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Case Studies in Religion and Peacebuilding

Cambodia

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Over the past decade, Cambodia has been the focus of some of the world's most concentrated peacebuilding activities in history. More than \$1.8 billion was spent on the work of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) alone. The world associates Cambodia's conflicts with the horrifying Khmer Rouge regime and its aftermath, but its troubles have not been isolated to the past three decades. Historically, Cambodia has been caught between expansionist neighbors, European colonial interests, Cold War superpowers, and agendas of "globalization." Religion and religious leaders have been important in Cambodian politics and conflicts,¹ but the record does not conspicuously show determinative roles for religion in peacebuilding. Cambodian Buddhism was nearly annihilated during the Pol Pot period. Nonetheless, a striking religiously inspired Cambodian peace movement has drawn international attention since the early 1990s and provides impetus for this case study.

Cambodia's state motto is "Nation, Religion, King." Cambodians are said to have a distinct sense of identity based on the glories of the

Angkor empire, the ancient Khmer language, and a Buddhist heritage. Angkor's grandeur between the ninth and fifteenth centuries has been used to cultivate nationalism and advance the ambitions of ideologically diverse regimes that have dominated Cambodia over the past century.² More than 90 percent of Cambodia's 11.4 million people adhere to Theravada Buddhism, the endemic religion of Khmer people since the fourteenth century. Cambodia's current constitution makes Buddhism the state religion. Popular Khmer-Buddhism, deeply connected with Khmer identity, is inextricably interwoven with Indic Brahmanism and animism that predate Buddhism. Historically, village wats (pagoda-monasteries) were central in schooling, moral education, community decision making, political advice, spiritual counsel, and conflict resolution. Now, knowledge and practice of Buddhist ethics and meditation are shallow, but Cambodians participate widely in religious ceremonies and festivals. Buddhist clergy still evoke popular deference.

This chapter uses illustrations from Cambodian history and current events, emphasizing religious activism in 1993 and 1998 elections,³ to demonstrate that religion has been unconstructive in conflict resolution or peacebuilding when disengaged from social issues or, alternatively, when politically aligned or manipulated. Religion has contributed to peacebuilding when its leaders have played active nonpartisan roles in teaching, conflict resolution, and advocacy for public ethics and nonviolence at grassroots and national levels.

Resources have been teased from English language materials from several disciplines, including news reports. About fifty unstructured interviews were conducted in Cambodia (in English or through interpreters) in 1998 and 2000 with Buddhist and Christian clergy and lay leaders as well as human rights, legal development, conflict resolution and peacebuilding scholars, and practitioners within civil society and government.⁴ The focus is on popular expressions of Khmer-Buddhism. Christianity is also considered because of the high-profile work of foreign Christian development and evangelistic missions. Brief comments are made about nonreligious peacebuilding efforts.

When considering Cambodia, one must remember the world's involvement, complicity, silence, or apathy in the devastation of the country and its people's suffering. A Cambodian monk says, "we must be responsible politically and personally. Everyone was implicated in some way, intentionally or unintentionally." Speaking about foreigners, a Christian priest who has worked with Cambodians for decades cautions: "We must be very humble."

ROOTS OF CAMBODIAN CONFLICTS

External factors have been important in Cambodia's conflicts. Vietnamese and Thai expansionism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was curbed by installation of a French protectorate in 1864. The French legacy included an anticolonial nationalist movement. Buddhist clergy sometimes participated in sporadic protests during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and after 1945 were among leaders in the communist movement. Communist leaders also included men and women educated in France and influenced by Marxism, including Saloth Sar (later Pol Pot). National autonomy and preservation of Khmer-Buddhist identity, together with complex dynamics of the Vietnam War, were factors in the ultimate rise of the 1975–1979 Pol Pot regime.⁵

The regime's radical collectivism, nationalist isolation, and internal purges caused deaths of about 1.7 million men, women, and children—up to a quarter of Cambodia's population—from privation, illness, torture, or execution. Historical and religious archives were destroyed. Wats were demolished. Religious practice was abolished. Ethnic and religious minorities were persecuted. Along with doctors, lawyers, teachers, artists, and scholars, most monks and nuns were killed, died, fled, or disappeared. Fewer than 5000 of Cambodia's 65,000 monks survived the 1970s; more than 25,000 were executed.⁶

Vietnam's ouster of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 was followed by a decade of international isolation. Powerful Western countries supported insurgency by the republican Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front (KPNLF), the monarchist Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC) and the Khmer Rouge. The breakdown of Cold War politics created conditions for several years of regional and UN peace efforts resulting in the 1991 Paris Peace Accords.

UNTAC-organized 1993 elections produced a fragile coalition between FUNCINPEC and the incumbent Cambodia People's Party (CPP), successor to the Communist Party of the previous regime. The new government created a liberal democratic constitution, but continued factional power mongering thwarted all progress. Increasing tensions erupted in military violence in July 1997. Hun Sen's CPP secured control. Elections in 1998 resulted in another coalition controlled by Hun Sen. In late 1998, the remnants of Khmer Rouge insurgency forces were given amnesties and integrated into the Cambodian armed forces.⁷

With increased political stability, life has improved for many Cambodians. But the country remains among the poorest in the world. The

shift from centrally planned socialist policies to neoliberal free market practices prescribed by international financial institutions is implicated in the growing gap between rich and poor. Cambodia remains fraught with inequality, corruption, violence, ethnic prejudice, and factionalism.

