to the task of building a socialist revolution.⁸³ In the consciousness section, a cadre was expected to strive to engage in criticism and self-criticism about the remnants of individualism and private ownership of all kinds. This essentially involved the five 'struggles' against (1) the thirst for power, militarism and commandism; (2) privatism (*eakchun-niyum*); (3) proletarian consciousness; (4) the defence of the collective spirit of the proletarian class; and (5) revolutionary morality.⁸⁴

Strikingly similar to small study groups in communist China's thought reform programme in the 1950s,⁸⁵ the party insisted that criticism and self-criticism sessions be conducted every day after work in every group of three members, weekly for every unit of ten to twelve members, monthly at the subcell level and every three months at the sector level. A general study meeting for the entire cooperative was usually held every three months to disseminate the party's directives and statutes to party members and cadres.⁸⁶ Operationally, in each small-group criticism and self-criticism meeting, participants had to confess specific counter-revolutionary actions and thinking and give concrete examples of their past and present reactionary ideology. Lack of thoroughness, neutrality, indifference or refusal to speak were symptomatic of a half-hearted convert, thus considered regressive or outright hostile to the regime's puritan ideological culture. After lifestyle meetings, group leaders would give their respective summary report to the unit leader, who would then send it up to the cell (party member) leader. At the party cell meeting, a chairperson and a secretary in charge of reporting were selected. A secretary or sometimes the chairperson reported to the meeting on the party work for the entire month; members would provide additional comments; then criticism and self-criticisms would be made; and finally, the chairperson would give a speech to summarize shortcomings and spell out corrective measures. As criticism and self-criticism sessions were carried out frequently and repeatedly, group pressure on individuals must have been increasingly intense.

Besides re-educating and propagating the party policies to the masses, the CPK entrusted all party members with another crucial inner-party task: to strengthen and expand new membership of the party and Youth League.⁸⁷ Their tasks included

studying biographies, examining morals and investigating the activities of every party member candidate. They were instructed to travel to candidates' villages to gather information about them and their families and to eradicate reactionary elements from the party and the military.⁸⁸ Carrying out these tasks successfully would turn the entire army into a truly loyal and monopolistic tool of the party and the proletarian class. Therefore, they were crucial to defending the party and the country.⁸⁹ The CPK also entrusted its members with setting a clear direction for the conduct of criticism and self-criticism among cadres.⁹⁰ Party member candidates needed to demonstrate unwavering commitment to criticism and self-criticism and loyalty to the party.⁹¹ Candidates who failed to meet these criteria were not worthy of becoming party cadres.

Social-psychological Impact of thought reform on KR cadres

It is notable that the 'consciousness' criticism and self-criticism section took the most subjective turn in KR lifestyle sessions. Criticisms of one another's consciousness produced the most contentious and arbitrary mutual accusations among cadres. In theory, criticism was aimed at moulding and remoulding every individual's thought and action in accordance with the party's revolutionary ethos. In practice, criticism sessions were rather arbitrarily used by local party cadres to root out both real and imagined traitors, including their rivals, people who disobeyed, or simply people they disliked.⁹² Psychologically, at the group and individual levels, lifestyle meetings created, as Sergio Thion, who had intimate knowledge of the early KR movement, observed, 'a system of intense psychological pressures on collective meetings, where individuals had to criticize their own bad "trends" and to relinquish control over their behavior'.⁹³ The effect was to reduce individuals to servility and 'the complete psychological isolation of an individual, making him or her suspicious of everybody, totally identified with, and dependent on his group and its leaders.'⁹⁴

Trailing the consciousness issues are those pertaining to self-criticism of one's 'organizational assignment' trend. This refers to the learning of the party's socialist revolutionary guidelines and statutes, which were the central political documents of the party. Often organizational assignment was understood by cadres as the party's strengthening and expansion of class struggle, collectivization and eradication of private ownership, counter-revolutionary elements, and enemies burrowing within party cells. Although this was the most important task for the party, it turned out to be the least discussed issue in criticism and self-criticism sessions. By inference, cadres at the local level did not understand much about their political tasks. Party cell leaders often and repeatedly raised the issue of the cadres' lack of understanding of the statutes and their failure to translate party statutes into daily actions. Strikingly, the concept of 'organizational assignment' was also widely open to interpretation by KR operatives at the lower levels. Being accused of such wrongs must have spawned no less fear, and could have sealed the fate of

individuals. Hence, lifestyle meetings fomented and perpetuated fear, distrust and animosity among cadres, which in turn directed their loyalty towards the Angkar.

Two particular notebooks illustrate a typical characteristic of self-criticism among party members. One was written by a senior aide to Foreign Affairs Minister Ieng Sary and the other by a party member who worked for the KR Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁹⁵ In the first notebook, the aide recorded that Comrade Din criticized himself for his 'attachment to family and private property' while Comrade Meuan criticized himself for a longer list of shortcomings, including 'desire for personal comfort, lifestyle of a middle-class person, cliqueism, all about face and weak spirit of the collective.' Din's superior Comrade Ruon criticized himself for 'relaxing self-criticism to improve his revolutionary consciousness because he believed he is active and good enough.'⁹⁶ In the other notebook, the self-criticism went deeper in the member's self-examination of his extreme hatred for the Vietnamese.⁹⁷ This party member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confessed in late 1975,

My analysis tends to lean heavily to one side. For instance, on national construction, I tend to place more emphasis on the three-tons-per-hectare of cultivated land, and pay much less attention to my revolutionary vigilance regarding counter-revolutionary activities burrowing within the ranks.⁹⁸

