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**Anthropologies of the Khmer Rouge, Part II**  
**Genocidal Bricolage**

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# Anthropologies of the Khmer Rouge, Part II: Genocidal Bricolage

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## Genocidal Bricolage: A Reading of Human Liver-Eating in Cambodia<sup>17</sup>

Alexander Laban Hinton

When describing Democratic Kampuchea, the genocidal period of Khmer Rouge rule from April 1975 to January 1979,<sup>18</sup> Cambodians sometimes note that the Khmer Rouge consumed the livers of their victims. For example, Sophea Mouth (1997:179-80) begins his account of Democratic Kampuchea ("DK") as follows:

A man was holding a sharp ax rotated backward in his right hand, and with his left, he had a firm grip on another man's shoulder. At that instant, the edge of the ax cut open the man's chest. Blood spurted and I heard a roaring groan, loud enough to startle the animals. I stood there smiling deceitfully in shock because it was the first killing I had seen.

After the cadre had opened up the man's chest, he took out the liver. One man exclaimed, "One man's liver is another man's food." Then a second man quickly placed the liver on an old stump where he sliced it horizontally and fried it in a pan with pig grease above a fire that one of the cadres had built.

When the liver was cooked, the cadre leader took out two bottles of rice-distilled whiskey, which they drank cheerfully. . . . As I sat and

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<sup>18</sup> When the Khmer Rouge – a radical group of Maoist-inspired Communist rebels – came to power after a bloody civil war in which 600,000 people died, they transformed Cambodian society into what some survivors now call "the prison without walls" (*kuk et chonhcheang*). The cities were evacuated; economic production and consumption were collectivized; books were confiscated and sometimes burned; Buddhism and other forms of religious worship were banned; freedom of speech, travel, residence, and occupational choice were dramatically curtailed; formal education largely disappeared; money, markets, and courts were abolished; and the family was subordinated to the Party Organization, *Ângkar*. Over one and a half million of Cambodia's eight million inhabitants perished from disease, overwork, starvation, and outright execution under this genocidal regime (Kiernan 1996; see also Chandler 1991).

observed those men using small bamboo stakes to pike the slices of the liver frying in the pan, I thought that they were savages.

Such violence is horrifying and in some ways seems to defy comprehension. However, I believe that even a hideous act like human liver-eating may be at least partially understood by looking at local frames of knowledge. Moreover, while it is difficult to analyze such extreme forms of behavior in a manner that remains sensitive to the suffering of the victims, I believe that scholars must attempt to examine *all* aspects of a genocide in order to help prevent such atrocities from recurring in the future. Accordingly, this paper has two goals: first, to describe this cultural "sense" of human liver-eating; and, second, to use my analysis to increase our understanding of perpetrator motivation, an issue I address toward the end of this essay.

Human liver-eating is an extremely brutal, troubling and seemingly bizarre form of violence that needs to be understood within a particular cultural and historical context. The consumption of human liver, gallbladder, and bile is known to take place *infrequently* in Cambodia and some other Asian societies (e.g., Martin 1994; Ponchaud 1978, 1989; Sutton 1995) and has occurred in earlier historical periods in Cambodia. For example, Chou Ta-Kuan (1987), a Chinese emissary who visited Cambodia at the turn of the fourteenth century, reported that the Angkorean empire annually paid a tribute to the King of Champa that included a large jar filled with "thousands and thousands" of human gallbladders cut out of the backs of unsuspecting victims. In the contemporary period, liver and gallbladder consumption was practiced by anti-colonial Khmer Issarak, Sihanouk and Lon Nol soldiers, and Khmer Rouge prior to DK (e.g., Becker 1986:21; Martin 1994:15; Vickery 1984:4), and is reported to have recently occurred both in the early 1990s at "Black Tree," a secret government military detention center in Battambang province and during the July 1997 coup.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Thayer (1994:2; see also 1995:16) quotes a United Nations Center for Human Rights (UNCHR) report which asserts that executioners at Black Wood ripped "open the abdomen of their victims to extract their liver and bile. The livers of the victims were subsequently fried or

One infamous episode of liver-eating occurred in 1970 in Kompong Cham province (where I conducted ethnographic research from 1994-5), after Prince Sihanouk had been deposed. On March 26, two days after Sihanouk, in exile, called for a general uprising against the Lon Nol regime, demonstrators killed and consumed the livers of two National Assembly members. In a nearby locale, a mob did the same to Lon Nol's younger brother, Lon Nil, a policeman who owned a small rubber plantation; after extracting his liver, they reportedly took it to a Chinese restaurant where it was fried and then eaten by the mob. Saruon, a man whose family lived in Kompong Cham at the time, recalled, "The demonstrators cut open Lon Nil's stomach, cut out his liver, had it boiled in fish oil, and then ate it. They did this in order to show their anger toward [Lon Nol], to express their extreme anger." In order to understand such explanations of liver-eating, we need to unpack some of the meanings of the liver in Cambodian society.