The United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) refer to Cambodia's climate of human rights abuse and poor law enforcement as "a culture of impunity." Issues include violence and bullying by authorities, sexual and labor exploitation of children and women, labor conflicts, and widespread land rights disputes. Military, police, and government officials often turn a blind eye or are actively involved. Courts lack independence and resources. There are no trusted government human rights complaint mechanisms. Public frustration with impunity of offenders has led to violent mob "justice." There is much preoccupation with how to come to terms with past atrocities, including plans for a UN-approved tribunal to try selected Khmer Rouge leaders.

Generations of war and conflict have broken down community structures, religious practice, and relationships at the grass roots. Deep divisions, suspicion, violence, and trauma maintain their grip on institutions and morale.

Political discourse remains polarized along factional lines. Factions are based on personal loyalties as much as political values.⁸ Obligations to patrons, family, or friends militate against taking differing views or even impartial stances. Concepts and practices of nonpartisanship, neutrality, and impartiality are ill defined and undeveloped. Impartial conflict resolution and decision-making processes are strongly urged for Cambodia, including independent courts, human rights bodies, and other entities. There is frustration about how to implement neutrality in a political culture in which the very idea of independent decision-making bodies is an anathema to power holders who benefit from the status quo. There is no tradition of power sharing. Instead, power holders and power seekers seem to stockpile and garrison their influence as though it were scarce, threatened property essential for zero-sum, life-and-death contests.⁹

One problem with "neutrality" is its diverse connotations. The Cambodian term *apyearkret* (neutrality, impartiality) is defined as "in the middle, representing those in the middle, not entering any group."¹⁰ The definition is capable of several meanings, including the taking of moderate positions, being independent, or being apart from relevant parties.¹¹ One civil society leader suggests that "neutrality" tends to be disrespected in Cambodian politics because "neutral" stances are interpreted as "neutralized, passive, and non-vocal." Literature from the

field of conflict resolution suggests that dominant groups tend to see “neutral” ideas or people as those that implicitly or explicitly conform to the dominant groups’ prevailing social norms. “Normal” may be anything but “neutral” in the eyes of nondominant and minority interests.¹² A Cambodian human rights leader spells this out: “If you stand ‘neutral’ between the bad and the good, the bad will like you . . . this is not [true] neutrality.” He used the example of much criticized “neutral” stances of embassies whose policies were believed to advantage the powerfully ensconced CPP after the July 1997 conflicts and during the 1998 elections.¹³ In his view, “true” neutrality involves taking ethical stands. This principled approach to “neutrality” is challenging in Cambodia’s polarized political culture. The first-mentioned civil society leader puts it this way: “if you express an opinion, you are put either in the government basket or the opposition basket. Independent views are colored one way or the other.” Thus, it is difficult to identify Cambodians at the national level who are impartial in the sense of being respected and trusted by all sides.

RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING IN CAMBODIA

For the Khmer-Buddhist majority, Buddhism is the only institution that cuts across political and social divisions. Monks have exceptional power to sway people at the grass roots. Their very presence in public activities has a legitimizing effect. This section discusses the clergy’s tradition of political neutrality, and its mediating role between people and rulers.¹⁴

Traditional and Contemporary Roles of Buddhism in Governance

In traditional Khmer-Buddhist thinking, the nation is held together by the clergy (*sangha*) and the righteous ruler (*dhammaraja*), the two reciprocally supportive wheels of Buddhist *dhamma* (truth, law, ethical teaching). *Adhammaraja* is a person of merit who has risen to rule through right actions in previous lives (*kamma*). Historically, the *sangha* maintained royal support by subordinating itself to the king. The ruler maintained *sangha* support, popular legitimacy, and social control by observing the *dhamma*. Righteous rulers (and, by extrapolation, public officials) observe Ten Royal Virtues: liberality or generosity concerning the people’s welfare; morality including noncorruption; duty, including self-sacrifice for the people; integrity, including truthful sincerity; kindness, including concern about people’s hardships; austerity, including simple living, spiritual discipline,

and self-control; non-anger; nonviolence; forbearance; and “non-opposition” to the people. The concept of non-opposition is seen as a “Buddhist endorsement of democracy.”¹⁵ Traditional Buddhist ethics and governance principles are seen as resonant with liberal democratic conceptions of public participation, equality, and protection of human rights.¹⁶

For centuries, Cambodian politics have flown far from the benign and reciprocal traditional Buddhist governance model with ruler, *sangha*, and people all following the *dhamma* with compassionate loving-kindness and dedication to the common good. Historically, powerful religious rhetoric and the *sangha* itself have been involved in politics. Religion has frequently been exploited, manipulated, or inverted for political purposes.

During the colonial period, intermittent political protests by clergy aimed to protect Buddhism. For example, a 1942 French proposal to Romanize the Khmer alphabet was seen as an attack on Buddhism. When Achar Hem Chieu led a monk protest, he was forcibly defrocked and arrested for plotting a coup. The insult and arrest provoked an “umbrella war” of a thousand people in Phnom Penh including hundreds of saffron-robed monks carrying their customary umbrellas. Hem Chieu died in prison. He remains a popular Cambodian hero.¹⁷ Nationalist movements were primarily noncommunist until the French tried to reassert authority after World War II. Some clergy joined the communist movement in 1946 and rose to prominent leadership until Pol Pot (then Saloth Sar) became leader in 1962.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Sihanouk exploited Buddhist rhetoric with policies of “Buddhist Socialism.”¹⁸ The Khmer Rouge, while denouncing religion, instituted rules for cadres that imitated precepts for monks, aiming to show their conduct as “more perfect than the practice of monks.”¹⁹ In 1979, the Vietnamese-sponsored People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime bolstered its legitimacy by partially restoring Buddhism, including arrangements for ordination of seven former Cambodian monks including Venerable Tep Vong, who became head monk of a unified Cambodian *sangha* until Sihanouk reestablished the Thommayut order in December 1991 at which time Venerable Tep Vong became (and remains) Supreme Patriarch of the Mohanikay order. Until 1989, PRK constraints on Buddhism included restriction of ordination to men over fifty and a tax on wats.

