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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENOCIDAL LEADERSHIP: POL POT AND A CAMBODIAN DYSTOPIA[1]

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Abstract

We define misleadership as leadership process involving a complex interplay of leader, follower, and situational elements, inscribing a vicious circle of intensifying dysfunctional action. It is tempting to see misleadership as the result of the madness of one leader. It is also misleading. Leadership research has been insufficiently attentive to misleadership~~and~~, ~~in~~ particularly~~,~~ to the one of the most extreme forms of misleadership ~~factors intervening~~resulting in genocidal processes. We discuss the antecedents and the rule of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in the 1970s as an extreme case of misleadership. We ~~seek to~~ derive some lessons from the Polpotist dystopia as well as reflect on possible contra-strategies. In particular, we suggest that it is necessary to distinguish measures for social change that are admissible and positive, from negative utopian visions ~~that are negative, inadmissible and~~ facilitative of evil leadership.

Keywords: leadership; misleadership; evil leadership; genocide; Pol Pot; Khmer Rouge; utopia

Short bios

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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENOCIDAL LEADERSHIP:

POL POT AND A CAMBODIAN DYSTOPIA

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Leadership, as largely portrayed in the organization and management literatures, is represented as a fundamentally positive process. Gini and Green (2012), however, observe that leadership sometimes unfolds in such a way that it ends up being best described as "misleadership", as something that it would be misleading to term "leadership". A similar perspective is assumed by Perruci and McManus (2013, p. 50) when stating that "immoral – evil – goals, by definition do not fall under the leadership category." Some researchers distinguish possible types of destructive leadership behavior. Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, and Einarsen (2010), for example, concluded that leadership behavior that is destructive rather than constructive is a prevalent phenomenon rather than an anomaly, with tyrannical leadership being the rarest form of destructive behavior (distinguishing different types of "destructive leadership" in Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). The fact that democratic governing structures now prevail in the West (Brill & Sloan, 2011) should not obscure the fact that non-democratic forms of leadership and governance are still common elsewhere, sometimes producing extreme results.

The article considers one specific type of tyrannical leadership based upon the use of genocidal terror as a tool of power by discussing the conditions that favored the emergence of genocidal leadership in Cambodia in the 1970s and through analysis of the underlying rationality of genocide in the case of Pol Pot and "Pol Potism" (1975-1979; the Appendix summarizes some key chronological moments of Pol Pot and Pol Potism). Rithy Panh, the Cambodian filmmaker who witnessed the Khmer Rouge years, characterized Pol Pot as a case of genocidal leadership of a regime defined by violence and purity (see Gini & Green 2012). The statistics are stark. Short (2004) suggests that 1.7 million people died as a consequence of the policies imposed between 1975 and the

beginning of 1979 by the Khmer Rouge, people who were victims of execution, starvation, and extreme exhaustion. Such a case represented far more than an example of bad leadership: at an institutional level, it was extremely destructive normalized social practice. Using genocide as a power tool (Cunha, Clegg, Rego, & Gabriel, 2014) and normalizing it in a society may be an extreme, but it is not unusual. Genocide is not a rare event: since Kampuchea there have been many cases, the most recent being the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS; "poor in offering a lifestyle that most people find attractive" (…) but "strong in spiritual purity"; Brooks, 2014) waging genocide on non-Sunni believers.

The persistence of institutionalized genocidal processes and evil leaders justifies research on a topic that is prevalent and tragic from a human perspective (Goldhagen, 2009). Genocide ("a crime with the intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group"; Volhardt & Bilewicz, 2013, p. 1), is a highly organized process, knowledge of which is necessary to understand why people organize themselves around evil, inhuman visions and follow malign leaders (Owens, Su, & Snow, 2013). Processes involving categorizations that divide people into the worthy and the unworthy on the basis of some marker, usually premised on some permutation of ethnic, linguistic or religious identity, are at the core of genocidal programs. The killings in Kampuchea resulted from categorical distinction based on political ideology. Others have taken place based on distinctions between different religious ideologies; for example, in the former Yugoslavia; on ethnic or tribal distinctions, as in Rwanda; more recently, they have been institutionalized on the basis of a mixture of clan, religious and political distinctions in the Middle East, overlain by gender discrimination in which males are killed and younger women seized for sexual purposes. In many cases, such as Nazi Germany, Northern Ireland and the Middle East, the categorical distinctions are historically institutionalized. In the Kampuchean case, the categorical distinctions were freshly minted by the leadership and had no root in a deeply embedded sense of historic grievance.

