

**AN INSTITUTIONAL PALIMPSEST?  
THE CASE OF CAMBODIA'S POLITICAL ORDER, 1970 AND BEYOND<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

How do continuity and change coexist and co-evolve? How does continuity enable change and changes reinforce continuity? These are central questions in organizational and political research, as organizational and institutional systems benefit from the presence of both reproduction and transformation. However, the relation between the processes of change and continuity still raises significant questions. To contribute to this discussion, we analyse the coexistence of deep institutional continuity and radical political change in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century Cambodia. Over a two decade period, Cambodia was ruled by radically different political systems of organization: a traditional monarchy with feudal characteristics, a failing republic, a totalitarian communist regime, and a Vietnamese protectorate, before being governed by the UN, and finally becoming a constitutional monarchy. We use an historical approach to study how a succession of radical changes may in reality signal deep lines of continuity.

**Keywords:** change as continuity, change as discontinuity, institutional change, Khmer Rouge, state reforms.

## INTRODUCTION

Change and stability are complementary rather than opposing tensions, expressing a “nonbipolar” quality (Bobko, 1985, p. 106). Stability and change, rather than being dualisms, are deeply intertwined processes, best explained as dualities (Farjoun, 2010; Fligstein, 2013). We will discuss continuity as change through a deeper integration of history into the study of organizations and institutions (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014a) by drawing on the case of Cambodia between 1970 and 1989, with a special interest in the 1975-1979 period of Khmer Rouge (Red Khmer) rule.<sup>2</sup> A period of dramatic discontinuity, a scar in the institutional and human fabric of Cambodia, our interest is in what made this period an historical possibility. We approach the topic from a double temporal perspective. First, as a structural process, presuming some form of continuity at a deep structural level, conceived as the “fundamental organizing principles (...) that structure collective action” (Dougherty & Dunne, 2011, p.1216) beneath the apparent surface of changing personnel, issues, and decisions. Second, as a succession of events (Deroy & Clegg 2011), focusing on the disruptive episodes that shaped the institutional Cambodian landscape in a decisive way. The two perspectives are compatible as processes materialize as events that punctuate deep continuity.

What is intriguing is that, in an historically limited period, this nation experienced a succession of highly contrasting political regimes of organization: the end of a feudal monarchy, a corrupt republic, a communist genocidal dictatorship, a Vietnamese protectorate, and, back to the beginning, a constitutional monarchy with the executive power assumed by a powerful prime-minister (“Asia’s longest-ruling leader”; Peel, 2015), one often accused of ignoring human rights, corruption and the suppression of political dissent (Pilling & Peel, 2014). The ultra-rapid succession of apparent radical changes challenges the view that radical, transformative change is difficult and that it takes lengthy periods of time to unfold (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), a proposition defended in organization

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<sup>2</sup> We have been exploring the case of the Khmer Rouge since 2009 (Authors, Date), and the theme for this particular paper emerged during the course of this major ongoing research project

theory by both teleological (Kotter, 1996) and non-teleological perspectives (Gersick, 1991). However, in the Cambodian case, dramatic change seemed to be the rule rather than the exception, posing a historical and organizational riddle: how do successive and rapid changes in the organization of political regimes sustain structural continuity?

We use a historical approach to explore the Cambodian institutional context, emphasizing deep structural continuity punctuated by radical changes on the surface. The historical perspective entails much more than looking into past documents to reconstruct subsequent evolution (Lawrence, 1984) but unfolds the duality of continuity-change by placing radical political transformation in historical perspective. Doing so, the significance of changes is better understood, not merely as events in a chronology but as the process by which the significance of events becomes coded as an action integrated into an overall process of development in terms of multiple temporal perspectives (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014b). In this case, we sought specifically to study the earliest phases and the subsequent evolution of Khmer Rouge Cambodia, zooming in on this short period (1975-1979), a raw example of radical change, in which revolutionary attempts tried to destroy not only past institutions but also the actual social fabric.

We first present a brief overview of the habitual representation of radical change as rare discontinuity, in order to explore its recurrent emergence in the case. We focus conceptually on the processes relating continuity and change because, as Malhotra and Hinings (2015, p.1) have pointed out, “we do not understand much about the mechanisms that underlie and shape how these two opposing forces evolve together.” After stating the research question and providing a rationale for the locus of research, we study the topic by adopting a “thick slicing” approach, aiming to help develop a historically informed theorizing of processes over relatively substantial periods of time, covering several years in each “slice”. The “thick slices” situate a subject in an historical perspective, helping to witness changes that can be articulated only by considering a sufficiently long time span (Lawrence, 1984). We explore the radical discontinuity introduced by the Khmer Rouge into the

institutional fabric of Cambodia. The paper contributes to the literature by defending the thesis that discontinuous change cannot be understood or explained without a full consideration of continuities that, at times, render some salient events as peak moments in radical process discontinuities. Furthermore, rather than polar concepts and states, continuity and discontinuity may represent a mutually reinforcing duality.