Although pagoda restoration began in 1979 after the Vietnamese took over, the pace increased dramatically after 1989. Revival over the past decade means approximately 4000 pagodas have been restored, mainly with villagers’ lay offerings. There are now more than 50,000

monks. Few have education or experience. Novices often have only primary education. Most monks are young men and teenagers ordained temporarily for education or as part of traditional expectations that males serve some time as monks. Shortage of educated, experienced monks means lack of discipline for young monks. There are anecdotes about monks leering at women, and even standing by giggling while mobs beat suspected thieves.²⁰ Education is improving. In 1992, the Buddhist Institute reopened and began distributing scriptures to libraries and pagodas. The first Buddhist high school for monks reopened in 1993. The Buddhist University reopened in 1997. Japan's donation of a million copies of Khmer language Buddhist scriptures means young monks can read them. Divisions are appearing as young monks challenge elders concerning monk discipline, tradition, and social engagement.

Cambodia's estimated 20,000 nuns²¹ have lower status and prominence than monks, partly because nuns are unordained (as in all Theravada traditions since the sixth century). Nuns are usually disciplined, responsible older women with no family responsibilities. Usually uneducated, nuns traditionally work in pagodas as housekeepers. The Association of Nuns and Lay Women of Cambodia (ANLWC) has been training nuns in Buddhist concepts of human rights, and skills for conflict resolution, leadership, trauma counseling, and social work for street children. Nuns sometimes now serve on pagoda committees that are influential in village decision-making.²² Nuns and lay Buddhist women have been visible and courageous in sometimes dangerous peace walks. They are driving, organizing, and coordinating forces for much of Cambodia's peacework.

Internal divisions in the *sangha* mean increased ability of political players to manipulate religion. All political parties seek *sangha* legitimization by inviting monks to bless events and by visiting and donating to wats. The *sangha* is divided into two denominations. The tiny Thommayut denomination, restored in 1991 by Prince Sihanouk, is associated with the royal family and FUNCINPEC. The Mohanikay denomination, constituting more than 90 percent of monks, is headed by Venerable Tep Vong, long identified with the CPP. However, many younger Mohanikay monks do not identify with the CPP.

Poor education, institutional weakness, divisions, and political alignments mean the *sangha* currently is not positioned for strong roles in governance, conflict resolution, or teaching of ethics to leaders or populace. Nevertheless, the popular authority of Buddhism is such that Cambodian political players try to co-opt it, manipulate it, or control it. Later discussed is the CPP's use of force and coercion on monks.

Conceptions of Monk “Neutrality” and Social Engagement

Theoretically, traditions of political neutrality mean that monks are in a unique position to hold to the Middle Path, standing on Buddhist precepts, principles of ethical governance and nonviolence. There is consensus that Cambodian monks should stand for righteousness, nonviolence and political neutrality. But practical meanings of “righteousness” and “neutrality” differ along a continuum from disengagement to political alignment.

Conservative Buddhists emphasize individual piety and a disengaged approach to “neutrality.” This view of neutrality favors silence about controversial political or social issues. Many monks take this approach.

Engaged Buddhists subscribe to traditional monk roles but add emphasis on active social engagement, nonpartisan and nonviolent approaches to social justice, and the alleviation of oppressive or conflict-producing social structures and situations.²³ Education goes beyond prescribing personal piety and aims to develop a critical mass of peaceful individuals who live out Buddhist ethical precepts. Thus, peace radiates outward from individuals to families, to communities, to society. Engaged Buddhists point to scripture and traditions that support nonviolence, human dignity, ethical governance and economic policy, active peacemaking, consensus-based participatory decision making, and nonpartisan *sangha* advocacy on behalf of people and the environment. Engaged Buddhists are a small minority in Cambodia, but their activism, particularly that of Maha Ghosananda²⁴ who led annual peace walks in Cambodia between 1992 and 1998, has resulted in his nomination for the Nobel Prize four times between 1994 and 1997.

Another stream of thinking in the continuum seems closer to the style of Cambodia’s monk political activists of the past two centuries, represented by the iconic Hem Chieu. This stream does not shun political activism, but claims neutrality by standing for righteous governance regardless of party affiliation. During 1998 post-election conflicts, some young monks representing this thinking leaped into the middle of clearly partisan opposition political demonstrations while asserting a nonpartisan motivation. Concepts and lines between the various approaches to “neutrality” are blurred and confused.

From an engaged Buddhist perspective, Venerable Yos Hut points out that “public activities that challenge injustices are often seen as partisan by Cambodia’s leaders,”²⁵ and therefore monks must follow the Middle Path strictly: “Non-partisan activism in favor of peace walks a fine line between neither endorsing nor opposing any party in a conflict and making clear statements of opposition to policies which lead to vio-

lence and suffering.” Yos Hut acknowledges that Cambodia’s polarized political climate makes this stance controversial and difficult; monks who take public roles are accused of “meddling in politics and overstepping the bounds of their religious duties.”