Before proceeding in my discussion of human liver-eating, I want to stress that Cambodians should not be stereotyped as "liver-eaters." We should heed the words of Saruon, who, at one point, cautioned me that liver-eating "isn't really a Cambodian characteristic. Among a gathering of 10,000 Cambodians, you would find only one person who is savage, one who steals, and one who has eaten human liver . . . Therefore you can't say that Cambodians eat human liver. It's not true. There is only one person here or there who does this . . . and we Cambodians regard such people as despicable and without value." Just as people in the United States should not be called sadistic devil worshippers because of the isolated activities of satanic cults and Muslims should not be characterized as fundamentalist killers because of the bombings committed by terrorist extremists, so too must we recognize that Cambodians should not be stereotyped as "liver-eaters." The practice of

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grilled and eaten by the soldiers." Similarly, an August 1997 UNCHR report claims that, just after the 1997 coup, two farmers from Kompong Speu province, Sok Vanthorn and Khmer Rouge defector Sou Sal, were found "at the foot of a mountain. Their eyes were gouged out. Their heads, chests and stomachs were cut open. Their livers and gall-bladders had been removed" (1997:2).

human liver-eating is not a regular occurrence in Cambodian society; it only takes place in contexts of extremity, such as DK.

### Part I: A Cosmology of Liver-eating

The Khmer Dictionary defines "liver" (*thlaoem*) as "a part of human and animal bodies that is grouped with the gallbladder and heart.<sup>20</sup> A 'big liver' [*thlaoem thom*] means a 'big heart' [*chett thom*], great insolence or rudeness, as in 'Now I [contemptuous prefix] have a big liver and am not in awe of or scared of anyone'" (1967:420). As the second part of this definition implies, the liver has a figurative connotation somewhat like the English terms "spirit" or "heart" in the sense that the liver serves as a vitalizing organ that initiates action and emboldens a person. If English speakers refer to a person as "having a lot of heart," Cambodians may characterize a brave or daring individual as "having [a lot of] liver" (*mean thlaoem*). In fact, the liver is often portrayed as a "seat of courage" (see Smith 1987:28).

Because it is a source of individual initiative, however, one's liver may lead one to transgress norms of propriety and/or to have too much desire and craving (in the Buddhist sense). Accordingly, some Khmer terms and phrases associated with the liver have an extremely negative connotation, often one of excess. A person with an evil or bad character is sometimes said to have a "black liver" (*thlaoem khmav*). Pol Pot has been described in this way. Alternatively, as the Khmer Dictionary highlights, people who act in an aggressively rude, arrogant, or insolent manner and/or don't fear the potential repercussions of excessive behavior are characterized as having a "big liver" (*thlaoem thom*). In addition, the liver is associated with drinking, an activity that may also lead to excessive emotions or behaviors. Cambodians sometimes say that "drinking raises the liver" (*phoek loek*

*thlaoem*). While this phrase may be employed to reference the desire to maximize the good feelings among one's drinking companions, it also expresses the potential for extreme, sometimes even violent, behaviors. Occasionally, the connection between the liver and violence is made directly during arguments when one person tells an adversary, "I am so angry I will eat your liver" (*khoeng si thlaoem*). While such threats are not acted upon in normal Cambodian life, liver-eating does occur in contexts of extremity, such as military operations and warfare, violent demonstrations, and DK executions, to which I now return.