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Research on change *processes* (e.g., Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999) suggests that complex flows, even when characterized by imbricated design, constantly produce deviant patterning as dynamic processes, changing because of contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002), diverging interests (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006), institutional entrepreneuring (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007), multiple logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014) and ethno-political action (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008) disturbing the surface patterning. Such a multitude of forces generate deviations from previous practice and habit, infusing complex systems with properties of incessant change.

Given the centrality of change, organizational scholars have been urged to consider the importance of processes as the ontological building blocks of institutions, rather than structures and substances (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013). In particular, the processes that produce institutional change (Reay, Golden-Biddle, & Germann, 2006), rather than stability and persistence, can be viewed as constituting preferential areas for significant research (Garud et al., 2007).

#### **Selection of the research setting**

Change is not opposed to continuity. Even in contested domains, some basic continuity in rules is normally accepted, and some limits to alternative possibilities assumed; yet, the normalcy of the normal is sometimes subject to severe breaches, as we shall see in the case we consider. To explore the research question on the continuity/change duality, we analyse the “particularly revelatory” case (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p.27) of Cambodian political regimes before, during and after the Khmer Rouge period. Extreme settings provide distinctive social opportunities for the analysis of

processes that appear in other settings in more mitigated forms (Eisenhardt, 1989; Goffman, 1961), therefore presenting themselves as windows for insight on phenomena that usually occur in more nuanced and disguised ways. The approach is similar to the use of “social drama” to elucidate practices and conflicts beneath the surface of formal and social regularities (Turner, 1974); with antecedents in structural phenomenology influenced by Wittgenstein’s (1968) distinctions of surface and deep structure (e.g. Clegg 1975). The Cambodian context as a natural experiment of frequent radical change, challenges the dominant view of the power of the state as deeply institutionalized. Additionally, it offers a window to observe the under-theorized relationship between the state power and violence (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

The case of Cambodia is conceptually challenging and surprising in at least two ways. First, Cambodia produced a very rapid replacement of dominant logics. The sheer succession of these forcing radical change in successive waves disconfirm punctuated equilibrium models (because of the lack of equilibrium periods; see Gersick, 1991); moreover, the history challenges more traditional change theories, which anticipate radical change as rare and difficult. Second, the creation of an organizational regime characterized by extremely unusual political ferocity, that of the Khmer Rouge, suggests the value of the case as a natural experiment in successive waves of rapid changes. We will analyse the roots of political volatility, the emergence of the extremely lethal Khmer Rouge regime, drawing out the implications of the case for understanding radical change as a peculiar form of stability at the level of the inner institutional structures.

The twin goals of institutional implosion and substitution were explicit in the agenda of the Khmer Rouge movement. The regime, following the French Revolution, instituted a total break with the past by establishing a *calendrier républicain*, starting with “Year Zero”, representing the chronological dawn of a new Cambodia (Clayton, 1998) and the beginning of an entirely new institutional framework marked by the Khmer Rouge army taking control of Cambodia’s capital city of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975, installing a rule of terror that directly or indirectly led to between 2.2 and 2.8

million demographically excess deaths in the 1970-1980 period (Heuveline, 1998). The victory of the revolutionary army represented, allegedly, a deep break with the past, hence its description as a metaphorical “Year Zero”.

With “Year Zero” a number of processes were unleashed: the market economy, urban life, the school system and religious practices were destroyed while the population was decimated by a process of elimination that claimed the lives of millions, especially educated adult men from urban areas (de Walque, 2006) and the state, as it is normally known, was obliterated. In other words, rarely has any pursuit of political change gone so far in its attempt to destroy one institutional template and to install a radically different new one. “Year Zero” was presented as an end to “over two thousand years of Cambodian history” (in Chandler, 1993, p.209), or, as Comrade Duch, commandant of the S-21 extermination centre, explained: “We were destroying the old world in order to build a new one. We wanted to manufacture a new conception of the world” (in Panh, 2012, p. 259). Significant institutional work must necessarily be involved in the creation of alternative conceptions of the world (Martí & Fernández, 2013) and in the dismantling of a failing state to prepare the installation of a totalitarian order. The fact that the result of this intense institutional work was a genocidal state adds conceptual texture and policy relevance to the study, producing a relevant strategic research site (Merton, 1987) due to its combination of extreme circumstances.