It was the responsibility of the on-lookers to recognize and distinguish the self-critics' thoughts and behaviours and to effectively point them out during feedback sessions. Local cadres would be on the lookout for any regressive consciousness traits, while noting any successful reform. The fact that cadres spoke far less of their achievements reflected the regime's focus on, as Nuon Chea recalled, 'continuous self-criticisms' to improve their revolutionary stance because that was seen as the best way to keep themselves clean from all kinds of contaminants.⁹⁹ Obedience to the Angkar authority left no room for compassion or individual discretion. Delving into specific examples of shortcomings, this party member self-confessed,

In the past, I have not yet firmly grasped the true nature of the proletarian class to an extent that it becomes the vortex of my actions. I still had some compassion toward cadres. ... After a cadre in my unit was found to be a traitor, I was reluctant [to arrest him] and felt pity for this comrade because he had worked and lived with me for some time.¹⁰⁰

Concerning his revolutionary consciousness, the writer criticized himself for his nonproletarian lifestyle and his tendencies towards free spirit in terms of eating and having fun, self-centeredness and factionalism.¹⁰¹ Regarding his assignment, his self-criticism went into his autocracy in selecting members of the Party Cell Committee, thus leaning heavily towards 'centralism' and away from 'democracy' in his leadership.¹⁰² To address these shortcomings, this party cadre pledged to strive to reform himself and regularly conduct lifestyle meetings at the subcell level and within the Party Cell Committee. Hence, the conscientious practice of

self-criticism acted to ruthlessly expose shortcomings to critics, and regularized compulsory self-criticism functioned to reduce people to servility, stripping them of any personality and individuality.

The Angkar, in this case the head of the Party Cell Committee, concluded the session with the following summary addressed to the cadres:

Criticism and self-criticism sessions in lifestyle meetings have not yet been properly conducted. You cannot make a good model for the masses to follow Some cadres who received criticisms and instruction on how to conduct criticism and self-criticism sessions raised various excuses for not following through. Yet, your commitment to criticism and self-criticism is steadfast. Those who criticized and those who were criticized understood the guidelines of our socialist revolution. You have actively encouraged other cadres to conduct criticism and self-criticism. However, individual ownership and rankism (*bönsäk-niyum*) remain the main problems. These are also the elements of the capitalist and feudal classes that still exist in your unit.¹⁰³

At a 15 December 1976 study meeting of military Division 170¹⁰⁴ (Eastern Zone), political commissar of Division 170 Ke San (alias Sok),¹⁰⁵ who chaired the meeting, proposed to investigate more meticulously each biography and revolutionary standpoint, and to constantly exercise self-criticism.¹⁰⁶ Towards the end of 1976, the KR regime carried out the phase of deepening and widening its socialist revolution as it prepared for military confrontation with its number one enemy, Vietnam, in the east. All sectors, especially the armed forces, were instructed to prioritize political tasks to uproot the remnants of the enemies burrowing from within, especially those who belonged to the category of ‘Khmer body, Vietnamese brain,’ referring to pro-Vietnamese elements in society.¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, this continuous socialist revolution had to be carried out within the party ranks, especially among party cadres in all core sectors, particularly the armed forces.¹⁰⁸

The KR notably devoted significant time and energy to political study sessions and lifestyle meetings in 1977. Criticism and self-criticism sessions were intensified.¹⁰⁹ Each session fostered a terrifying climate of fear and suspicion for all participating cadres rather than a constructive forum for reform and reintegration in the party. The intense atmosphere of fear and distrust towards other cadres within one’s unit effectively directed loyalty and obedience away from comradeship and towards the Angkar. Every aspect of cadres’ lives was closely scrutinized and subjected to criticism by other cadres in their own unit, and mistakes could lead to disciplinary punishment, imprisonment or even death. As a KR committee chair noted in one notebook, ‘Some cadres refashioned themselves because of fear or coercion rather than out of genuine voluntarism’.¹¹⁰ The criticism and self-criticism in Section K-1 of Division 170 provides insight into the nature of fear and obedience.

Although the purges in the Eastern Zone were intensified after 1977, self-criticism sessions and lifestyle meetings were continuously practised at the group, unit and section levels. Some high-ranking officials within the KR leadership disagreed with the policy of execution, preferring re-education.¹¹¹ Yet criticism and

self-criticism took on a new character of accusation at meetings in the atmosphere of fear amid the Party Centre's policy of purging. For example, the criticism and self-criticism sessions at the unit level in Section K-1 of Office 170 (the administrative command of Division 170) consisted of three units: Unit 1, headed by Touch Chöan, consisted of fourteen members; Unit 2, headed by Touch Euan, twelve members; and Unit 3, headed by Uk Yöan, twelve members. In the 18 February 1977 lifestyle meeting of Section K-1, members of Unit 2 were praised for 'their ability to carry out the tasks well,' but the Angkar at the section level criticized all units for 'relaxing self-criticisms and criticisms in lifestyle meetings, and for not going deep enough in criticism and self-criticism, possessing a pacifist mindset and lacking revolutionary vigilance'.¹¹² Comrade Sok, political commissar of Division 170, was himself criticized for 'the way he talks to other comrades' in a manner that countered revolutionary virtues and politeness. He was told to refashion by 'deeply examining his leadership standpoint'.¹¹³ In the 24 February study meeting of Office 170, the Angkar (Comrade Sok himself) lodged a counter-accusation by noting, 'There are many cases where our youth and cadres possessed free spirit in their speech and lifestyle. Today at least 30 members are in this category of free spirit'.¹¹⁴