Conflict resolution practitioners involved in Cambodia’s peace movement have outlined the practical mind-set required for neutrality from an engaged Buddhist perspective. The first principle is avoidance of actual or perceived partisan alignment with any individual or group or its interests.²⁶ Second, silence and social disengagement are not considered neutral; practical results of disengaged silence may be continued dominance of the powerful to the detriment of the weak. By contrast, an engaged Buddhist conception of neutrality contemplates engagement without attachment, “neither joining the fight nor hiding from it.”²⁷ Third, “engaged” neutrality springs from commitment to the *dhamma*’s teaching concerning mindfulness, detachment, and compassion.²⁸ Engaged neutrality means mindful detachment from interests of self or parties, avoidance of prejudices, *and* compassionate attention to needs of all concerned.²⁹ Fourth, engaged neutrality involves active commitment to justice. Yos Hut maintains that to justify passive inaction in the face of injustice is to misunderstand Buddhist teaching.³⁰ Finally, engaged neutrality recalls Maha Ghosananda’s emphasis on balancing compassion with protective wisdom:

retaliation, hatred and revenge only continue the cycle [of violence] and never stop it. . . . Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but rather that we use love. Our wisdom and our compassion must walk together. Having one without the other is like walking on one foot; you will fall. Balancing the two you will walk very well, step by step.³¹

Cambodian clergy have become politically active at certain points in history, but there is no long-standing pattern of this kind of nonpartisan social engagement. Conservatism, non-engaged passive neutrality and cooperation with rulers have been more the norms. Currently, even conventional clergy roles in grassroots moral education and community conflict resolution are weak. Some clergy have been involved in development work, including Heng Monychenda,³² who founded Buddhism for Development. He has also been involved in peacework. However, nonpartisan engaged Buddhist approaches are the exception.

Low clergy involvement in peacework and development is largely due to the near extinction of organized Buddhism during the 1970s. Heavy loads rest on a handful of educated and experienced monks and

nuns. Also, the *sangha* has not had much space to develop apart from government control. Activist monks have become more cautious since a crackdown on monk demonstrators after the 1998 election. CPP strength continues to penetrate most of the country down to the village level where local monks are not exempt from political pressures.

Election Conflicts: 1993 and 1998

Buddhist clergy and laity, particularly through the *dhammayietra*³³ movement, played positive roles in surprisingly peaceful 1993 and 1998 elections. In contrast, when monks joined opposition demonstrations against outcomes of the 1998 election, the *sangha* became entangled in public violence and controversy.

The 1993 election was one of UNTAC's successes. Ninety percent of the electorate exercised their secret ballot with remarkably few incidents of violence and fraud despite intimidation from the Khmer Rouge and the CPP and considerable pre-election violence and deaths.³⁴ Peace walks led by Maha Ghosananda just prior to the election contributed to encouraging and calming the population. An organizer of the 1993 peace walk remembers that "people were afraid before the election—they expected bloodshed . . . Venerable Maha Ghosananda was influential in awakening people with his peace walks. The symbol of thousands of saffron robes and miles of walkers lessened their fears." People had stored food rations for fear of election violence, but they came out and cooked for the walkers, she recalls. Monk encouragement also provided moral authority for public participation in the election. Cambodians thronged to the polls in a massive, peaceful demonstration of popular will.

In July 1998, Cambodia ran its own multiparty elections with international support and observation. There was considerably less pre-election violence than in the 1993 election. Despite reports of considerable pre-election intimidation by the CPP, and lack of equal media access by opposition parties, again people peacefully came out to vote in overwhelming numbers. NGO coalitions played notable roles in voter education and election observation.³⁵ Civil society organizations, including Buddhist laity, monks, and nuns, organized an impressive coalition to campaign for a peaceful election. With support from many sectors, this campaign is credited with helping to prevent violence through peace education and other activities in sixteen provinces, including peace walks in ten provinces. Venerable Maha Ghosananda participated in pre-election peace activities in Phnom Penh as did Supreme Patriarch Tep Vong.³⁶

Election results showed the CPP ahead. FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) alleged irregularities in vote counting. The National Election Commission, appointed to run the election, was criticized for lack of neutrality and inability to handle hundreds of complaints. Lack of timely, effective complaint resolution is regarded as one cause of escalating conflict, demonstrations, and violence after the election.³⁷ Opposition parties, notably the SRP, orchestrated nonviolent demonstrations in late August to protest irregularities including poor transparency in vote counting. Students became involved. After violent clashes between authorities and demonstrators in early September, a number of young monks joined the demonstrations.³⁸ One witness says the monks' unplanned involvement was impulsive, motivated by desire to deescalate conflict. But some monk demonstrators appeared to have political motives, claiming Hem Chieu as inspiration and role model.³⁹

Whatever the monks' diverse motives, their "open defiance of traditional Buddhist edicts and orders from their elders not to participate made them targets of a violent government crackdown."⁴⁰ Monks were beaten and publicly disrobed. Authorities searched pagodas, fired guns within wat precincts, and restricted monks' movements. Eighteen monks and a nun were among seventy-seven injured during suppression of demonstrations. Among fifty-three missing are four monks.⁴¹ Many monks went into hiding. A senior monk said on television that monks' involvement in the demonstrations was against the rules of Buddhism. Monks' injuries were not caused by beatings, he said, but happened when they "fell down and struck each other" in the confusion.⁴² It is believed that this statement was coerced.⁴³

Cambodians were shocked and frightened by beatings and disappearances of clergy, but opinion became polarized. Many were outraged at the treatment of monks and nuns. Some lauded the monks for a brave stand for justice. Others criticized their involvement in opposition politics. Some suggested that the monks were manipulated by the opposition. Media statements by senior clergy and others fomented public controversy about "political" or "undisciplined" monks versus cooperative "neutral" monks who stay out of politics.

The 1993 and 1998 elections demonstrate contrasting fruits of monk involvement. Buddhist monks, nuns, and laity made significant contributions to a peaceful voter turnout during both elections. But the aftermath of the 1998 election saw monks embroiled in political conflict. Passive forms of neutrality or complicity by senior monks were viewed as either coerced or partisan on the CPP side. Association with political demonstrations was seen as partisan on the opposition side.