## Part II: A Reading of Human Liver-eating in DK

At the 1979 People's Revolutionary Tribunal in Phnom Penh, which convicted Pol Pot and his cronies *en abstenia* for genocide, Denise Affonço, a French-Vietnamese woman who survived DK, provided gruesome, yet detailed testimony about an episode of liver-eating she observed in an area of Battambang province suffering from great famine. She explained:

When the problem of starvation reached its apex, people, old or young, stole whatever they could lay hands on (cassava, vegetables, sugar canes, etc.). If they were caught it was to the "forest of the West" they had to go to. One day a young fellow named Touch was arrested for uprooting a few cassava roots. On learning this, Ta Ling [the village chief] simply said: "Take him to the forest of the West" (a special spot had been cleared there for such a kind of job). The culprit was accosted by three executioners: Ta Sok a bloodthirsty fellow . . . , Ta Doeung (also bloodthirsty and of the same origin), Ta Chea, a "new [person]" like us from Phnom Penh [who] had turned proud and arrogant [when] he became Ta Ling's aide . . .

I stealthily followed them from a distance out of curiosity. Coming near the place, I hid in a thicket from which I could safely watch the "ceremony," but was so frightened by what I saw that I nearly fainted. The condemned lad was attached, nude from the waist up, to a tree, his eyes bandaged. Using a long knife, Ta Sok, the executioner, made a long incision

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<sup>20</sup> All transliterations are based on Franklin E. Huffman's Franco-Khmer transcription system that is reproduced in Heder and Ledgerwood (1996:xvii).



in the abdomen of the miserable victim, who screamed with pain like a wild beast. (I can still hear his cries today.) Blood gushed out from all sides and from his intestines also while Ta Sok groped for his liver which he cut out, sliced into pieces, and started to cook in a frying pan already heated by Ta Chea. (Strangely, a human liver, cooked on a stove, makes little jerks like pancakes on a frying-pan.) They shared the cooked liver with a hearty appetite. After having buried the body they left with a satisfied air. I didn't dare leave my hiding place until they were far away, because if they happened to know that I had witnessed their criminal acts [that would have been it for me. That] evening, I could not sleep a wink [and] was haunted all night by the horrors [that I had seen] (PRK Tribunal 1988:58-9 and Burchett 1981:88).

How can we comprehend such horrifying events? One mode of understanding has been suggested by several anthropologists who have pointed out how, particularly in situations in which people are uncertain about the identities of others, violent excesses are sometimes used to create certainty by inscribing difference on the body of victims (Feldman 1991; Malkki 1994; Appadurai 1998). Discerning "the enemy" during DK was clearly an often difficult and ambiguous enterprise, particularly given purges which could even suddenly implicate Khmer Rouge like Ta Ling and his cronies. In the above case, Ta Ling gives orders for Touch to be "taken to the forest of the West" because he had stolen some cassava roots, a crime that, in other historical periods, would have been considered a minor offense. Given the comments of former Khmer Rouge executioners who have stated that they "were just following orders" when they killed, we may conjecture that even "blood-thirsty" fellows like Ta Sok, Ta Doeung, and Ta Chea might have entertained some doubts about Touch's "enemy" status.

Within such contexts of uncertainty, bodily violence may serve to "manufacture difference" (Hinton 1998a) by transforming victims into the political tokens for which they are accused of standing. In some cases, this process may resemble a rite of passage (V. Turner 1967; Van Gennep 1960). Thus, Touch is suddenly separated from his former social position and taken to a liminal space, "the forest of the West." In Cambodian culture, the "jungle" is associated with the wild and uncivilized (Chandler 1982), while

"the West" represents the direction of death in Buddhist cosmology (Swearer 1995). Ta Ling's short command is thus symbolically loaded: it tells the three executioner to take Touch to a marginal arena in which death and transgressive, wild acts may take place. Touch, who is deprived of markers of human identity such as his shirt and his physiological ability to eat, drink, see, and move his body, occupies a "structurally dead" (V. Turner 1967) position at this liminal locale. He becomes a text upon which difference is inscribed by violence -- in this case via Ta Sok's "long knife." By cutting into Touch's abdomen, Ta Sok violates a fundamental human barrier, the "social skin" (T. Turner 1980), and, through the resulting disfigurement and death, he thoroughly dehumanizes Touch. As if to confirm this loss of humanity, Touch's last act before death is to scream in agony, producing sounds that are no longer human, but rather are like those of "a wild beast." Ta Sok continues to violate what's left of Touch's human status as he gropes for his liver, the organ of vitality. In a sense, the process of disembowelment mimes the search for hidden enemies. Touch looks and seems like everyone else; however, his stealing demonstrates that he is secretly an "enemy." Just as such secret identities must be uncovered and revealed -- in fact, local cadre sometimes received orders to find enemies who were "burrowing from within" (*khmang bângkap siroung phtai knong*) -- so, too, is Touch's body opened up and a hidden organ removed from a place of internal invisibility in which it is "burrowed" to one of external visibility.