In the section meeting on 1 March 1977, Comrade Hong Min, a member of Unit 3, was criticized for irresponsible talking, that is, launching personal attacks on other cadres' criticism of his shortcomings, lack of respect for the party, possession of private property and nepotism.¹¹⁵ In another instance, during the meeting of Office 170 on 23 March, the party Angkar of Division 170 announced the revocation of Khiev Samraong's full party membership. As evidence against him, the Angkar referred to Khiev's autobiography of 20 December 1976, in which he admitted that he came from a lower middle class farm family that possessed three hectares of land and confessed to coveting private ownership, a pacifist standpoint, and lack of 'revolutionary politeness' (i.e. improper behaviour such as yelling at other comrades). This made him a prime suspect as an enemy burrowing within the party.¹¹⁶

On 2 April, in another study meeting of Office 170, nine members of core military units, including Hong Min, were singled out for deeper investigation of their biographies and past activities. Three cadres—Khöem Chan, Löek Lim and Sok Chea—were considered 'influenced by traitors'.¹¹⁷ On 28 April, in the lifestyle meetings of Sector K-1, seven other members, including Khöem Chan, were criticized for being 'loose' in obeying the Angkar's discipline. Uong Sok was criticized for concealing his true nature 'like a cat trying to conceal its claws'. Chöem Son was accused of 'indifference to the collective's criticisms and rankism'.¹¹⁸ Touch Euan, head of Group 2, was criticized for 'careless talking'. On 25 June, he was again criticized for loose and weak leadership, because he often needed instruction from the upper levels.¹¹⁹

From July 1977 through 1978, criticism and self-criticism sessions became even more intense and confrontational, coinciding with the ferocity of the war against Vietnam in the east. Each group of roughly 12 members conducted lifestyle

meetings as frequently as every 3 or 4 days.¹²⁰ Self-criticizing and criticizing others were equally terrifying. New members replaced those who had been purged. On 11 July 1977, in a general meeting of Section K-1, Pheuak and Sovōan, new full party members, unleashed a barrage of strong criticisms. They opined that ‘some comrades and youths still possess the standpoint of self-centeredness’ and that the old issues of ‘picking and eating fruits such as coconuts without permission, and talking about the cultures of old regimes remained prevalent among cadres and youths’. Pheuak went on to critique what he called ‘a new issue of cadres’ resentment toward the Party’ for being harsh and reducing food rations. In the same lifestyle meeting, party member Saom Mao raised the issue of ‘lack of thriftiness’ among cadres and youth; Mao also criticized San for ‘verbally attacking other comrades’ for criticizing him, and ‘not taking seriously his duty to criticize other cadres to eliminate nonrevolutionary thought and behaviors’.¹²¹ Increasingly prevalent were criticisms of trivial matters, such as Ra criticizing Sovōan for ‘sending dirty clothes to be mended.’ As resources (including food) went dry, pressure from the top leadership mounted, internal competition multiplied and the natural instinct of self-preservation kicked in strongly. Ideological self-criticisms and criticisms were hijacked, if not replaced, by endless mutual accusations, greatly marginalizing the discussion of Marxist ideology.¹²²

In the 16 July lifestyle meeting of core unit Kh-III, mentions of previous regimes, travel without permission and failure to report regularly on work remained pervasive. On 17 July, in the study meeting of Unit 3, Chan criticized his superior Saom Mao (now head of Unit 3) for ‘doing things to try to shirk his duty’ and ‘relaxing his self-criticism’. Another member, Phorn, spoke of the need to hold lifestyle meetings more regularly. Phorn also claimed that ‘there are still enemies within Unit 77’ and requested that the Angkar ‘get rid of those enemies in this unit’.¹²³ In the 28 June study meeting of core unit Kh-III, full party member Pheuak himself was harshly criticized for similar reasons:

Your unit leadership is not yet firm; you have not yet learned from the collective. Your organizational assignment remains weak; your consciousness is contaminated by your free spirit; you did things to try to shirk your duty—you desire personal comfort and you are stubborn; you still possess privatism—live a private life, eat good and tasty food, and do not work in accordance with the collective spirit.¹²⁴

In the same study meeting, another full party member, Sovōan, was also harshly criticized for ‘often counterattacking those who criticized him’ and ‘using luxury things’ in his daily life. He was also criticized for ‘flirting with female cadres’.¹²⁵ Courting a woman was considered a serious moral offense during the KR regime.

From mid-1977 through 1978, the threat of Vietnamese infiltration was constantly propagated to cadres and the masses. In the Eastern Zone bordering with Vietnam, cadres were prohibited from making contact with the masses or travelling anywhere without permission. On 17 July, in a study meeting of Unit 3, cadres were warned about ‘talks that would leak information to the enemies’, ‘lack of discipline in traveling’ and ‘making contacts without permission’.¹²⁶ The party

instructed that educating cadres about Vietnamese aggression was of paramount significance.¹²⁷ On 3 February 1978, the Vietnamese launched a major attack through the eastern part of Svay Rieng Province and then withdrew. In a study meeting on 4 February 1978, party members anticipated that the next Vietnamese offensive was being planned, with a force of 8000 soldiers supported by tanks.¹²⁸ The party leadership told their cadres that the party would prevail over the Vietnamese in this war because the Vietnamese did not have 'high-quality soldiers free from private ownership and economic dependency' on other great powers.¹²⁹ Moreover, the chairperson of the session noted, 'Although Vietnam had more sophisticated tanks and weapons, the Vietnamese soldiers' fighting spirit was weak because they were corrupted by private ownership as opposed to our brave and selfless soldiers.'¹³⁰ The CPK leadership ordered counter-attacks into Vietnamese territory using guerilla war tactics. Inside the party, the fear of Vietnamese agents among the party cadres spiralled into sheer paranoia.