The genocide process is saturated with leadership. Leaders invoke a vision of a world purged of impurity using categorizations that distinguish different courses of treatment for different types of people. Typically, leaders seek to invoke a vision based on belief in an overwhelmingly teleological purpose, often historically justified by reference to the site of specific schisms, battles and grievances. To implement the vision followers need to be mobilized; hence, genocide is a complex and ongoing activity, rather than an irrational explosion of violence. Where there is no historical foundation in schism, battles, ethnicity, religion or language, then considerable leadership work is required to institutionalize the necessity of killing the stigmatized. Given the complexity of the process, analysis of the leadership component involved in novel founding, leading and organizing genocide seems necessary. Nonetheless, the organization and management studies community, with limited exceptions, has been mostly silent about the tragedy of genocidal leadership under circumstances of either historical or contemporary institutionalization (Stokes & Gabriel, 2010). Such a silence is odd, for, as several authors have suggested (Burnette, Pollack & Forsyth, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006), a great deal can be learned from “extreme cases”.

Pol Pot’s regime is an extreme “extreme case” and in this article the leadership aspects involved in the Cambodian genocide are the topic for analysis. The paper starts with a methodological note and then organizes the discussion in a narrative sequence comprising two major parts. First, it discusses how genocidal leadership emerges. It asks: what are the conditions that turn terror into political possibility? Second, it focuses on the practice of genocidal leadership once power relations are established to implement its rule more widely. It asks: how do leaders accomplish evil? The paper indicates what needs to be considered in terms of anticipating the potential of evil contained in leadership action on the assumption that any partial explanation for the emergence of genocidal leadership is best built from paradigmatically extreme cases.

Methodological Note

The case of Cambodia in the Khmer Rouge period presents a historically embedded case study with extreme traits (Flyvbjerg, 2006), rendering characteristics of the genocidal process highly transparent. A combination of data collection methods was used to explore inductively the emergence of genocidal leadership in Cambodia, a country that had not suffered from internal division so much as from overbearing neighbors and conquerors. The present article is based on the analysis of a diversity of data sources, in order to obtain a balanced and multi-perspectival account of process, including historical analyses, memoirs, and testimonials. The analysis of data proceeds in two stages. In stage 1, the process of institutionalization of leadership is bracketed into two key periods: *emergence* and *rule*. In step 2, the major dimensions characterizing these periods are subsequently analyzed in order to extract information about how evil leadership emerges. These two periods are examined after a brief overview of Pol Pot's Cambodia, which sets the context for the case.

Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge: An Overview

The Khmer Rouge, a Maoist-inspired politico-military movement, was the final victor in a civil war that erupted in the geopolitically unstable region of Southeast Asia in the 1970s. Cambodia was caught in the political vortex of the Vietnam War, where the realpolitik of the major powers, namely China, US, and the USSR fought for supremacy. During the Vietnam War, the United States Air Force (USAF) dropped 2,756,941 tons of ordinances on Cambodian territory in an attempt to disrupt Viet Cong supply lines – making Cambodia probably the most heavily bombed country in history (Owen & Kiernan, 2006). As a result of the bombings, 600,000 Cambodians perished. The Khmer Rouge, in the context of this destruction, mobilized support from the peasant segments of the Cambodian population. Against the backdrop of devastation (a map of the bombing is presented by Owen and Kiernan [2006]) and in a context of corruption, poverty, and institutional decay, the Khmer Rouge presented themselves as a political movement that could rebuild the nation through

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revolutionary action. With Chinese and, initially, Vietnamese support, the Khmer Rouge seized Phnom Penh on April 1, 1975, after the fall of the government of Lon Nol, during the final days of American involvement in Vietnam.

The Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer), the label created by Prince Sihanouk to describe the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK), were led by a clique of French educated Cambodian intellectuals, familiar with Communist ideals. They sought to create a utopian autarchic society: a self-sufficient agrarian, egalitarian, anti-professional, anti-technology and primitive communist paradise unlike any other actually existing society on the planet (Kiernan, 2008). As Mohr (2013) explains the process, the leadership presented a moral façade cast in the light of revolutionary zeal to the impoverished masses. The revolutionary process the Khmer Rouge unleashed engaged the nation in a vicious circle of radicalism never before witnessed: even the Maoist Chinese, in the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution, came to represent the Kampuchean project as excessively radical.