After removing Touch's liver, Ta Sok and his comrades slice, fry, and consume it. In doing so, the perpetrators perform another horrifying mimesis. If Touch has violated the community by extracting and consuming its food, he is punished by a bodily violation in which his liver is removed and eaten by representatives of the collective. This mimesis resonates with Buddhist conceptions of purgatory in which those who have sinned are frequently reborn in hells that have punishments mirroring their deeds (e.g., Brereton 1994; Reynolds and Reynolds 1982). In fact, many of the torments to which people are subjected in the realm of the hells involve being physically

hacked, mutilated, burned, and sometimes even consumed. Thus, in one version of the Buddhist hells, those who have killed fish for profit are condemned to be stabbed with lances, cut up with butcher knives, and then filleted so that their flesh can be sold; similarly, those who deceive others are sent to another hell where they have their tongues removed, are skinned alive, and are forced to lie on burning hot iron floors (Reynolds and Reynolds 1982:76-8). On some level, Ta Sok and his cronies may thus be acting as symbolic guardians of hell who "righteously" carry out the verdict of Ângkar -- the new Yama, or Buddhist Lord of Death -- in a manner involving a type of bodily mutilation that mirrors the "sin" (i.e., extracting Touch's liver, just as Touch had extracted food from the collective). Perhaps by frying Touch's liver, a key source of individual vitality, Tak Sok and the others were symbolically burning him in the flames of the new hell.

The act of communal eating provides a symbolic means of decontamination, as it moves the perpetrators -- who themselves have been defiled by committing violent transgressions and by having contact with an "enemy" and violator of the collective -- from the realm of the impure (i.e., killing) to the pure (i.e., sociality and communal consumption). The process of decontamination is symbolized by the frying of Touch's liver, which is purified through the heat of the flames and transformed into a "cooked" food object that may be jointly consumed in a "civilized" social context into which Ta Sok and his fellow cronies are reintegrated. Moreover, the cooking of the liver may also be seen as symbolizing the purification of the collective, which had been violated by Touch's stealing.

On another level, this act of liver-eating manufactures Touch's status as an enemy. As illustrated by the Khmer phrase "I'm so angry I will eat your liver," liver-eating is something that is done in contexts of extremity, such as when one person is irate and/or strongly desires revenge. During DK, Khmer Rouge discourse often encouraged its minions to hate and seek vengeance against enemies of the state, a point I have made elsewhere (Hinton 1998b). By eating Touch's liver, Ta Sok, Ta Doeung, and Ta Chea affirm Touch's

newly inscribed and dehumanized status as an enemy, since liver-eating is done to one's hated enemies. In ambiguous situations, then, liver-eating provides one way of demonstrating extreme anger toward and asserting certainty about the identities of alleged "enemies."

Liver-eating also serves other purposes. On the one hand, by eating human liver, people may believe they are able to incorporate qualities associated with the liver. (The great potency and vitality of human liver may be indexed by the fact that it supposedly jumps around in a frying pan, unlike the livers of animals.) When asked why people sometimes ate human liver during the Pol Pot period, I received some of the following responses:

People eat human liver at times when they are way too irate, such as when they hold a grudge . . . When they eat human liver, it makes their heart dare (*chett hean*), as if 'there is no one like me [prefix of superiority], there is only I' [prefix of superiority], as if they have taken some potent power (*etthipol*).

— Khel

People sometimes say that if one eats human liver, one's heart becomes detached (*chett dach*), that one's heart becomes audacious (*chett mut*) . . . Having an audacious heart is doing something one has to do. For example, if one decides to kill, it means one kills without thinking about it. You see, if they tell you, 'Kill these two people,' it means that — 'Bang!' — they would be killed at once. If one doesn't eat liver, one's heart doesn't become detached. And when they eat liver, they say (I've never seen it, but I've heard others talk about it) that after eating liver one's eyes become red. When one's eyes become redder, one's heart is really detached. So, if a group of perpetrators is killing a lot of people in some situation, perhaps they really do eat human liver in order to make their hearts detached . . . I believe that human liver really is eaten in order to make the heart detached, to prevent them from thinking. If the order to kill comes, they kill.