The second congress of Division 170 in late 1977 concluded that in building the party, the need to carefully scrutinize cadres further was more urgent than expanding the membership because cadres were found to have extensive ties with traitors. Educating combatants and cadres at the lower levels was to be intensified. The party instructed,

We must grasp the political standpoint, consciousness, and assignment of every cadre in our unit. So far, we have investigated 3,953 biographies, and 2,757 biographies, roughly 43 percent of the total force of Division 170, have not yet been investigated.¹³¹

Party members were instructed to pay closer attention to investigating enemy networks and purify their own unit.¹³² Notably, in 1978, the party instructed in the midst of fighting a fierce war against the Vietnamese, 'Lifestyle meetings are to be conducted within each group on a daily basis.'¹³³ Movement outside one's military station or position was prohibited. Without the permission of the Angkar (upper echelon), cadres were not allowed to visit their families or socialize with friends, even on the occasion of celebrating the CPK's April 17 victory.

After mid-1977, criticism and self-criticism sessions in lifestyle meetings went beyond the three core themes of politics, consciousness and assignment. They simply degenerated into witch-hunt sessions. Re-education was replaced by a lynch mob mentality wherein indiscriminate accusations against one another became an everyday nightmare. Every KR cadre regardless of rank was subjected to a myriad of insidious criticisms about every trivial matter. Any resentment or anger at someone's criticism was considered antirevolutionary; not even a group or unit leader was immune from harsh criticism and purging. An environment of fear and paranoia pervaded in these sessions. For instance, in a lifestyle meeting of Company 836 of the Division 170 on 13 October 1977, female cadres were criticized for lack of cleanliness in the kitchen, which was affecting soldiers' health. In turn female cooks made a counter-criticism that Comrades Söeng and Suong 'lacked revolutionary spirit because they wore hats while eating' in the communal dining hall. In

another case, Comrade Sovđan criticized the keepers of the banana plantation for hiding bananas from the collective.¹³⁴

In a lifestyle meeting on 19 November 1977, the criticism and self-criticism worsened. Cadres accused one another of ‘playing chess during free time, falling asleep while guarding the rice paddy, losing chickens for no reasons, wearing hats while eating, [and] leaving fish bones on plates’ in the session.¹³⁵ On 28 June 1978, the lifestyle meeting of Unit 3 delved into mostly all sorts of issues cast in a widely interpreted rubric of persisting existence of private ownership and lack of clean collective consciousness.¹³⁶ The list of mutual accusations in these sessions went on and on as they turned more and more into witch-hunts, breaking down cadres’ morale and leading to subsequent arrests on a large scale. Even seemingly trivial matters were considered counter-revolutionary in these sessions. As a result, the list of counter-revolutionary behaviours, thoughts and actions was limitless. One can only imagine the atmosphere of terror that ensued. In short, the social-psychological mechanism of the KR thought reform suggests that KR leaders not only sought to construct a ‘new revolutionary man’, but also aimed at a higher order: absolute obedience to the Angkar’s authority by the whole society.

Theoretical implications: the agent-structure problem of ideological conversion

How does the empirical case discussed earlier contribute to theorizing about ideological conversion process? These studies outline a few pertinent contributions. First, the KR thought reform programme serves as a crucial case to evaluate specifically Snow and Machalek’s social theory of conversion. We argue that the profile of the reformed KR cadres largely fit the Snow/Machalek model of the convert as a social type. As shown earlier, the KR leadership saw ‘thought reform’ as an instrumental vehicle for converting the majority of their uneducated and peasantry cadres into ‘pure revolutionaries’ in their own image. Converts became the most obedient lethal operatives of the regime, while nonconverts were to be outright eliminated.

For Snow and Machalek, radical change in individuals’ ‘consciousness’ which manifested in their rhetoric, talks and reasoning is the core indicator of conversion. Likewise, as discussed earlier, it is precisely the revolutionary consciousness of each KR cadre that the regime sought to forge through the regularized criticism and self-criticism meetings, and detect and define which cadres were to be promoted, re-educated or eliminated. Snow and Machalek describe four properties, not a process of conversion per se, of a convert as follows: (1) biographical reconstruction, (2) adoption of a master attribution scheme, (3) suspension of analogical reasoning, (4) embracement of a master role.¹³⁷ First, the agent or entity attempting the conversion brings in the alarming need for ‘biographical reconstruction.’ On the one hand stands the doomed past and on the other the enlightened present. As such this dimension overlaps with Lifton’s discussion of ideological totalism, referred to as ‘the coming together between immoderate ideology with equally immoderate

individual character traits.’¹³⁸ Indeed, the KR sought to interpret the past, present and future with its grand vision of constructing a puritan communist culture and society unprecedented in human history. In the KR context, life before the KR was doomed by injustice and repression by the morally corrupt and wicked bourgeois and royalists. For instance, Laurence Picq’s first-hand account earlier illustrates KR converts’ sweeping claims not only of a clear division between the past and the present, but also their biographical reconstruction in the form of ‘borne again.’ As she recalls, her colleagues back in the days in Paris and Beijing now inhabited a different mental plane; they spoke, reasoned, and acted in a defined political and ideological context.¹³⁹ Cadres’ rhetorical account in these KR notebooks not only corroborated Picq’s account of the converts, but also revealed each individual cadre’s self-initiated efforts to reconstruct their biography. Thus a cadre would self-criticize himself for demonstrating emotional compassion for his loyal subordinate, which illustrated his struggle to dismantle his past, as well as his pledge to refashion or rebuild himself as a truly revolutionary model.