To implement the Kampuchean revolution, the pillars of the old world were erased in order to institutionalize a utopian vision of a collectivist future. Families were disbanded. Meals were turned into communal events. Buddhism was forbidden. Political cells replaced community villages organized around collective work projects imposed top-down by Ângkar, the panoptical *Organization*. Democratic Kampuchea (DK) was, in summary, intended to be a classless society dominated by those designated by the Khmer Rouge as the "old people", the peasants. Money would cease to circulate, markets would not exist and educational activities were to be replaced by political indoctrination. "Political incorrectness", in whatever forms, would be eradicated and the politically correct DK line was established everywhere for everything. The new Kampuchea would be a wholly new form of social organization (Kiernan, 2008).

Genocidal leadership: Emergence (1970-1974)

While evil forms of leadership can be perceived as a form of projection by an innately evil person, such a representation would almost certainly be an oversimplification of reality. Undoubtedly, there is an element of individual projection but evil leadership also entails complex institutional processes of which leaders are only a part. In the case of the Khmer Rouge, three elements played critical roles in the ascension to power: *attraction, resistance born of shared hardship,* and *alliance*.

ATTRACTION

Attraction can be a result of either push or pull factors: some things push attractors together while others pull them together. In the Khmer case, the push factors were associated with corrupt government and the American bombings, while the pull factor was Khmer Rouge ideology. The Khmer Rouge movement was the most active oppositional force against the corrupt government and the American attacks. The Khmer Rouge leadership offered a vision and a viable alternative to powerlessness through opening a path for action that framed their actions in the terms of a new ideology, one aiming to create an entirely new society, one purged of injustice and lack of opportunities for the impoverished and immiserated peasantry. The appeal was not entirely ideological, as it fed on the resentments of those excluded from the small numbers of people that enjoyed a bourgeois life: the rebel army offered a practical livelihood for those with little in the way of resources.

External push factors also played an important role in the emergence of the Khmer Rouge leadership. American bombings had a pivotal role in the history of the movement, pushing the peasantry towards the Khmer Rouge cause as one that was resolutely anti-American. The Khmer Rouge started their final ascent to power during the Vietnam War and the carpet-bombing of their territory. In domestic politics, the Khmer Rouge mobilized against the corrupt government of Lon Nol, who had declared the Kingdom of Cambodia a Republic in 1970. Lon Nol’s regime was characterized by authoritarian rule, corruption, violence, executions and disappearances. As Lon Nol

sought to restore Cambodia's sovereignty in its eastern regions, where Vietnamese communists had established base camps and supply trails, the regime came to rely increasingly on large quantities of American aid, with the people caught between the viciousness of an increasingly erratic, weak and corrupt state and the ordinance of a lethal foreign power. Opposition to the USA and to Lon Nol fused. As the US Air Force attacked Laos and Cambodian areas in an attempt to destroy Vietnamese troops hiding in the jungle, it created an unexpected effect: habitat destruction led many people to flee and join the ranks of the Khmer Rouge. The push, avoiding the carpet-bombing, combined with the pull of the promise contained in the Khmer Rouge ideology of a land cleansed of a decadent and corrupt ruling class.

RESISTANCE BORN OF SHARED HARDSHIP

The Khmer Rouge was a jungle-based guerrilla movement. Life in the jungle was hard and precarious. The movement was clandestine and its members lived in the Cambodian jungles for years. In the clandestine phase, the movement started to stabilize and reproduce an ideology, a vision, work routines and other institutional processes. The development of oppression depends upon institutionalized work (see Martí & Fernandez, 2013). The experience of hardship and resistance molded the membership and was used to imprint the youthful members with the idea that their mission would put an end to an era of generalized injustice and oppression. As a measure of the hardships, one young Khmer Rouge soldier recalls, "In Ta Khmau, comrades ate even cockroaches to survive" (Ea & Sorya, 2001, p. 19). Surviving these hardships transformed the movement into an important political presence in a period when the institutional landscape in Cambodia was imploding. The Khmer Rouge emerged as the major opposition group to General Lon Nol's government, shifting from being a relatively minor contender into the most consistent political alternative to the regime. Persistence in face of a very hostile environment was critical in the rise to power. While the management and organizational literatures tend to explain success through strategic factors, such as

capabilities, resources and contextual structure, the case shows that strategy is not enough: persistence may be a form of strategic validation. If one group survives where all others fail, then it must have some strength that others lack. Endurance came first; strategy was second.