Both these approaches are contrasted with the Buddhist-inspired non-partisan peace activism practiced in carefully planned and disciplined ways, and widely seen as conducive to religious integrity, social justice, and peace.

Given confusion and controversy about monk roles in society, together with still-strong moral authority provided by clergy, a current challenge for the Cambodian monkhood is to grapple with issues of *sangha*-state relations, including practical meanings of “neutrality.” Questions include: Should monks be involved in social issues? What kinds of issues and how? Should monks vote? Should they be involved in political discussions and demonstrations? What kinds of demonstrations and how? If monks should be engaged in development and social issues but not partisan politics, how are “politics” defined, and where is the line drawn for involvement?

The Cambodian Peace Movement

Positive, peacebuilding roles of clergy and lay religious leaders in the 1993 and 1998 elections did not “just happen.” They were a part of sustained peacework over two decades.

The work inspired by Maha Ghosananda is the most frequently cited example of religiously based peacebuilding in Cambodia. Beginning in 1978, he built nonpartisan relationships by visiting refugee camps of all factions. With other monks, including Yos Hut, he attended international peace talks to encourage the factions toward settlement. Although the Peace Accords were reached only after the UN stepped in, the effect of the monks’ presence and their moral authority with the factions should not be dismissed.

Maha Ghosananda is the founder and spiritual leader of the *dhammayietra* movement in Cambodia. Considerably inspired by Gandhi, the movement has taught and exemplified active nonviolence to foster peace and reconciliation. Beginning in 1992, monks, nuns, and laypeople conducted annual *dhammayietra* processions through armed conflict zones.

The increasingly prominent movement has been marked by planning and preparation. Training has included theory and practical disciplines of nonviolence, nonpartisanship, and conflict resolution. Preparation for the 1996 walk included twelve training workshops in eight provinces for 600 people. The 1998 pre-election peace campaign included training workshops, practice sessions, poster and media campaigns, and extensive logistical preparation coordinated largely by Cambodian NGOs. Connected to the *dhammayietra* movement is the work of the Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation⁴⁴ which has sponsored

grassroots training in conflict resolution and nonviolence for many Buddhist monks, nuns and others. International support has been provided by groups like the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB).

ROLES OF OTHER RELIGIONS

Christian presence in peacebuilding is small but influential and respected at grassroots and national levels.⁴⁵ Foreign Christian efforts have been most prominent in social services, health care, and rural development. Quakers, Mennonites, and Catholics have been most prominent in peacework. Christian peaceworkers have labored alongside Cambodian monks and laypeople for the past two decades. Christians have been involved in the *dhammayietra* movement of the 1990s, grassroots conflict resolution work, the 1998 election Campaign to Reduce Violence for Peace, initiatives such as the Cambodia Centre for Conflict Resolution, and weapons reduction work. Christians have been prominent in the Cambodia Campaign to Ban Land Mines which, as part of the International Campaign, is credited with providing moral pressure that contributed to signing of the 1997 Treaty to Ban Land Mines by 122 countries including Cambodia. Cambodians, including Buddhist leaders and NGOs, have seen the work of foreign Christian peaceworkers as complementary and facilitative of their own local initiatives.

Not all foreign Christian presence has been conducive to peacebuilding. Evangelical Protestant Christianity is attracting a number of Cambodians whose suffering over past decades has led to crises of faith.⁴⁶ Insensitive proselytization has offended many.⁴⁷ Some view Christianity as a potential threat to Cambodia's Khmer-Buddhist identity. Christians and Buddhists see increased interfaith dialogue as important to prevent growth of any seeds of religiously based conflict.

Other religions in Cambodia include Mahayana Buddhism practiced among the Vietnamese minority. Folk religions are practiced by indigenous peoples. Islam is practiced by the Cham people, who have received support for rebuilding mosques from Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Roles of these religions in peacebuilding are beyond the scope of this study.

ROLES OF OTHERS IN PEACEBUILDING

Comparatively small religiously based peacebuilding initiatives have been overshadowed by nonreligious activities. UNTAC was the most visible and expensive peace effort. UNTAC was praised for its success in

the 1993 election and for creating a safe climate for development of human rights and civil society organizations. UNTAC is criticized for its lack of fit with (or knowledge of) Cambodia's culture or power patterns, and its marginalization of local knowledge and skills.⁴⁸

Currently, diverse perspectives are taken concerning peacebuilding, legal development, and human rights. Some take a Western legal approach toward identification and accountability of individual offenders. The UN focus on trials for key Khmer Rouge leaders is an example.⁴⁹ The theory is that trials will set an example by bringing to justice individuals chiefly responsible for the genocide, thereby addressing current impunity problems. Some take a cultural perspective, saying effective peacebuilding lies in enhancement of local knowledge based on Khmer-Buddhist culture and Cambodian conditions. The dominant institutionalist approach of UN and democratic donors concentrates on development of liberal democratic legislative, judicial, executive, and ombuds-type institutions. Sorpong Peou, originally from Cambodia, defends institutionalist approaches, arguing that neither trials nor traditional governance models can transform Cambodia's personalist style of governance, which he sees as a root of power abuse and conflict.⁵⁰ However, institutionalist approaches to governance are often the hand-servants of neoliberal economic development that is implicated in Cambodia's grassroots poverty, child labor, and environmental problems. Some Cambodian peacebuilders use eclectic strategies, combining local knowledge approaches with institutional capacity development. For example, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace has organized multisectoral think tanks among scholars, NGOs, political leaders, and Cambodian institutions to encourage less polarized dialogue and increase capacity and respect for impartiality. The Cambodia Centre for Conflict Resolution uses Western and Buddhist concepts for training urban and rural government officials and civil society workers.