-- Saruon

Regular people didn't dare eat this, most often just executioners. Nowadays and during the Hun Sen period you had it, too. Most often it was done by soldiers living in the forest or mountains. Lon Nol soldiers used to capture Khmer Rouge, cut them open, take out their livers, and stir-fry them with rice wine. If the Khmer Rouge caught them, they would do the same. They would take revenge on each other . . . From what I know

liver makes a person more courageous. Afterwards, if the person who ate liver is told to shoot someone, the person will do it. If they are told to kill, they will kill. That person wouldn't think much. They eat liver in order to be able to kill.

-- Mol

Echoing the responses of many other people I interviewed, these informants all portray human liver-eating as an act that transforms the perpetrator's state of mind and, potentially, their character in general. To consume a person's liver, their "seat of courage," is to appropriate their courage. As a result, the perpetrator becomes extremely audacious and bold, someone who "dares" to engage in transgressive acts like those who have "big livers." The incorporation of liver therefore may have a cumulative effect, as it symbolically "adds" to the size of one's own liver.

Moreover, since the liver is an organ that initiates action, one may increase one's ability to act by eating it. Like Saruon, many of my informants mentioned that human liver-eating enables one to have a "heart that is detached" (*chett dach*; see Headley 1977:282) -- a phrase that implies one is able to literally "cut off" one's feelings toward something or someone, to become dispassionate and resolute when dealing with a matter. Killing another human being like Touch, even if a "hated enemy," is an act that causes most people, particularly those who are not yet fully desensitized, to have at least some qualms (Hinton 1996). By eating human liver, then, perpetrators incorporate qualities that enable them to become audacious, brave, dispassionate, and resolved enough to commit the most transgressive of acts, killing another human being. Like a person who is extremely inebriated (remember, too, the association between heavy drinking and a "big liver"), a liver-eater is able to act without hesitation or forethought. As one Cambodian observed, "If they are told to kill, they will kill. That person wouldn't think much. They eat liver in order to be able to kill." The very act of cutting out the liver is a gruesome mimesis of the perpetrator's mental state of "detached" resolve (mirroring the separation of the liver from the body) and

transgressive daring (mirroring the cutting out of the "seat of courage" and initiative).

On the other hand, liver-eating also provides a means of expressing power and intimidating others. As the above quotes suggest, cutting out and consuming an enemy's liver represents an extreme assertion of power, as it implies that perpetrators can do whatever they want, without fearing the consequences. Further, the removal of a victim's liver marks -- both physically and symbolically -- the victim's inferiority, powerlessness, and dehumanized status, as he or she is incapacitated and stripped of an organ of vitality and agency crucial to human life. Human liver-eating may therefore be seen as a perverse type of "power display" (Hinton 1997), as it constitutes a violent show of force intended to instill fear and obedience in others. One Kompong Cham city resident told me that, in contexts like DK, people sometimes eat human liver "to become braver and to gain renown through their actions. When others know that a person has eaten human liver, they will bend down before them, not dare to go near them."

During DK, Khmer Rouge seem to have used human liver-eating (real or perceived) as a way to intimidate people into obedience. Thus, Someth May (1986:203) described how some cadre purposely sat close enough to May and his co-workers so that they would overhear the cadre talking about human liver-eating:

I knew something of the pleasure they took in killing people . . . They would boast about how somebody screamed and cried for mercy before he died. They said that after people had had their livers cut out they could do nothing -- they couldn't talk, only blink their eyes. They said that fat people had small livers and thin people had big livers. They would sit there laughing together as they exchanged these details. 'You're wrong,' one of them would say, 'I had a fat guy last night and his liver was really big.' And once I heard one of them say that when you put human liver in the frying pan it jumps.

Such remarks seem designed to instill fear and terror in those who were listening to the cadre laugh about human livers being cut out, the speechless

torment of the victims, and the movement of the liver as it was fried before being consumed.

Similar remarks were sometimes made about the extraction and consumption of human gallbladders (*brâmat*),<sup>21</sup> an act that closely parallels human liver-eating. Whereas human liver is fried and then eaten, the gallbladder and the bile it contains is often dried and then added to liquor and drunk. The mixture is said to be extremely potent and is sometimes used as a medicine for high fevers and other illnesses (e.g., Criddle and Mam 1987:98-9; Stuart-Fox 1985:145; Ponchaud 1989:161). Sophea Mouth told me that gallbladder soaked in liquor is known to be