ALLIANCES

The Khmer Rouge was initially a small player in Cambodian politics. Its ascent resulted from a combination of ideological fervor meeting unpredictable contingencies, led by the "Upper Brothers", (as the Khmer Rouge designated the leadership). The contingencies were the corruption of the Lol Non regime and its urban bourgeois associations, together with the intense USAF bombing. These factors would have been insufficient without alliance building. The Khmer Rouge initially secured support from Vietnam via the Communist Party of Indochina. Later, consumed by historical distrust between Cambodia and Vietnam, the alliance broke and the Chinese became the Khmer Rouge's main supporters. Chinese backing was critical to a geopolitical conflict involving the major world powers (the Soviets aligned with North Vietnam, and the US backed South Vietnam).

It is difficult to explain evil leadership as the result of the malignity of one leader. Pol Potism was much bigger and much deeper than Pol Pot, the individual. Ben Kiernan, founding director of Yale's Cambodian Genocide Program, explains that Pol Pot returned from China in 1970 in order to command preparations for full-scale revolt (Kiernan, 2004). To some extent, Pol Pot was an outcome of contingent circumstance, a pawn in the game of history being made by other leaders in several parts of the world: (a) Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon in the United States, trying to stop "dominoes" of East Asia from falling into communist hands; (b) the nationalist struggle with socialist characters of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam; (c) the Gang of Four and Mao in China, with the Cultural Revolution. Proximity to the Chinese communists was crucial. Even after the fall of Phnom Pen to the Vietnamese invaders in January 1979, a core group led by Pol Pot found refuge in the Thai-Cambodia border, making occasional visits to China. Particularly influenced by the continuous

struggle and permanent revolutionary philosophy of Maoism, with its valorization of the peasantry and class war on the bourgeoisie, the Khmer Rouge regime was not an ideological outlier but a variant of Southeast Asian communism

Genocidal leadership: Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)

Once in power, the Khmer Rouge founded their rule around three pillars: a *utopian vision, the creation of a totalitarian space aligned with the vision,* and *the abundant use of terror to enforce the vision*. These three processes are explained next.

UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA

The egalitarian paradise envisaged in the jungle, which justified the hardship and struggle, formed the central ideology of the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge utopia was to be one in which the evils and miseries of feudal expropriation of the land and exploitation of the peasantry, supported by a venal urban elite, would be substituted by peace, harmony and happiness, via the subordination of all traces of bourgeois individualism to the collective will. The Khmer Rouge and its following of Cambodians were drawn largely from rural areas (those who were categorized as “base” people, in opposition to the urban and “inferior” new people) and comprised a collective characterized by a deep sense of the humiliation inflicted on them by the recent Cambodian state and its bourgeois society that both fed into and was exacerbated by Khmer Rouge ideological training. Their vision promised a solution, a “cure” for their state and society’s ills. The cure was drastic: to re-educate the class enemies that oppressed them through living as the peasants did so that they shared the common people’s conditions, or through their elimination by legal process. It was assumed that the consequences of re-education and legal elimination would “eradicate” the problem of bourgeois domination. DK thus sought to found a utopia whose foundations rested upon an ideology of purity. It was meant to create “The cleanest, most fair society ever known in our history” (Hinton, 2005, p.

8). In the case of DK, utopia rapidly revealed its dystopian face, creating a society describable as a prison without walls, an extreme totalitarian state, whose contours are explained next.

TOTALITARIANISM

The agrarian paradise promised by the leadership of the CPK amounted to little more than a gigantic slavery state for many of its inhabitants. The Khmer Rouge led their country, renamed Democratic Kampuchea, into a new dark ages. Under their rule, citizens were turned into instruments of the state. Private life disappeared in the new system as every sphere of life was brought under regulation by the state: as Rithy Panh (2013) put it, the state's gaze roamed from the cooperative to the bedroom. As a result, people could only live under the big black tunic of the Ângkar, "The Organization", under a state of exception justified by the prevalence of enemies (Cunha, Clegg, Rego, & Lancione, 2012). There was no freedom of choice. The distinctive trait of a total institutional space is its claim over every aspect of the lives of those on the inside, those whom it contains, in every sense of the word. In DK, lives were determined by the Ângkar. "The Organization" decided who deserved to live, who should be marrying whom, even the micro-detail of where and how they should eat or sleep together as the state sought to regulate the sex lives of couples. The private became public as nothing could escape the ever-vigilant eyes of the pineapple, the metaphor used to refer to the multiple capacities for panopticism of the Ângkar, through its networks of informers and surveillance (Clegg, Cunha, & Rego, 2012). In such a context, informers bred victims in a spiral of increasing paranoia.