Dominant foreign efforts for peacebuilding still tend to give lip service to understanding Cambodian political, social, and religious culture. Few resources have been put into sustained research to elicit and enhance Cambodian approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Some research has been done on local wat-based participatory governance⁵¹ and village conflict resolution.⁵² Cambodians repeatedly express interest in learning more about mediation for community conflicts, legal disputes, and human rights conflicts.⁵³ Recent initiatives for mediation of land disputes illustrate the need for better understanding about what kinds of mediation processes will be effective.⁵⁴ Whether traditional, Western-inspired, or combined models are adopted, the development process needs to be driven and informed by Cambodians.

LESSONS TO BE DRAWN

Cambodians have many lessons to teach the world. One is that it is important for peacebuilders to pay attention to the politics and grassroots power of religion even when conflicts are not centered around religious animosities, and even when the religious establishment is weak. The weakness of Cambodian Buddhism together with popular attachment to religion and religious leaders means that Buddhism is potentially powerful, but easily manipulated by dominant forces.

Second, this study provides insights into concepts and practices of “neutrality” that can prevent cooption of religion, and enhance clergy and lay roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. When “neutrality” is defined as silence or passivity, a neutral religious community is malleable to whomever dominates society. At the opposite pole, partisan political actions by religious leaders have been implicated (however inadvertently) in Cambodia’s twentieth-century spiral into the Khmer Rouge genocide that ended up turning on religion itself. Monk involvement in the 1998 demonstrations shows that activism, however well intentioned, can be divisive when it becomes politically aligned—or perceived as politically aligned. The lesson to be drawn concerns the power of “engaged neutrality” that includes taking stands on public ethics while remaining actively nonviolent, nonpartisan, fair, and righteous. When “neutrality” is defined this way, a nonpartisan monk-hood could conceivably become a force toward sustainable peace and justice. Several Cambodian monks, nuns, as well as lay women and men are providing dynamic leadership to this end.

Third, further research on Cambodian and Khmer-Buddhist concepts of impartiality could illuminate ways to increase capacity for independent courts and human rights bodies. Fourth, local Cambodian capacity, knowledge and will for effective religiously based peacebuilding is alive among many laity, a number of monks and nuns, and some foreign supporters. These can be strengthened and harnessed to inspire government and religious leaders toward ethical and accountable governance suited to the needs of Cambodians in the twenty-first century.

Fifth, we see the fruits of interfaith Buddhist-Christian collaboration. We have witnessed the impact of locally initiated work led by a nonpartisan and multifaith religious community, such as anti-landmines work and the *dhammayietra* movement. This work has inspired people in Cambodia and elsewhere to see that nonpartisan nonviolence can be an effective third way between violent insurgency and docile acquiescence to injustice. Sixth, from a development perspective, religiously based peacework in Cambodia shows the good fruits of facilitative foreign approaches to

peacebuilding and development, compared to advisory, top-down, “we-know-best” approaches. Increased foreign efforts would be well spent on action research to facilitate expansion of local and regional knowledge and strategies. Seventh, we learn about striking synergies that can result when grassroots organizational skills are combined with the dynamism of charismatic leaders like Maha Ghosananda.

Finally, we are reminded of the call of Buddhist and Christian leaders in Cambodia for responsibility and humility, recognizing that “we are all implicated, intentionally or unintentionally.” Therefore, I close with a question: There is still a long way to go for people in Cambodia on their *dhammayietra*. Who will walk with Cambodian peacebuilders patiently, on their terms, step by step?

NOTES

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1. Ian Harris, “Buddhism in Extremis: The Case of Cambodia,” *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, ed. Ian Harris (London, New York: Pinter, 1999), pp. 54–78; Charles F. Keyes, “Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia,” in Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre, eds., *Asian Visions of Authority* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 43–73; Yang Sam, *Khmer Buddhism and Politics from 1954 to 1984* (Newington, CT: Khmer Studies Institute, 1987), pp. 8–16.

2. David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silk-worm, 1996).

3. Since this research, commune elections occurred in February 2002, too late to allow for discussion in this chapter.

4. All unattributed quotes are based on notes of confidential interviews with key informants and are not footnoted separately.

5. Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power: A History of Communism in Kampuchea, 1930–1975* (London: Thetford Press, 1985).

6. Peter Gyallay-Pap, "From Conflict to Reconciliation in Cambodia?" (Battambang, Cambodia: unpublished paper, 1993).

7. See Laura McGrew, *Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Cambodia: 20 Years After the Khmer Rouge* (Phnom Penh, unpublished paper funded by the Canadian Embassy, March, 2000).

8. For a description of Cambodia's patronage system, see Kate G. Frieson, "The Cambodian Elections of 1993: A Case of Power to the People?" in R. H. Taylor, ed., *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), pp. 224–251, at p. 231.

9. David Chandler, "Might Makes Right," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 162:36 (1999), pp. 54–56; Ing-Britt Trankell and Jan Ovesen, "Introduction," *Facets of Power and Its Limitations: Political Culture in Southeast Asia*, ed. Ing-Britt Trankell and Laura Summers (Uppsala, Sweden: Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, 1998), pp. 9–18.

10. Chuon Nath et al., *Dictionnaire Cambodgien* (Phnom Penh: Institut Bouddhique, 1967), p. 1658. *Apyeankret* derives from Sanskrit.

11. Caroline Hughes, with Real Sopheap, *Nature and Causes of Conflict Escalation in the 1998 National Election* (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Development Resource Institute, 2000), pp. 32–38; SILAKA, *The Political Neutrality of Cambodian NGOs* (Phnom Penh: Cambodian NGO Support Network and SILAKA, 1998).