These regime changes stamped out competing logics; the extremity of the changes does not lend credibility to the claims of an incremental approach to institutional building. Exclusive and exclusivist institutional players, on gaining control of key power relations, invested in the creation of total institutional templates to gain absolute leverage and ward off foes. How this is possible should be a central research question because, as Martí and Fernández (2013) have pointed out, institutional research should devote more attention to the process of mobilizing power to produce oppression in large scale.

## **METHOD**

The extraordinariness of Cambodia in the period 1970 and beyond suggests the appropriateness of historically embedded case study as the methodological approach (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Sgourev, 2013; Smets, Morris & Greenwood, 2012). We adopted a generative approach (Cornelissen, Mantere & Vaara, 2014) to formulate theoretical explanations that can be used to facilitate theory-building efforts. A combination of data collection methods was used inductively (Kieser, 1994) for “excavating the past” (Langley, 2009, p. 413), offering a comprehensive and rich (Weick, 2007) rendering of institutional processes before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge regime.

### **Data collection**

In order to respond to the research question, two of the authors visited Cambodia twice, including what had once been Security Prison 21 (S-21; now Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum), the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center (a “killing field”), and the Documentation Center of Cambodia, in search of unexplored bibliographic sources. The analysis was thus based on a diversity of data collection sources, in order to obtain a balanced and multi-perspectival account of processes under scrutiny, including historical analyses, memoirs, and testimonials, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

### **Data analysis**

Historical methodology provides a context for disclosing the complex relations between change and long-rooted continuity. Multiple temporal lenses are used to focus on different time periods, corresponding to contrasting institutional settings, punctuated by radical short-term political events. Braudel (1969) emphasized the multiplicity of temporal approaches required to explain complex relations through the “multiplicity of time”. Following Braudel, a long-term view of the evolution of Cambodia over the last decades provides one time perspective, while the punctuation of this evolution by recursive, contingent events (Deroy & Clegg 2011), disrupting the sense of evolution, provides another.



To analyse the historical data we started with the bracketing of key periods, composing thick slices of time in order to explore the slow change of complex systems not through thin-slicing but through thick-slicing. The concept of thin-slicing (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992) refers to the ability to explain the unfolding of a phenomenon on the basis of carefully observing short segments of the process of interest. The concept has been applied variously to group dynamics, negotiations, and divorce (see Waller, Sohrab, & Ma, 2013). In order to understand rapid, simple, abundant, and potentially ephemeral micro-changes, as well as slow, complex, embedded, ingrained and lasting macro-changes, organizational scholars should combine thin-slicing and thick-slicing approaches.

From an historical perspective (Lawrence, 1984) bracketing allows for signification of differences between periods, by contrasting key features of each period. Based on the literature, we bracketed three main stages or periods. Period I corresponded to Lon Nol's Khmer Republic; period II corresponded to the Khmer Rouge years of 1975-1979, i.e. to Democratic Kampuchea (DK), the central focus for our research. The most radical changes took place during this period, justifying zooming in with more detail, trying to uncover the duality of change and stability. Period III corresponds to the People's Republic of Kampuchea, i.e. the time frame from 1979 to the UNTAC years. These periods present different regimes in Cambodia's institutional order. In the first period, the regime was Republican, by contrast with the previous monarchy. In the second, it took the form of communist totalitarianism. In the third, it became a Vietnamese protectorate, later replaced by a constitutional monarchy.

We mobilize specific theoretical frames to support data interpretation and to sustain tentative explanatory attempts. Iterative movements between data and the preliminary attempts to answer the research question led to the exploration of several literatures, namely those on genocide, institutional change, and change in an historical perspective. These literatures supported the progressive embeddedness of theory in data. The theoretical frames invoked offered distinct theoretical lenses that, conjoined with the thick slicing approach and the different temporal dimensions, provides a

theoretically rich understanding of the topic. We build our process model as the emergent product of successive interpretive moves between data, theory, and emerging interpretive schemes. Several intermediate attempts were necessary to stabilize the interpretation, involving a long sensemaking effort. The process model is depicted in Figure 1 and aims to contribute to explain the emergence of the Khmer Rouge from the perspective of institutional change.