a cure for high temperature or malarial chills. Sometimes it helps women who have an irregular period . . . Before the 1970s, gallbladder was in demand by Chinese medicinists. These people were willing to pay a lot for freshly extracted gallbladder. The method of killing was to cut a person open from the back so that the gallbladder would pop out and could be easily removed. Once the gallbladder was dried, it would be soaked in whiskey. One gallbladder could be used many times. If the saturation is too thick, then it needs to be diluted. A strong saturation would be very bitter and could cause excessive heating. Other symptoms associated with a strong mixture is the feeling of choking or asphyxiation, blood-shot eyes, and loss of consciousness. The long-term effect of both liver and gallbladder consumption is madness. My father and other people have observed this. . . . My father told me that his military unit killed some Khmer Rouge members in the mid-1960s. Some of the soldiers ate their livers, and some cut out their gallbladders and put them in rice whiskey for medicine. One of these guys who drank gallbladder whiskey died from excessive heat and another one went crazy and shot a couple of his friends.

As illustrated by Mouth's comments, Cambodians view gallbladder and bile as "hot" substances having such great potency that they may alter one's physical and/or psychological state, even to the extent that they may drive a person mad. Like liver-eating, consuming human gallbladder/bile is said to increase one's daring, savagery, and detachment from the killing process. One villager explained, "I don't know for certain, but I've heard that drinking

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<sup>21</sup> The gallbladder is a small, muscular sac located under the right-lobe of the liver, which stores and discharges bile (*teuk brâmat*), a bitter liquid that aids digestion and is secreted by

liquor soaked in human gallbladder is done to make the heart detached (*chett dach*), so that the killer would dare to kill (*hean sâmlap*) people. Thus, I don't dare to kill, but if you gave me one glass of human gallbladder, I would dare at once." Such parallels between the transformative qualities of consuming human gallbladder and liver are likely due, at least in part, to the gallbladder's close association with the liver, since one is effectively consuming bile, a substance secreted by the liver.

The association between the consumption of bile and rage may also be partially derived from Ayurvedic medicine -- a tradition that has strongly influenced Cambodian conceptions of the body -- which holds that an excess of bile may produce an excess of heat, extreme anger, increased motor activity, red eyes, and, in extreme cases, madness (Obeyesekere 1977). From this perspective, to consume bile would be to make oneself irate toward the enemy (heat and extreme anger), to induce one to act/kill (increased motor activity) in an altered state of consciousness in which one loses agency (varying degrees of madness), particularly given that one is drinking gallbladder/bile mixed with alcohol, another mind-altering substance. While we do not know the exact roots of the practice of consuming human gallbladder and liver, I suspect that it has been strongly influenced by both Ayurvedic and Chinese medical traditions.

### **Part III: Genocidal Bricolage**

When considering why Khmer Rouge killed during DK, then, it is not enough to say they were merely "obeying orders." While these perpetrators were, to an extent, "disciplined" (Foucault 1979) to obey by certain salient cultural norms situated within a context of constraints, they had a degree of agency within these parameters. Ta Sok and his comrades were effectively

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the liver (Khmer Dictionary 1967:684; American Heritage Dictionary 1976:539, 131).



ordered to kill Touch. In doing so, however, they chose the manner of his execution. Their actions provide an example of what might be called, drawing *loosely* from Levi-Strauss's usage, "genocidal bricolage." Like Levi-Strauss' bricoleur (1966),<sup>22</sup> a "genocidal bricoleur" carries out his or her task armed with a varied array of cultural "tools."<sup>23</sup> In the context of DK, in which violence and extreme cruelty were rampant, perpetrators drew on various, preexisting cultural resources to carry out their brutal deeds. It seems likely that, prior to DK, Ta Sok, like the villager I quoted above, had heard people talking about how those who ate human liver would increase their daring to the extent that they could detach their hearts from their victims. When ordered to kill, Ta Sok used this cultural knowledge both to help him murder people like Touch and to make sense of what he was doing. Consuming human liver and gallbladder, of course, is not the only tool that perpetrators

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<sup>22</sup> For Levi-Strauss, "bricolage" consists of instances in which something – like mythical thought – is built out of a preexisting repertoire of structural resources. A "bricoleur," in turn, is analogous to a "jack of all trades" in the sense that he or she uses whatever materials and tools are at hand to perform a wide array of tasks: "The 'bricoleur' . . . always [makes] do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions" (1966:17). Drawing loosely on Levi-Strauss' usage, I use the term "genocidal bricolage" to refer to the repertoire of cultural resources a perpetrator draws upon to carry out and make sense of his or her murderous task.