TERROR

The exercise of power inevitably contains a potential for coercion that should not be ignored (Weber, 1978). Sometimes, leaders use extreme coercion as a power tool. In the case of DK, leaders used terror as a governmental tool abundantly. The country became a "dictatorship by terror" in which

"death was everywhere" (Panh, 2013, pp. 110 and 194). States have traditionally been defined by their claims to having a monopoly of violence, a prerogative that the Kampuchean state used without hesitation. Violence was used against those who expressed any signs of misalignment with the status quo. The perfection of utopia admitted no doubt. Presumed enemies of the revolution were potential targets, with the Ângkar not resting in its search for enemies, many of them even inside the ranks: as the cadres put it, it was equally important to fight the enemy in the battlefields as well as in the rice fields (Ea, 2005). The rule of terror resulted in a regime imposed by brute force. Brutality was applied with no parsimony and no hesitation: as the regime defended itself, the policy was that it was better to risk killing the innocent rather than letting the guilty escape.

Violence was a necessary tool to implement the utopian vision. In the initial phases, hard measures were viewed as necessary to eradicate the old habits and to remove the hordes of enemies of the revolution. Power relations between the base people and the hated class enemies were founded on revenge fuelled by the imposition of hardship for the fortunate, who might learn through re-education. Hard, brutal violence was reserved for all others whose class origins were too impure or who were suspected of being counter-revolutionaries or spies acting against the interests of the comrades.

Implementing utopia became an extreme experiment in leadership by terror (Kets de Vries, 2004). Terror, once unleashed, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The regime fought to exterminate all forms of dissent and created a chain of terror (Ea, 2005) that extended all over the country, organizing a network of prisons that articulated with death camps, the well-known "killing fields". At the center of such a network was the infamous S-21 prison of Phnom Penh, where some 17,000 people, namely the top cadres who had fallen into disgrace in the eyes of the senior echelons of the movement, were tortured and later executed at the Choueng Ek killing field.

Implications for the Study of Evil Leadership

What does the case of DK teach about the nature of evil leadership? From the above discussion, a number of lessons can be derived. A first lesson refers to the role of the top leader. The process was directed by a group of leaders (the so-called Upper Brothers) rather than by a charismatic, visionary leader. It would be a mistake to assume that Pol Pot was a charismatic revolutionary hero. Pol Pot was initially described as a mediocre student and as a “self-effacing” man (Short, 2004). In reality, in the initial period of the Khmer Rouge rule, he was not even known to the people. As suggested elsewhere, the leader could be seen as an instrument of history (Cunha, Rego, & Clegg, 2011). Genocidal leadership resulted from the institutional action of a group of co-leaders (the Upper Brothers) rather than from the charismatic powers of one malign person. Once the process was underway Pol Pot emerged as a shadowy leader, rarely seen. Thus, there is a marked contrast with studies of charismatic leaders, such as Hitler. As Kershaw (2000) explains, the ascension of Hitler’s German National Socialist Workers’ Party is difficult to understand without fully considering the charisma and the rhetorical appeal of the Fuhrer to the masses. In the Nazi case, as charismatic leadership theory predicts (Klein & House, 1995), the leader is a necessary presence in the leadership process. In Kampuchea, Pol Pot was no rabble-rousing charismatic figure but an almost invisible element to the masses.

A second lesson is that, during times of massive upheaval and chaos in which extreme contingencies drive devaluation of existing recipes, people’s approval of radical ideas are stimulated. As radical ideas are advanced, their initial acceptance by a strongly ideologically coherent cohort – such as the comrades who emerged from the jungle – functions to allow the institutionalization of perverse relationships between the leader and the led in the absence of any other coherent or valued ideologies (Klein & House, 1995). The utopian world of the Khmer Rouge became viable because the status quo presented itself in the form of very unenviable alternatives: (a) in the cities, the corrupted government of Lon Nol, which had removed Prince Sihanouk, destroying the traditional legitimacy associated in Cambodia with the royalty; (b) in the countryside, the war zones that had

imported destruction from a foreign war and wreaked destruction on peasant agrarianism. In extreme cases, the exclusion of past choice creates a void that radicalism can colonize.

In a third lesson, visionaries can become captives of their rhetoric, their utopias, those ideas that they cherish, so defining of their identity that their leadership becomes an exercise in power that preserves the vision against all contingencies. Under such circumstances, being part of a permanently failing ideological program, because of the existence of opponents to it, becomes the best incentive to apply even more of what is failing so that if the vision is not being realized, the project requires the faithful to prove their faith by pushing it harder: more enemies must be found and annihilated. Power relations must be used to do whatever it takes to make the ideological vision become true. The leadership and management literatures tend to emphasize the positive side of vision but there is a dark side. Visions are often more appealing if they favor a clear contrast with what is and dispense contempt for the status quo. Visions can become inflammable ideological material. Being aware of the dangers associated with the promotion of vision is thus necessary in leadership studies. Leaders might actually mean what they say – as the case of Kampuchea indicates – and do whatever it takes to transform vision into reality, be it in Kampuchean Cambodia or some other part of the world. Leaders who strive hard to stay on message are inflexible in being able to refocus when reality confounds their vision: for such commitments it is better to reshape reality without refocusing the vision.