12. See Catherine Morris, "The Trusted Mediator: Ethics and Interaction in Mediation," *Rethinking Disputes: The Mediation Alternative*, ed. Julie Macfarlane (London and Toronto: Cavendish Publishing, and Emond-Montgomery, 1997), pp. 301–347, at pp. 329–330. Problematics of terminology, concepts, practice, and ethics of "neutrality" and "impartiality" are not confined to Cambodia.

13. See David W. Ashley, "The Failure of Conflict Resolution in Cambodia: Causes and Lessons," *Cambodia and the International Community: The Quest for Peace, Development, and Democracy*, ed. Frederick Z. Brown and David G. Timberman (New York and Singapore: Asia Society and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998), pp. 49–78.

14. This section draws on William Collins, *Grassroots Civil Society in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study, November 1998); Peter Gyallay-Pap, "From Conflict to Reconciliation in Cambodia?"; Peter Gyallay-Pap and Hean Sokhom, eds. *Buddhism in Cambodia*, special issue, *Cambodia Report II* (2) (Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study, 1996); Charles F. Keyes, "Communist Revolution and the Buddhist Past in Cambodia"; Somboon Suksumran, "Buddhism, Political Authority, and Legitimacy in Thailand and Cambodia," *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, ed. Trevor Ling (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993); Somboon Suksumran, "The Buddhist Concept of Political Authority and Society as Basis to Rebuild the Khmer Society and

Nation,” *Buddhism and the Future of Cambodia*, ed. Khmer Buddhist Research Center (Rithisen: Khmer Buddhist Research Center, 1986).

15. Aung San Suu Kyi, “In Quest of Democracy,” *Freedom from Fear*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Aris (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 173.

16. For example, Yos Hut Khemacaro, “Steering the Middle Path: Buddhism, Non-Violence and Political Change in Cambodia,” *Safeguarding Peace: Cambodia’s Constitutional Challenge*. Special Issue, *Accord 5* (1998), p. 73.

17. Bunchan Mul, “The Umbrella War of 1942,” trans. Chantou Boua, *Peasants and Politics in Kampuchea, 1942–1981*, ed. Ben Kiernan, and Chanthou Boua (London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1982).

18. Yang Sam, *Khmer Buddhism and Politics from 1954 to 1984*, pp. 8–16; also see Ben Kiernan, *How Pol Pot Came to Power*, pp. 169–248.

19. Yang Sam, *Khmer Buddhism and Politics from 1954 to 1984*, p. 70.

20. Seth Mydans, “Mob Justice Rules over Cambodia’s Ailing Courts.”

21. Naurin Ahmad-Zaki, “Association of Nuns and Lay Women (ANLWC): Women, Morality and Reconciliation” (Phnom Penh: Heinrich-Böll Foundation, n.d.), retrieved 14 January 2001 from <http://www.hbfasia.org/cambodia/adlwc.html>.

22. Kassie Neou, “Human Rights in Action—Developing Partnerships Between Government and Civil Society—Our Unique Non-confrontational Approach in Cambodia,” Occasional Paper 35—Cambodia Country Study, Human Development Report Office Occasional Papers (Phnom Penh: United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2000), retrieved 19 November 2000 from <http://www.undp.org/hdro/oc35.html>.

23. Soraj Hongladarom, “Buddhism and Human Rights in the Thoughts of Sulak Sivaraksa and Phra Dhammapidok (Prayudh Prayutto),” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Conference on Buddhism and Human Rights, 1–14 October 1995*, retrieved 4 January 2001 from <http://jbe.la.psu.edu/1995conf/honglada.txt>; Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

24. For a biography, see Maha Ghosananda, *Step by Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion*, ed. Jane Sharada Mahoney and Philip Edmonds (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1992).

25. Yos Hut Khemacaro, “Steering the Middle Path,” pp. 73–74. See Chea Sotheacheath, and James Eckardt, “Activist Monks Dare to Defy Authorities,” *Phnom Penh Post*, Special Edition, 7:20 (September 12–17, 1998); Pok Sokundara and Beth Moorthy, “Monks Walk a Tightrope between Peace and Politics,” *Phnom Penh Post*, 7(22) (October 2–15, 1998).

26. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan, and Marissa Maure, “One Million Kilometres for Peace: Five Years of Peace Action Walks in Cambodia” (Bangkok: Non-

violence International South East Asia Program, undated). Retrieved 13 January 2001 from <http://www.igc.apc.org/nonviolence/niseasia/dymwalk/dy1.htm>.

27. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan, and Marissa Maure, "One Million Kilometres for Peace."

28. For elaboration on doctrinal and scriptural sources please refer to sources cited. Also see Eva Neumaier's chapter in this volume.

29. John A. McConnell, *Mindful Meditation: A Handbook for Buddhist Mediators* (Bangkok: Buddhist Research Institute, Mahachula Buddhist University, and others, 1995), pp. 245–257, which discusses Theravada Buddhist theory as it relates to community conflict and mediation, with extensive references to scriptural sources. A Khmer translation is published by the Cambodia Development Resource Institute in Phnom Penh.

30. Yos Hut Khemacaro, "Steering the Middle Path," p. 73.

31. Maha Ghosananda, Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Marissa Maure, "One Million Kilometres for Peace."

32. Heng Monychenda was a monk for seventeen years until 1997.

33. *Dhammayietra* literally means *dhamma* walk and is translated "pilgrimage of truth."

34. Kate G. Frieson, "The Cambodian Elections of 1993: A Case of Power to the People?" *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, ed. R. H. Taylor (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), pp. 224–251.