Second, the adoption of a master attribution scheme is introduced with the aim of providing answers to every problem of injustice. It invented and propagated myths of the faceless ‘Angkar’ as the enlightened godlike organization and the revered centre of authority with ‘all-seeing eyes’. This discourse allowed for mystical manipulation on a grand scale. In his self-criticism, one cadre attributed the low yield of cabbage to a lack of his revolutionary vigilance, not the lack of fertilizer.¹⁴⁰ Also, as revealed in these notebooks, nothing is ambiguous or complex. Anyone who was arrested by Angkar was considered guilty as charged or guilty by association. As shown earlier, the criteria for defining someone a CIA, KGB or Vietnamese agent were greatly simplified to mere affiliation or any kind of connection with a suspected individual or entity. Third, individuals are overwhelmingly subjected to suspension of analogical reasoning via ethno-nationalistic or religious metaphors. Note that Lifton stresses mystical manipulation and the incorporation of a sacred science or ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence.¹⁴¹ Indicative of this is the KR regime’s abundant use of the loaded language of slogans such as ‘Long live the revolutionary Angkar, utterly wise and clear-sighted and ever glorious’ and ‘monks are parasites’.¹⁴²

Finally, KR converts adopted a new identity role, and strove to demonstrate their revolutionary consciousness. According to KR rhetoric, one had to be vigilant against one’s own and one’s associates’ dormant consciousness and prevent bourgeois habits from sinking in. The convert’s role involved the ubiquitous use of their new identity as reformed men and women. One KR convert told Picq, ‘we are people of Kampuchea, truly heroic, but not Cambodia or Cambodian people, because these terms are associated with colonial heritage.’¹⁴³ Through the notebooks discussed earlier, the new converts preached Angkar’s ideology like Buddhist monks giving a sermon. As Angkar’s representatives, the converts became Angkar themselves and exercised Angkar’s authority in their own domain. Traditional role identities such as mother or father paled in comparison to the role identity of the convert. KR membership became the main role of one’s being. As

Picq again recalled, KR cadres who were recruited as diplomats to China, Korea and Vietnam, left their children behind because they wanted to demonstrate their confidence in Angkar, and their belief that Angkar is the mother of their children and the whole country.¹⁴⁴ Expression of a new KR revolutionary identity also involved enthusiasm about manual labour, overseeing work in the rice fields, the digging of canals, mutual spying and torturing or killing. In short, the reformed fit the profile of the convert described by Snow and Machalek.

However, while the Snow/Machalek model of conversion captures the properties of the convert at the individual level, it does not tell us much about the ideational structure that shapes the process of ideological conversion. The omnipresent ideological-cultural structure of KR thought reform, as this article has shown, frame, define and differentiate the convert from the nonconvert, as well as determining the character and intensity of the KR ideological conversion process itself. In his study of thought reform in China, Robert Lifton argues that although milieu control never succeeds in becoming absolute, it is a prerequisite to large-scale conversion. While totalitarians envision a perfectly run totalitarian apparatus, totalist administrators have to deal with 'discordant noise' generated by the human soul, he contends.¹⁴⁵ As a process, a totalitarian apparatus is enforced through the following elements: milieu control, mystical manipulation, the demand for purity, a cult of confession, the development of a sacred science, the use of loaded language, doctrine over personality and the dispensing of individual existence.¹⁴⁶

For Lifton, the cult of confession allows for continuous purification, the act of symbolic self-surrender, the merger of the self or individual with the environment and the maintenance of an ethos of total exposure. This exposure would take place in a purging environment such as 'lifestyle' meetings. As such, it was ideal for the flourishing of existential guilt. This filtering was constant. Thus, conversion as process allowed: (1) the continuous exercise of control over others; (2) the transformation of consciousness; (3) the development of cadres' own rhetoric that would set them apart; and (4) viewing their own previous lives with suspicion. This 'retrospective' vision allowed the KR an open window through which to dig out impure elements from one's own self and others. Lifton's study of thought reform in Mao's China highlighted the surrounding conditions and processes of the totalitarian context. Hence, his work is fundamental for understanding Snow and Machalek's focus on the individual at the centre of it all, the convert.

Placing particular emphasis on the use of linguistic elements that set the mind up for the process of conversion, Snow and Machalek point out that it is the convert's rhetoric, not the institutional membership/affiliation or demonstration events like religious baptism or taking an oath of allegiance during recruitment, that denotes the convert as a social type.¹⁴⁷ While their work focuses on religious converts, we are combining it here with Lifton's discussion of milieu control, the cult of confession, doctrine over person and the dispensing of existence. One has to approach the reformed with an ear not only for the rhetorical elements that allowed the spread of the KR movement but also the cultural (local traditional values and beliefs) and ideological (domestic and foreign) elements that increased its appeal due to

their immediate resonance and availability among Cambodia's rural population. In short, a synthesis of Lifton's ideological-cultural and psychological elements of the KR thought reform programme and the Snow/Machalek social theory of conversion at the individual level best captures the phenomenon of the KR thought reform in terms of its characteristics and intensity.