Fourth, once leaders achieve power, their utopias may degenerate into dystopias. Positive talk means little. In Nazi Germany, Hitler was preparing for war while talking about peace (Kershaw, 2000). In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge army were simultaneously rebelling against injustice and clearing the path to a genocidal state. Utopia is most often a stepping-stone to dystopia.

Fifth, words count. As discussed, good words are not indicators of good deeds. Good talk is cheap and should be received with caution. Some keywords should be viewed as warning signs or

exemplars of what Martí and Fernández (2013) called a "camouflage language", the use of euphemisms that hide and soften the intentions behind them. Pol Pot told a Belgian delegation that "We do not have prisons and we do not even use the word prison. Bad elements are sent to farming production" (Ea, 2005, p. 12). These farms were more akin to slaughter stockades. Two categories of words are especially relevant: (1) those that emphasize the *purity* of one's in-group, and (2) those that underline the *impurity* of the out-group. These language imbalances were used abundantly in DK. The peasantry were *pure* whereas the city dwellers, the new people, were *impure*. The latter were then marginalized, animalized and targeted by the former. The stereotyping offered explanation and lent "legitimacy" to inhumanity. Evil leaders use language categorization devices to create the binaries of friends and enemies, compatriots and competitors, and those "with us" or "against us" in precise ways. Learning to detect the language of evil is necessary to break the vicious circle of evil leadership.

Sixth, it may be difficult to learn from the evils of even the recent past. School history textbooks in Cambodia refer only minimally to the Khmer Rouge era. While the 2013 Cambodian election was positive, it was also demonstrative of a fragile state. On the one hand, a democratic election is something to be celebrated *per se*. But on the other hand, the campaign's verbal exchanges suggested that it may be difficult to learn from the evils of the past. One opposition candidate remarked that the Kampuchean genocide was actually a fabrication of the Vietnamese, rather than an historical fact. The target of the accusation was Hun Sen, the country's strongman Prime Minister since 1985, who found refuge in Vietnam during the Khmer Rouge ascendancy (Mehta & Mehta, 2013). Hun Sen was positioned in the narrative as owing allegiance to the enemy Vietnam In anticipated response of his winning, the possibility of a new version of a tyrant regime, a reincarnation of the Khmer Rouge, was advanced as likely if the election delivered the "wrong" results. The heat of political battles is a fertile soil for verbal excess. Leadership that forgets the past

or rewrites it contributes to building "historiographical perversions" (Nichanian, 2009). Considering such a risk, how can one develop contra-strategies?

Implications: How to Counter the Institutionalization of Evil?

Considering the persistence of genocide throughout the ages (Goldhagen, 2009; Volhardt & Bilewicz, 2013), there is no reason to be excessively optimistic about potential remedies but such realistic observation should not be a source of discouragement. As Karl Popper argued "Not only do I hate violence, but I firmly believe that the fight against it is not at all hopeless" (Popper, 1986, p. 3). Humanity has, according to some research, been able to improve its own nature (Pinker, 2011) or at least to use civilization as a process of self-control (Elias, 1982), a finding that suggests that efforts to theorize counter violence is relevant not only on moral but also on practical grounds (Baron-Cohen, 2012). How can the case contribute to the understanding and neutralization of the institutional processes of evil leadership (see table 1 for a summary)?

First, the case suggests that non-charismatic leaders can be at the core of the process of evil leadership, not just charismatic demagogues. Pol Pot, the self-effacing man, led the genocidal state not as a mass manipulator but rather as the central occupant of a network that empowered its representatives to achieve brutalities of several sorts. People who embodied the Ângkar's authority acted on the basis of their mutually agreed license to kill rather than on some emotional resonance coming from the leader. The lack of a charismatic representative should not be taken as an indicator that the process will fail due to the lack of the metaphorical leadership "spark" (Klein & House, 1995). The power to enforce the vision is distributed throughout the system and the led are often active or passive supporters of an evil vision (Kellerman, 2004; Volhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). As the case suggests, collective radicalism can be exacerbated by radical ideas rather than by radical leaders: radical ideas can propagate even without charismatic leaders in a context in which evil is

more circular and institutionally distributed than it is concentrated in a malign leader (Cunha, Rego & Clegg, 2010).