35. Chea Vannath, "The 1998 Cambodian Elections: Progress and Challenges," *National Elections: Cambodia's Experiences and Expectations*, ed. Kao Kim Hourn and Norbert von Hofmann (Phnom Penh: Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, 1998), pp. 30–35.

36. Thida Khus and Ouk Chettra, eds., *The Campaign to Reduce Violence for Peace during the 1998 Election Campaign: Summary Report* (Phnom Penh: Forum for Peace Through Love and Compassion and SILAKA, 1998).

37. Caroline Hughes, *Nature and Causes of Conflict Escalation in the 1998 National Election*, p. 55.

38. There are rumors that many monks involved in the demonstrations were imposters in robes, or were ordained just for the demonstrations. Although I did not investigate this point, I heard only supposition to support the idea, although some informants acknowledged the possibility. I spoke to several witnesses who saw, hid, or helped fleeing people known to be monks.

39. Michael Hayes, "The Legacy of Achar Hem Chieu," *Phnom Penh Post* 7(22) (October 2–15, 1998).

40. Yos Hut Khemacaro, "Steering the Middle Path," p. 76. Also see Chea Sotheacheath and James Eckardt, "Activist Monks Dare to Defy Authorities;" Pok Sokundara and Beth Moorthy, "Monks Walk a Tightrope between Peace

and Politics”; Laura McGrew, “Buddhism and Beatings,” *Phnom Penh Post*, 7(22) (October 2–15, 1998); discussions with researchers and civil society leaders (Phnom Penh, May–June, 2000).

41. Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Human Rights in Cambodia, *Monitoring of Election-Related Intimidation and Violence, August 20–October 28, 1998* (Phnom Penh: Cambodia Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (COHCHR), 28 October 1998); COHCHR, *Killings and Other Instances of Violent Deaths Documented in and around Phnom Penh between 7 and 19 September 1998* (Phnom Penh: COHCHR, September 25, 1998).

42. Chea Sotheacheath and James Eckardt, “Activist Monks Dare to Defy Authorities.”

43. Laura McGrew, “Buddhism and Beatings.”

44. Yeshua Moser-Puangsuwan and Marissa Maure. “One Million Kilometres for Peace”; Liz Bernstein, “Buddhism and Conflict Resolution Seminar for Cambodians” (Phnom Penh: Unpublished paper, n.d. circa 1992).

45. Cambodian Christians, a tiny minority of about 40,000 including 15,000 Catholics, have few resources for peacebuilding. For history of Catholics and Protestants respectively see François Ponchaud, *Cathedral of the Rice Paddy: 450 Years of History of the Church in Cambodia*, trans. Nancy Pignarre, and Bishop Salas Cambodian Catholic Center (Paris: Le Sarment, Fayard, 1990) and Don Cormack, *Killing Fields Living Fields: An Unfinished Portrait of the Cambodian Church* (Crowborough, UK: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1997).

46. Don Cormack, *Killing Fields Living Fields*, p. 440; François Ponchaud, *The Cathedral of the Rice Paddy*, pp. 169–170; Nancy Smith-Hefner, “Ethnicity and the Force of Faith,” pp. 24–38.

47. Phelim Kyne and Bou Saroeun, “Cambodians Who Turn from Buddha to Jesus,” *Phnom Penh Post* 9:14 (July 7–20, 2000); Nancy Smith-Hefner, “Ethnicity and the Force of Faith: Christian Conversion among Khmer Refugees,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 67:1 (1994): pp. 24–38.

48. UNTAC has been discussed extensively elsewhere. For diverse perspectives, see Steve Heder and Judy Ledgerwood, eds., *Propaganda, Politics, and Violence in Cambodia: Democratic Transition under United Nations Peacekeeping* (Armonk, NY, and London, UK: M.E. Sharpe, 1996); Caroline Hughes, *UNTAC in Cambodia: The Impact on Human Rights*, Occasional Paper No. 92 (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1996); Ben Kiernan, ed. *Genocide and Democracy in Cambodia : The Khmer Rouge, the United Nations and the International Community* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1993); Pierre P. Lizée, *Peace, Power and Resistance in Cambodia: Global Governance and the Failure of International Conflict Resolution* (Chippenhams, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd, and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Sorpong Peou, *Conflict Neutralization in the Cambodia War: From Battlefield*

to Ballot-box (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997); Alexandra Tennant, AUNTAC's 'Top-Down' Approach: Insensitivity or Pragmatism?" *Safeguarding Peace: Cambodia's Constitutional Challenge*. Special Issue. *Accord 5* (1998), p. 53.

49. In February 2002, the UN pulled out of several years of stop-and-start talks with the Hun Sen government aimed at setting up a UN-approved tribunal to try Khmer Rouge leaders. The government has asked the UN to reconsider. See Puy Kea, "Cambodia Asks U.N. to Return to Talks on Khmer Rouge Trial" *Kyodo News* (July 5, 2002).

50. Conversation with Sorpong Peou, Phnom Penh, 21 May 2000.

51. William Collins, *Grassroots Civil Society in Cambodia*.

52. William Collins, *Dynamics of Dispute Resolution and Administration of Justice for Cambodian Villagers* (Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study, 1997).

53. For example, see William Collins, *Evaluation of the Impact of CIHR Training for Seila Participants in Principles of Management and Good Governance: A Report to UNDP/CARERE*. Draft Final Report (Phnom Penh: Center for Advanced Study) 1999, p. 94.

54. Shaun Williams, *Land Ownership Disputes in Cambodia: A Study of the Capacity of Five Provinces to Resolve Conflicts over Land* (Phnom Penh: OXFAM (GB), February, 2000).