<sup>23</sup> See Sutton (1995) for an example of how perpetrators used "bricolage" when engaging in cannibalistic violence during China's Cultural Revolution. In fact, there are several similarities between liver-eating in Cambodia and cannibalism in China – e.g., violence was perpetrated against perceived "enemies;" in both situations, body parts, including liver, were consumed because of their transformative powers and association with anger and bravado; and, the consumption of human body parts was carried out to dehumanize the victim and intimidate others. In fact, it is possible that the tradition of liver-eating came to Cambodia from China via Chinese immigrants. This possible line of diffusion would be supported by the fact that the consumption of liver and gallbladder are sometimes directly linked to Chinese-Cambodians -- as evinced by the mob's taking Lon Nil's liver to a Chinese restaurant and by the perception that Chinese healers use gallbladder in their medicines. Interestingly, in Chinese medicine, the liver is viewed as a vital organ that is associated with anger and the eyes; moreover, an "excess" of liver is said to make one irritable and have reddened eyes (Wallnöfer and von Rottauscher 1965). Chinese medicine also includes a conception of cause-and-effect relations between corresponding phenomena that is a possible origin for the view that the incorporation of a substance like liver or gall-bladder increases one's vitality and daring (see Unschuld 1985). While I do not have information to trace the exact origins of Cambodian gallbladder and liver consumption, I suspect that it is partially derived from both Ayurvedic and Chinese medical

may use. Killing an "enemy" in such contexts is usually considered a legitimate endeavor (Hinton 1996). Thus, Ta Sok and his cronies may have been using bodily violence to transform Touch, who seemed like everyone else, into the political token for which he was supposed to stand. Clearly, there may be a vast array of lethal "tools" in the genocidal bricoleur's kit of death. However, I am here concerned with making the point that perpetrators do not just "obey orders" -- they have leeway to act and make sense of what they are doing, using whatever symbolic resources are available to them.

The victims, too, can be seen as performing a type of bricolage in coping and constructing meaning out of their plight. During DK, people lived in an atmosphere pervaded by fear and terror, one that lacked clear meanings. Both during and after such situations, victims will draw upon preexisting cultural resources, often ones invoked by state ideologies, to cope with what they have experienced. Consider the following the comments made by a woman and a man, respectively, from a village in which I conducted fieldwork.

Comrade Phat was extremely savage. And a woman, too! If I saw her, I was immediately afraid. Let me tell you a story. There was a plan to kill [Muslim minority] Chams. Comrade Phat did this. I saw it! I was scared and my body trembled. They gathered all the Chams together, even the children who were bathing, and killed them. Comrade Phat, a cadre from the Southwest, was dressed in evenly cut shorts and carried an ax on a belt around her waist. Comrade Phat killed these people with her own hands, without hesitation. After splitting people open, she took out their liver and gallbladder. This woman was really savage. She ate liver and drank gallbladder soaked in liquor. She hacked people apart raw, then went up, split them apart and took the liver out. This woman did this! . . . I've heard others say that drinking human gallbladder makes one savage, makes the heart dare. Whenever they drink human gallbladder, it makes their eyes become redder. People with red eyes can kill, they won't be scared, they don't shake. It's as if their heart dares, is audacious and without hesitation.

During the Pol Pot period, the Khmer Rouge ate human liver . . . I saw it happen! A group of cadre ordered us to watch them do it. . . . In such situations, people eat human liver to make their hearts brave, to make

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traditions.

themselves extremely powerful/audacious, to make themselves think only of killing, like an ogre in the movies, an ogre with fangs.

In such comments, perpetrators like Phat are described as almost inhuman. They are "savage" like the mythological "ogres" who, in Cambodian folk tales, songs, epics, and performances, are associated with violence, torture, killing, and the consumption of human flesh (see Shapiro 1994; Smith 1987). Portrayed in this fashion, perpetrators are no longer quite "Khmer." It is almost as if the genocide was carried out by non-Khmer. The perpetrators' transformation to another mode of being is accomplished by their consumption of human liver and gallbladder, which make them become capable of seemingly inhuman emotions and behaviors. The "savage" and transgressive state of the perpetrators is indexed by their reddened eyes, which are bloodshot like those of insane people, demons, and even Yama. In fact, U Sam Oeur (1998), a Cambodian poet, sometimes refers to the Khmer Rouge as "the Red-Eyes" in his poetry.