Second, when, in opposition to other radical ideas and contexts, radical ideas flourish, they can be perceived as acceptable options amongst the polyphony on offer. It took an invading army to dislodge the Khmer Rouge. In less martial and more civil circumstances, when leaders lead by exclusion, they instigate the radicalization of those excluded who have nothing to lose. To counter evil and exclusionary leadership, short of invasion from outside, organizations need to develop appreciation for tempered radicalism (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Often this will entail the dramatic overthrow of a hated leader, whether by popular revolt, *coup d'état*, or invasion. In more organizationally 'normal' terms we might think of these as industrial action, a board coup, or a takeover. Tempered radicalism means giving voice and being inclusive. Developing a counter to the institutionalization of evil leadership thus means leading by inclusion, offering space for dissent, attacking inequality and exclusion, increasing the leader's legitimacy and effective power (Tyler, 2006) by building legitimacy rooted in popular support.

Third, utopian ideas are both powerful and dangerous. Without checks, balances and limits on power's concentration, the unfolding of utopian processes by those who assume power is not easily countered, especially where "power grows out of the barrel of a gun", to recall one of Chairman Mao's famous phrases. Kampuchean history shows that utopian ideals rapidly turned into practical dystopia. People in Phnom Penh quickly realized that something strange was happening on the way to utopia, when the Khmer Rouge seized the capital. As Rithy Panh explains (Panh, 2013, p. 28):

> "Many books declare that Phnom Penh joyously celebrated the arrival of the revolutionaries. I recall instead feverishness, disquiet, a sort of anguished fear of the unknown. And I don't remember any scenes of fraternization. What surprised us was that the revolutionaries didn't smile. They kept us at a distance, coldly. I quickly noticed the looks in their eyes, their clenched jaws, their fingers on their triggers. I was frightened by that first encounter, by the entire absence of feeling."

Fourth, there are institutional alternatives to utopian change: incrementalism changes things by trial and error. It assumes that all solutions are potentially fallible and their espousal requires humility and moderation rather than hubris and contempt. Popper formulated such tension in terms of the opposition of revisable plans and utopian blueprints. Institutional incrementalism offers a way forward for positive social change. Incrementalists reject untested master plans, grandiose visions, and infallible *Führers*. They instead defend a "satisficing" conception of organizational change where strategic intentions, realistic visions and limited leaders proceed through small, iterative moves (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963). Whereas incrementalism favors competition between alternatives and a trial-and-error approach to social change, utopia refers to the exclusion of alternatives. Utopia reflects the aesthetics of perfection, whereas incrementalism appreciates the aesthetics of imperfection. Incrementalist solutions are more humane, allowing space for people to be more aware of their flaws and limitations. Utopian thinking, in turn, is more vulnerable to capture by the perfection of its grandiose creations and more able to deny their flaws and limits or the limited ability of the people charged with their delivery. Considering the above, evil in leadership resides in institutional intolerance of opposition, disregard for the weak, as well as the presence of contempt in the make-up of the emotional repertoires encouraged.

Fifth: words are revealing. Special attention should thus be given to the presence of some specific keywords in a leadership discourse. References to the purity of some and the impurity of others, expressions that suggest the dehumanization or the creation of stereotyped visions of the out-group, namely expressions that dehumanize members or make stereotypical representations, are all negative symptoms. These can go in parallel with the creation of expressions of collective narcissism on the part of the in-group. Evil intentions are transmitted and assisted by words that divide, dehumanize and diminish. A recent example is that of the Korean Central News Agency, a North Korean state media outlet, whose spokesperson for the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea, offered the following tirade to Park Geun-hye, South Korea's president, calling her a "dirty

comfort woman for the US and despicable prostitute selling off the nation"; *The Economist*, 2014, p. 50). Finding toxic *mots* in a leader's discourse reflects ideas circulating and opens windows on leadership thinking.

Sixth, a necessary obligation for leadership researchers is to reflect on tragic events, study bad leadership, and explain how people animalize the "Other" in ways that institutionalize genocidal behaviors. There is too much accentuation of the positive in the field, as Alvesson (1996) suggests. The present article supports previous calls for more attention being paid to misleaders and the histories they tell (Gini & Green, 2012; Mohr, 2013). As is frequently remarked, the risk of forgetting what one can learn from the past is that one might repeat its egregious errors yet again. Forgetfulness of a world gone wrong is not to be encouraged: leaders and leadership studies need to learn that learning from the negative is as important as learning from the positive. They also need to know that leadership is a broad field – it is not just a matter of traits or situational contingencies in empirical studies performed cross-sectionally, but a matter of learning from history and institutions – the grotesque as much as the glorious.