Conclusion

Relying on notebooks left behind by KR cadres themselves, combined with testimony from the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, this article demonstrates that Pol Pot's regime systematically institutionalized and regularized its thought reform programme in various forms, the most quintessential of which is 'lifestyle meetings' where criticism and self-criticism were central to the process of ideological conversion. In each criticism and self-criticism session, one was totally exposed to compulsory and exhaustive self-examination and criticisms by others. At its core, a group of three members functioned as an independent nucleus of the KR revolutionary thought reform movement. The KR regime was quite sophisticated in harnessing certain ideological-cultural elements of traditional Khmer culture, especially Buddhist ontology as well as Stalin's purging methods, to create a culturally appropriate and efficient thought reform programme to convert the majority of its uneducated and peasantry cadres, largely unfamiliar with Marxist ideology. In this sense, in the KR-style totalitarian regime, thought reform became the KR weapon of choice in the mass ideological conversion of the vast majority of its peasant cadres. It won adherents, trained cadres, ensured compliance to Communist doctrines and instilled inner warning signals of anxiety to guard against potential deviation. Thought reform practices, as this article shows, complemented the apparent lack of bureaucratic control by the Party Centre of the CPK at the local levels by granting the ideologically enlightened converts, especially full party members and/or political commissars, more autonomy and authority in training, educating and re-educating other cadres and the masses. Through such thought reform, the regime also effectively imposed psychological domination over its cadres and perpetuated a system of terror to extract obedience to its authority.

Re-education was given priority in the first years (1975–1976), but towards the last two years of the regime (1977–1978) during which the regime waged a relentless war against communist Vietnam, more repressive methods of purifying and purging dissents took precedence over re-education. Cadres' confession of their mistakes and shortcomings or failure to reveal them in self-confession were equally terrifying because, in either case, they were equally subjected to other cadres' criticisms, re-education or possibly ending up in a torture chamber or being killed. Uncertainty or fear of unknown consequences generated by regularized self-confessions and criticism sessions served as the social-psychological binding forces on the mind of these cadres that conditioned their obedience to the party's authority.

At the individual and group level, uneducated cadres, much less versed in Marxist–Leninist ideology than KR intellectual leaders, turned criticism and

self-criticism sessions into more or less witch-hunt episodes in which cadres were exposed to all manner of accusations, and in some cases implicated in traitorous activities, which called for purging. In practice, as these notebooks reveal earlier, local party cadres had quite a lot of room for interpreting the leadership's general ideological line and translating it into thought reform practices. At the implementation level, as resources became scarce and competition for power and favour from the upper echelons increased, the criticism and self-criticism exercises degenerated into chaotic and malicious accusation, counter-accusation and purging. This degeneration into a lynch mob mentality occupied criticism and self-criticism sessions to the point that everyone was terrorized into nearly complete loss of individuality and horizontal trust among fellow comrades. Through criticism and self-criticism sessions in lifestyle meetings, the KR leadership, without being physically present, exercised psychological domination over cadres' thoughts, actions and livelihood. The fact that no one was spared from criticism and self-criticism, and fear of losing one's life and family, constituted the ultimate psychological power of KR thought reform programmes.

Documentary evidence of the role of thought reform with the convert as the final product in the Pol Pot regime's grand plan of mass conversion throughout the entire party apparatus, government and army provides a crucial case for further refining and developing a social-psychological theory of ideological conversion and radicalization during the genocidal regime, 1975–1979.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Cathy Schlund-Vials, Eve Zucker, Judy Ledgerwood, Corey Robin and Craig Etcheson for their comments on the draft versions of this article. We also would like to thank Youk Chhang and his staff at the Documentation Center of Cambodia for access to the collection of Khmer Rouge notebooks.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The research for this article was made possible by the USC Shoah Foundation Institution fellowship.

Notes

1. B. Kiernan, 'External and indigenous sources of Khmer Rouge ideology', in O. A. Westad and S. Quinn-Judge (Eds), *The Third Indochina War: Conflict between China, Vietnam and Cambodia, 1972–79* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 201.
2. K. Jackson, 'The ideology of total revolution', in K. Jackson (Ed) *Cambodia 1975–1979: A Rendezvous with Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); D. Chandler, *Brother Number One: A Political*