Like red-eyed demons, Khmer Rouge held seemingly superhuman power during DK. Their great power is represented by the fear and awe others felt toward them and by their ability to kill people in horrendous ways. Conversely, members of the general populace are portrayed as passive victims who are powerless to act, as is Touch when he is disemboweled. Ironically, the same set of cultural conceptions about liver-eating is used by perpetrators and victims for different types of bricolage: perpetrators to display their power and to both enable and to provide meaning to their killings; victims to cope with and understand an almost incomprehensibly horrible, disempowered period of their lives.

#### Part IV: Perpetrator Motivation and the State

I would like to conclude this paper by discussing the implications of my analysis for the study of DK in particular, and genocide in general. Past studies of DK have tended to focus on macrolevel factors, or on the importance of political events, international affairs, socioeconomic conditions, and historical processes. However, while such work has provided rich and valuable insights into the events that took place prior to and during DK, they have paid less attention to the local, experiential, and motivational dimensions of the genocide.

I would like to argue for an approach that takes account of both macrolevel and individual-level factors, such as the one I will now describe. When a genocidal state like DK comes to power, it establishes the preconditions for genocide by: (1) altering the social contexts in which violence takes place, (2) establishing policy that enables, and giving orders to its minions to kill the regime's "enemies," and (3) disseminating an ideology of genocide legitimating and promoting the destruction of these victim groups. To be effective and to make sense to people, such ideologies must inevitably blend the new with the old. As Naomi Quinn and Dorothy Holland (1987:13) have noted:

States and other agencies promulgate ideology persuading people to do what they otherwise might question or resist doing. In spite of the resources and power that might be brought to such attempts at persuasion, it is not always effective. To be successful, ideologies must appeal to and activate preexisting cultural understandings, which are themselves compelling. Even though ideologues may mold and adapt cultural models to their own devices, and often show a great deal of genius for doing so, they do not create these cultural ideas *de novo*, nor are they able to guarantee the power of any given cultural model to grip us.

Thus, the utopian ideologies of genocidal regimes almost always incorporate preexisting cultural knowledge, distorting and dressing it up in new guises that nevertheless maintain familiar and compelling resonances.

The actions of perpetrators are not predetermined by this "state-level response." They will make their own "individual-level response" based on the situation, their prior experiences, the interpretive frames available to them, and their immediate feelings and goals, although all of these factors may be strongly influenced by the state-level response.<sup>24</sup> When killing another human being, even a radically devalued one, many, and perhaps most perpetrators may, at least initially, experience some hesitation. In order to overcome such feelings of hesitation, perpetrators make an individual-level response that I earlier suggested might be called "genocidal bricolage."

Like bricoleurs, perpetrators such as Ta Sok draw upon a repertoire of personal experience and knowledge to overcome their hesitations and to make sense of the murderous deeds they are carrying out. By linking their lethal ideologies to preexisting cultural knowledge, genocidal states provide perpetrators with an array of compelling discourses that may be used, consciously or unconsciously, in their genocidal bricolage. Elsewhere, I have explored several of these linkages, arguing that the Khmer Rouge attempted to motivate its minions to kill by invoking ideological discourses that played upon Cambodian cultural models related to face, honor, patronage, power, revenge, purity, and obedience (Hinton 1997).

In this paper, I have demonstrated how perpetrators sometimes use local frames of knowledge (i.e., in this case, the cosmology of human liver-eating) that are not directly invoked by the state. By framing my argument in this way, I have attempted to illustrate how scholars can account for genocide in a manner that does not portray perpetrators as homogeneous automatons, as other studies have done, most recently Daniel Goldhagen's (1996; see Hinton 1998a for a critique) study of Nazi Germany. I would argue that perpetrator motivation varies across time, place, and person. While a

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<sup>24</sup> It would certainly be possible to extend my analysis by including a median level, or "group-level response." While such an analysis is beyond the purview of this essay, I have elsewhere illustrated how cultural models related to face and honor – which were extremely salient on the group-level – influenced perpetrator motivation in the Cambodian genocide (Hinton 1998c).

perpetrator's motivations for and understanding of his or her deeds are often informed by state ideologies, this influence is not hegemonic and complete. Human liver-eating provides one example of how, within a system of constraints, Khmer Rouge perpetrators engaged in their own, individual-level, genocidal bricolage in carrying out their murderous deeds. They did not simply "obey orders."

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