## **FINDINGS**

We studied the formation of the oppressive state organization that the Khmer Rouge built by analysing the institutional work that supported the movement's ascent to power, which allowed the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) to build their genocidal institutional order. We identified three main thick slices: before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge period.

The first period corresponds to the years of the Lon Nol regime immediately preceding the seizure of power by the Khmer Rouge. A second period captures the Khmer Rouge years (1975-1979), the core of the ultra-radical change process constituting the centre of our analysis. The third and final period corresponds to the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime, starting in 1979. In this section we make a description of each period, followed by a general consideration of four interrelated dimensions of each period: the context; the guiding ideology; the institutional order, and the leadership. *Context* refers to the historical conditions within which change was occurring; by the term *ideology* we refer to the set of fundamental ideas articulated in a dominant belief system that reduces and limits preferences that is the domain of the ruling group whose members (Abravanel, 1983; Slocomb; 1996; Fleming & Spicer, 2014) use these ideas to form 'alliances and engage in temporally specific political conflicts or attempts to justify the use of state power' (Skocpol, 1985: 91). The *institutional order* refers to the translation of ideology into regulative structures that bring meaning and stability to a system (Scott, 1995). By *leadership*, we refer to how top cadres connected ideology with institution, i.e. how they turned ideas into routines and established practices. Top leaders have a key role in connecting ideology and institution given their positional power as minders of the obligatory

passage points in the state (Clegg, 1989). The decision to focus on these three dimensions emerged during the analysis, without being pre-defined beforehand.

### **The Khmer Republic (1970-1974) and before**

*Context:* Consecutive years of degradation of Cambodia's institutional order produced an atmosphere of decadence. Sihanouk's "golden age" (1953 to 1970) is often portrayed as a period of progress in the history of the country. Some saw the Cambodia of this period as a "fairy tale kingdom" (Osborne, 2008, p.133) and an oasis of peace. The picture was illusory, however. For a narrow stratum of the ruling national elite and the foreign advisers that served them, life may have seemed rich and sweet, an idyllic realm of contentment, a lotus land; beneath the surface, however, the elite composed a thin veneer overlying the peasantry. The nation was too vulnerable, economically, socially, and institutionally, to resist the challenges ahead. The fairy tale was about to be interrupted by realpolitik outside of elite control. First, it was disrupted by events escalating the conflict between the US and North Vietnam. Sihanouk's foreign policy was premised on his conviction that the communists would end up winning the war in Vietnam. Preparing for this eventuality, Sihanouk approached his Communist neighbours, declining American economic help in 1963, based on the idea that the Americans' intervention in Vietnam was undermining the Cambodian state.

The alignment with the North-Vietnamese communist regime reduced business opportunities in Phnom Penh and led to a deterioration of the economic situation, aggravated by the nationalization of the economy. Support from the elite and the middle class diminished and, as early as 1966, there was a perception that the country was in decline. These fragilities led to the *coup d'état* that installed Lon Nol's government, deposing Sihanouk during an absence from the country in 1970. Sihanouk, who had formed a government-in-exile, was condemned to death *in absentia*, a fate this most elusive and slippery of princes and politicians managed to avoid until natural causes caught up with him, a few days short of turning 90.

The proclaimed intention to rescue Cambodia from a corrupt government failed so flagrantly that the state was incapable of countering the threat posed by the Communist movement known as the Khmer Rouge. The number of its combatants was not massive (30,000 soldiers in 1970, at its peak, according to Vannak [2003]; consider, in contrast, that a force of 150,000 men was mobilized by Vietnam to depose the regime in late 1978) and its equipment was modest. The Khmer Rouge, however, were able to conduct a persistent form of institutional entrepreneurship drawing on symbolic and ideological resources and practices imported from Maoist China (see also Chan, Clegg, Cunha, & Rego, 2015). Chinese slogans such as “set fires, every few years to keep the revolution alive” (Spence, 1999) described the CPK’s approach to revolution. The group sought to follow the revolutionary path already travelled in the neighbouring People’s Republic. Their purpose was to purge all traces of bourgeois mentality from society and institute a totally new form of organization that would offer new prospects to the base people (i.e., the peasantry). For some time, this message was popular and persuasive for the masses. As described by one witness of the regime:

“[T]he peasants in [the village] really liked the Khmer Rouge. Whereas Lon Nol government had neglected them, the Khmer Rouge helped them to harvest and transplant rice. The peasants ... had high hopes for the revolution as far as their living standards were concerned” (in Owens, forthcoming, p.30).