Table 1 about here

Conclusion

Only to celebrate research recounting the positive in leadership is entirely explicable but extremely unbalanced. The current emphasis on a positive organizational scholarship should be balanced by attention to evil organization studies. Much more needs to be known about what makes for evil as well as for good. There are few worse cases than the systematic leadership of genocide, a phenomenon that constitutes a class of its own. Instead of ignoring genocide (Clegg, 2006), organizational researchers should thus strive to impede the propensity for some pasts to repeat themselves, in different places, with different victims but displaying the same traces of extreme

human suffering. By doing so, the article has responded to calls for more discussion on evil leadership (Gini & Green, 2012; Mohr, 2013) as a form of tyranny, analyzing the case of Pol Pot and the DK regime as an extreme institutional setting for studying the process. The case offers some institutional indicators that facilitate the identification of potential evil in leadership: (a) a utopian vision for the future, (b) the exclusionary logic associated with the vision, (c) a moral façade, (d) the use of diminishing language to describe the excluded, categorization and separation activities, (e) the lack of institutional checks and balances, and (f) a lack of transparency about the leadership. All these elements were present in the Khmer Rouge regime (as they are, nowadays, in ISIS). The final conclusion is that the first of all evils resides in the attempts by some to impose their views on others of what happiness should mean for all, of what the real interest of the other are, even against their preferences (Clegg, 1989). Managing against evil is an exercise in human and organizational polyphony (Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006), positing the rights of plurality and dissent as the highest form of defense against totalitarian forms of harmony.

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Appendix. Pol Pot and Pol Potism: Some Key Chronological Moments

Years	**Saloth Sar alias Pol Pot and Cambodia**
1863-1953	• French protectorate.
1920s	• Born in the French protectorate of Cambodia in 1925.
1940's	• Arrives to Paris in September 1949.
1950's	• 1953: King (later prince) Sihanouk gains independence. • Sâr approaches the Communists in France. Meets members of the future dome of the DK regime. • Joins the French Communist Party in 1952. In 1953 returns to Phnom Penh and joins the ICP. • Starts career as teacher. • Marries Khieu Ponnary and works as communist militant in clandestinity.
1960's	• A list of "Reds" is published by government in 1963. • Sâr and others flee to Eastern Cambodia. • Peasant revolt against Sihanouk. • Visits Hanoi.
1970's	• Sâr reaches agreement with Sihanouk to fight the Lon Nol pro-American regime. • 1970: Khmer Republic regime. • 1970-1975: Civil war. • CPK forces gain combat experience. • In 1973 US bombs CPK positions, causing thousands of civilian casualties. • Lon Nol regime collapses and CPK takes Phnom Penh in 1974. • Purges start inside Cambodia and hostilities with Vietnam intensify in December 1978. • Phnom Penh falls to the Vietnamese in 1979.
1980s	• Hun Sen becomes prime minister.
1990's	• US Congress signs Cambodian Genocide Justice act into law. • 1993: Sihanouk returns to throne. • 1998: Pol Pot's death.

Table 1 . Genocidal leadership: Sources, Signs, and Contra-measures

Source	**Signs**	**Contra-measures**
Misleadership processes	A leader or a leadership team cultivates a vision with utopian traits.	• Beware utopian blueprints. • Grow an appreciation for social polyphony (i.e. voice diversity and inclusion). • Cultivate incrementalist thinking.
Screen contextual signs of radicalism	Radical ideas circulate and gain followers.	• Combat extreme radicalism via the genuine protection of moderation and inclusion. • Leaders should avoid "putting out fire with gasoline"
Utopia as process	Utopia is more than a utopian leader: utopia is a process contributed to by followers.	• Introduce a system of checks and balances. • Limit the concentration of power.
Lack of incrementalism	Solutions for social problems are of the all or nothing type.	• Facilitate experimental, small scale solutions. • Allow the diversity of experiments. • Appreciate incremental approaches to change.
Search for keywords	Some words are divisive and pejorative, creating a Manichean "us vs. them" world.	• Consider official discourse. Does it include words that diminish the other party? Render the effects of discourse explicit. • Counter the use of divisive words and stereotypes.
Learn from the past	Attempts to rewrite the past or refute facts.	• Revisit the past. • Counter collective amnesia. • Study past examples of genocidal leadership. • Consider the importance of "worst practices" in order to avoid them.