- Biography*, Rev. ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); E. Becker, *When The War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution* (New York: Public Affairs, 1989).
3. A. Hinton, *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); G. Chon and T. Sambath, *Behind the Killing Fields: A Khmer Rouge Leader and One of His Victims* (Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); I. Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age: Cambodian Monks under Pol Pot* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013); E. Zucker, *Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013); P. Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004).
 4. See Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age*, *op.cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 43–63.
 5. H. Arendt, *On Violence* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970); H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973).
 6. See C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the final solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); D. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Random House, 1997); A. Getty and R. Manning eds, *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); M. Lewin, 'Bureaucracy and the Stalinist State', in I. Kershaw and M. Lewin, eds, *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorship in Comparison* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 53–74.
 7. B. Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79*, 3rd Ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); S. Heder, 'Reassessing the role of senior leaders and local officials in democratic Kampuchea crimes: Cambodian accountability in comparative perspective', in J. Ramji and B. Van Schaack (Eds) *Bringing the Khmer Rouge to Justice: Prosecuting Mass Violence before the Cambodian Courts* (Lewston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), pp. 401–420.
 8. Heder, *ibid.*, p. 408.
 9. D.A. Snow and R. Machalek, 'The convert as a social type', *Sociological Theory*, 1 (1983), pp. 259–289; 'The sociology of conversion,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1984), pp.167–90.
 10. A. Mertha, *Brother In Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge 1975–1979* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 25.
 11. R. Scollon, 'Action and text: towards an integrated understanding of the place of text in social (inter)action, mediated discourse analysis and the problem of social action', in R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis: Introducing Qualitative Methods* (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 139–195.
 12. Snow and Machalek, *op. cit.*, Ref. 9; R. J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
 13. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *ibid.*, p. ix; also see T. Chen, *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960).
 14. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *ibid.*, p. 389.
 15. *Ibid.*, p.14.
 16. Short, *Pol Pot*, *op.cit.*, Ref. 3., pp. 64–67.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 18. Notably in *Behind the Killing Fields*, Chon and Thet, who conducted groundbreaking interviews with Nuon Chea emphasized the role of agency—Pol Pot and Nuon Chea—in translating 'alien ideas' into 'revolutionary policies.'
 19. Short, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 64.
 20. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 32–33.
 21. Hinton, *Why did they kill?*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 51.
 22. L. Picq, *Beyond the Horizon: Five Years with the Khmer Rouge*, P. Norland Trans. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); also see Short, *Pol Pot*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 313.
 23. Picq, *Beyond the Horizon*, *ibid.*, Ref. 22, p. 35.
 24. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields*, *ibid.*, Ref. 3, p. 37.
 25. Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan vs. Cambodia, Case 002, ECCC hearing transcript, Trial Day, 27 June 2013, E1/214.1, p. 4.
 26. The CPK's Statement in July 1978 by Deputy Party Secretary Nuon Chea to the Communist Workers' Party of Denmark (available at http://www.dccam.org/Archives/Documents/KR_Policy/KR_Policy_Nuon_Chea_Statement.htm), p. 9.
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 28. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 12, pp. 390–391.
 29. On a detailed treatment of 'Angkar' as a symbol of the new potent centre of the CPK, see Hinton, *Why did they kill?*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 49–50, 126–133; Harris, *Buddhism in A Dark Age*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 60.
 30. See J. Marston, 'Metaphors of the Khmer Rouge', in M.M. Ebihara, C.A. Mortland, and J. Ledgerwood (Eds) *Cambodian Culture Since 1975: Homeland and Exile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 105–118.

31. See N. Astrid, 'Performance as (Re)incarnation): The Sdech Kan Narrative', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44(1) (February 2013), pp. 4–23.
32. Chandler, *Brother Number One*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 6. For a more thorough treatment, see Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, Ch. 2 on 'Buddhism and the origins of Cambodian Communism'.
33. Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 4.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 57–59.
35. Zucker, *Forest of Struggle*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 52–56.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
37. Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 56–57.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 54; Hinton, *Why did they kill?*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 198.
39. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 56; Short, *Pol Pot*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p.150.
40. H. Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book: The Saying of Angkar* (Chiang Mai: Silkwarm Books, 2004).
41. P. Maquire, *Facing Death in Cambodia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 58.
42. F. Ponchaud, 'Social change in the vortex of revolution', in K. Jackson (Ed) *Cambodia: 1975–1978: Rendezvous with Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 173.
43. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields*, *op.cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 32.
44. Short, *Pol Pot*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 314, 318.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 324. Note that transcriptions in this article follow the Franco-Khmer transcriptions system developed by Franklin E. Huffman, 1983.
46. Ponchaud, 'Social change', *op. cit.*, Ref. 42, p. 175.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Picq, *Beyond the Horizon*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22, pp. 35–36; Becker, *When the War Was Over*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p.182.
49. Picq, *Beyond the Horizon*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22, p. 36.
50. Marston, 'Metaphors', *op. cit.*, Ref. 30, p. 115.
51. M. Ea, *The Chain of Terror: The Khmer Rouge Southwest Zone Security System* (Phnom Penh: The Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2005), p. 14.
52. Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 40, p. 90.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.
55. T. Clayton, 'Building the new Cambodia: educational destruction and construction under the Khmer Rouge regime: 1975–79', *History of Education Quarterly*, 38(1) (Spring 1998), pp. 1–16.
56. Ea, *The Chain of Terror*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 51, p. 173.
57. For more details on ideological training by Nuon Chea and Pol Pot, see Pech Chim's testimony, Case 002 (Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan vs. Cambodia, Trial Chamber Hearing, Trial Day 01 July 2013, pp. 73–74. Former KR District Chief Pech Chim told the court, 'These lessons as good education.'
58. Nuon Chea told journalist Thet Sambath in an interview before he was brought to custody. See Trial Chamber Transcript, Case 002 (Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan vs. Cambodia), Trial Day 201, 27 June 2013, E1/214.1, pp. 20–21.
59. For details see 'Introductory note' in K. Path and B. Kiernan with S. Sim *Trans., Ieng Sary's Regime: A Diary of the Khmer Rouge Foreign Ministry, 1976–1979* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, Spring 1998).
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
62. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 35–36.
63. Path et al., *Ieng Sary's Regime*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 59, p. 80.
64. 'Notes of the Meeting of Secretaries and Deputies of Divisions and Independent Regiments, 9 October 1976' quoted in Ea, *The Chain of Terror*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 51, p. 11.
65. *Ibid.*
66. In *Chain of Terror*, *ibid.*, Ea quoted *Conversations of Pol Pot with the Delegation of the Belgium-Kampuchea Society, 5 August 1978* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, L01500).
67. Jackson, 'The ideology', *op. cit.*, Ref. 2, p. 78.
68. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 90.
69. Ea, *Chain of Terror*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 51, pp. 33, 45–46.
70. Pech Chim's testimony, *op. cit.*, Ref. 57, p. 27.
71. Ea, *Chain of Terror*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 51, p. 26.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.
74. Maguire, *Facing Death*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 41, p. 58.

75. Notebook, *Youth League Meetings, 1975–78* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D1569). This notebook has no title and name of the author because the first page was torn off. Yet the content indicated that it belonged to a Party member in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
76. Pech Chim's testimony, *op. cit.*, Ref. 57, p. 16.
77. *A S-21 notebook, 1975–76* (Phnom Penh, DC-Cam, D15375), p. 47. No name of author on the notebook itself, but the content suggests that it belonged to Mam Nai, who served as deputy of S-21 Director Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch and chief of the interrogation section of this Party Centre's prison.
78. Notebook, *Work Meetings of Division 170, 1975–78* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21574), p. 2.
79. *Youth League Meetings, op. cit.*, Ref. 75, pp. 1–2.
80. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 35–36.
81. Hinton, *Why did they kill?*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 198.
82. Notebook, *Private Ownership: Discussion Questions Concerning the Creation of our Cooperative System on 20 May 1973* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21584), pp. 4–5. The author of this notebook was a Party member and military officer and the content indicates that this notebook was used for ideological training including criticism and self-criticism meetings.
83. For details see a KR notebook, *The Content of the Party Sector Meeting Concerning Criticism and Self-criticism about Political Standpoint, Consciousness and Assignments, 1976–1978* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21638), pp. 1–36.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.
85. Chen, *Thought Reform, op. cit.*, Ref. 13, pp. 76–77.
86. *The Content of the Party Sector Meeting, op. cit.*, Ref. 83, pp. 7–9.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, pp. 5–36.
93. See S. Thion, 'The Cambodian idea of revolution', in D. Chandler and B. Kiernan (Eds) *Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays* (Monograph Series No. 25, New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1983), p. 29.
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Youth Leagues*, Ref. 75, pp. 2.
96. Path et al., *Ieng Sary's Regime*, Ref. 59, p. 94.
97. *Youth Leagues*, Ref. 75, p. 3.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
99. Chon and Thet, *Behind the Killing Fields, op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 36.
100. *Youth Leagues, op. cit.*, Ref. 75, pp. 4–5.
101. *Ibid.*
102. *Ibid.*
103. *Ibid.*
104. Division 170 was the former 1st Eastern Zone Division, commanded by Chan Chakrey (alias Mean) until 1975. It came under direct Party Centre control in July of that year. On 9 October 1975, Pol Pot had remarked to a secret meeting of the Standing Committee of the ruling Communist Party of Kampuchea that Chakrey's Division 170 was 'the strongest of all' but that Chakrey owed his rank to Vietnam. Chakrey was demoted in April and arrested on 19 May 1976, and his wife on 19 September. For more details on the purge of Chakrey, see Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime, op. cit.*, Ref. 7, pp. 101, 321–325.
105. Office 170, the operating head of Division 170 located in Chbar Ampoeu (eastern part of the capital Phnom Penh) consisted of 119 members in late 1976-early 1977. According to historian Ben Kiernan, Ke San alias Sok, who replaced Chakrey as Division 170's political commissar, was himself arrested by the *Santebal* or 'State Security' branch of the Party on 4 March 1978 (available at: http://www.yale.edu/cgp/army_v3.html).
106. See *Work Meeting of Division 170, op. cit.*, Ref. 78.
107. *Ibid.*
108. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Ibid.*
111. B. Kiernan, 'Wild chickens, farm chickens, and cormorants: Kampuchea's eastern zone under Pol Pot', in D. Chandler and B. Kiernan (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 93, p. 179.
112. *Work Meetings of Division 170, op. cit.*, Ref. 78, pp. 6–7.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 114. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 115. *Ibid.*
 116. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
 117. *Ibid.*, p. 11. The three were members of Unit 3 in Section K-1.
 118. *Ibid.*
 119. *Ibid.*
 120. Notebook, *Lifestyle Meetings* [undated] (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21624), pp. 1–37.
 121. *Work Meetings of Division 170*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, p. 14.
 122. *Ibid.*
 123. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
 124. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 125. *Ibid.*
 126. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
 127. Notebook, *Battalion 713* (Phnom Penh, DC-Cam D21624), pp. 7–11; Notebook entitled *The Study of the Party's Directive Regarding the Defense of Our Country and Our People's War, and of the Past Lessons, 30 January 1978* (Phnom Penh, D21575), pp. 1–7. The study session focused on the question: Why does the Vietnamese desire to swallow Khmer land?
 128. *Battalion 713*, *ibid.*, p. 11.
 129. *Work Meetings of Division 170*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, D21574, p. 4.
 130. *Ibid.*
 131. Notebook, *Division 170* [undated] (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21601). That is roughly 40% of the total number of 6600 cadres and combatants.
 132. *Ibid.*
 133. Notebook, *Company 836's monthly experience study meetings, July 30, 1978* (Phnom Penh: DC-Cam, D21603), p. 17.
 134. *Ibid.*
 135. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–58.
 136. *Work Meetings of Division 170*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, p. 11.
 137. Snow and Machalek, 'Convert as social type', *op. cit.*, Ref. 9, p. 266.
 138. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 12, p. 419.
 139. For details, see Picq, *Beyond the Horizon*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22.
 140. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
 141. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 12., pp. 422–435.
 142. Locard, *Pol Pot's Little Red Book*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 40, pp. 45, 171.
 143. Picq, *Beyond the Horizon*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 22, p. 16.
 144. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 145. Lifton, *Thought Reform*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 12, pp. 420–423.
 146. *Ibid.*
 147. Snow and Machalek, 'The sociology of conversion', *op. cit.*, Ref. 9, pp. 171–172.