Institutional decay led to what would today be called a failing state. The condition of Lon Nol’s Government was so weak that it was eventually unable to neutralize the threat coming from the jungle. The Khmer Rouge was able to endure and survive in the remote jungles, while its opponents neutralized each other in the capital. The Khmer Rouge’s capacity for recruitment, now supported symbolically by deposed Prince Sihanouk and materially by Maoist China, combined with the degradation of the state to produce a growing awareness that the end of Lon Nol’s Khmer Republic was just a matter of time. The inhabitants of Phnom Penh increasingly developed awareness that theirs was a besieged capital, condemned to fall to the hands of the communist guerrillas. Philip

Short (2004) describes life in Phnom Penh by early April 1975 as “totally unreal” (p.264). He illustrates the situation in the following way:

“Once one of the loveliest capitals of South-East Asia, Phnom Penh had become a bloated caricature of the plight of poor countries everywhere, in which the misery of the many is matched only by the shameless consumption of the few. While prices rose astronomically and, in the shanty towns, thousands of children and old people starved to death, restaurants like Sirène and the Café de Paris still offered *foie gras*, venison and fine French wines. At the venerable Hotel Phnom, the oldest and most respected establishment in Cambodia, a French girl made love one evening in the swimming pool – once at the shallow end, once at the deep end, with two different men – to cheers from other guests sipping poolside drinks. It was as if the city were determined to prove itself the cesspit of decay and turpitude that the Khmer Rouges claimed it was – the ideal target, ready and waiting, like a diseased whore, for the purifying fires of an incandescent revolution” (p. 264).

The quote is indicative that the decadent ambience of the *fin de régime* was near, that the Communist Khmer would be the new ruler, introducing a new austerity. A whole new institutional world was now in the making but even those more realistic and well-versed in the ideology of the rebel army could not imagine the radicalism of the forthcoming changes.

*Ideology:* The Khmer Republic imposed after Sihanouk’s initial ousting was a right wing, pro-American regime formally supported by a national assembly. It maintained the feudal traits of monarchical rule while formally disestablishing it to counter the socio-political, economic, and military degradation characterizing the end of the previous period, a break with the past that obviously failed. In fact, the Republic was a penurious continuation of the old days, with the very same institutional problems as before. These were now aggravated by the war at the borders that resulted in heavy American bombing of the Vietnamese supply routes inside Cambodia’s frontiers.

“Almost immediately after taking power, the regime declared war on the Vietcong. It is impossible to discuss the ideological nature of the Khmer Republic without the hindsight of its drastic failure both militarily and administratively” (Slocomb 2006: .381). Lon Nol’s regime proved to be a period of transition. It lacked a clear ideology other than Buddhist militarism and nationalist opposition to Vietnam that was extended to their alleged Cambodian communist allies, the Khmer Rouge.

Ideologically, opposition to the Vietnamese based on long-standing nationalism blinded Lon Nol to the danger that the Khmer Rouge posed as the real enemy confronting Phnom Penh. Its ideology was defined in a manifesto issued by Lon Nol, probably in late 1972, as *Neo-Khmerisme*. The main elements of this ideology were modernization, socialism through nationalism, republican democracy and popular wellbeing, proposing a syncretic ‘fusing [of] the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity of Europe with the very deep influence of Buddha’ (Lon Nol 1972: 196).

*Institutional factors:* Institutionally, the Khmer Republic was a period of destruction. The Khmer Republic regime fumbled and stumbled from the outset with nine governments in all, each shorter and less effective than its predecessor (Slocomb 2006: 383). The state disappeared from significant parts of the country. The government controlled Phnom Penh, a few provincial capitals, and Battambang (Chandler, 2008). The rest of Cambodia was in the hands of the Communists or was too unsafe to be administered. The state’s institutions, already fragile, were now on the verge of collapse.

*Leadership:* Lon Nol has been described as “a strident nationalist whose anti-communism was matched only by his anti-Vietnamese rhetoric” (Verjeda, 2002, p. 46). He was unable to defend the borders of his country: during the Cambodian Campaign of April 1970, US and South Vietnamese forces entered Cambodian territory in pursuit of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. He suffered a stroke in 1971. While his recovery was rapid he did not assume full control again nor did he stop the plunder of the state’s resources by those that were supposed to defend it, including the military and the top politicians. He left Phnom Penh by US military aircraft on 1 April 1975 shortly before the Khmer Rouge arrived.

**Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)**

*Context:* The ultimate failure of the previous institutional orders, represented by a decadent monarchy, a corrupt and incompetent right wing government unable to counter the persistent institutional weakness of Cambodia and dependent on a closed political elite, justified the ideological-cum-institutional proposal of the Khmer Rouge as indispensable, valid, and appropriate (Rao, 1998). The Khmer Rouge offered a totally new template, a fully-fledged utopian vision (Clegg, Cunha, & Rego, 2012), a political move never attempted before, a vision seemingly uncontaminated by the past, genuinely focused on the dispossessed – the so-called “base people”. The Khmer Rouge, in summary, presented a redemptive solution to Cambodia’s institutional weakness. A whole new country was in the making, an imagined community (Anderson 1991) with a new name, a new anthem, a new flag, a new ruling class, and a new constellation of institutions that would replace the existing ones. The new Kampuchea would be more than an improvement on the past; it would be a new country built upon the ruins of this past through force of arms: “around midday on 17 April 1975, the victorious Khmer Rouge forces marched into Phnom Penh. They came, as their leaders said, ‘not to negotiate. We are entering the capital through force of arms’” (Osborne, 2008, p. 140).

When the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh, their first target is said to have been the local Coca-Cola plant (Dale & Burrell, 2011), an icon of American imperialism. From the very beginning of their rule, the Khmer Rouge men in black (Cunha, Clegg & Rego, 2014) forced the total evacuation of the capital of the now re-baptized nation of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Three major explanations for the massive evacuation of the city have been advanced, which help to explain the nature of the regime. First, as described by Vannak (2003, p. 26), young Khmer Rouge soldiers issued the following announcement: “Request that all you brothers leave Phnom Penh for three days because *Ângkar* must sweep clean enemies hidden in the houses.” Second, cities offer spaces that can be used as organizational weapons (Rao & Dutta, 2012). By emptying the city, this risk was neutralized. Not only would current enemies be “cleansed” but also those spaces where rebellion

could bubble up would be disarmed. Third, the Khmer Rouge envisioned the new Kampuchean society as a rural world, unpolluted by the bourgeois mentality incubated in the cities. In their image of society, cities were represented as places of vice, obstacles to their proto-communist vision of rural egalitarianism. The new regime eliminated all the core institutions of society (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008): families, markets, the bureaucratic state and religion. When the city was evacuated, “not a single civilian remained behind in Phnom Penh” (Vannak, 2003, p. 28) and “Even ordinary people who tried to enter Phnom Penh were shot”, the same author added (p. 29).

During its rule, the regime gradually replaced sometimes more tolerant local leaders with more loyal and extremist members, extending its radical vision throughout the country. Hard-core party members often viewed local leaders with suspicion: by early 1977, Party extremists had already alienated the initially supportive “Base” people (Owens, forthcoming). At this stage, the categories of “New” (non-peasantry, in general) and “Base” (i.e., peasantry) were increasingly blurred, with repressive violence no longer limited to the “New”. With the blurring of categorical distinctions violence consumed the regime from the inside, leading to waves of executions that potentially targeted anyone. The Khmer Rouge was now incapable of maintaining the loyalty of even those it claimed to serve (“Base”) and gradually weakened its own position. Recurring border clashes with Vietnamese troops, following Khmer Rouge attacks on the Vietnamese side of the border, precipitated the end.

*Ideology:* DK was founded upon a utopian ideology of total revolution. Few countries in modern history have seen their state organization captured by an insurgent revolutionary order that has gone so far in the development of a totalitarian utopia. Citizens became objects for and of the state’s apparatuses. Utopia would be implemented through apocalypse and the destruction of the established institutional order. Destruction was justified by commitment to socialism and nationalism. The former was intended to struggle against dependency, backwardness and inequality. Nationalism increasingly became dominant, however, after 1978, when Pol Pot tried to take back Kampuchea



Krom (the area of the Mekong Delta in Southern Vietnam with a large ethnic Khmer population) from Vietnam by armed force and to reincorporate it into Kampuchea.

*Institutional factors.* Khmer Rouge policy was that existing institutions should be erased to allow the creation of a new country. Kampuchea would be a nation with no money, no markets, no religion, no schools, and no families. One single institution, *Ângkar*, *The Organization*, would suffice. The *Ângkar* would replace all other institutions rather than coordinating or ruling them. It was one institution to rule them all: nothing was supposed to escape its panoptical gaze. Unfortunately for the leadership, the futility of war against Vietnam did and the regime effectively signed its death warrant when it invaded the vastly more powerful, militarily better equipped and battle-hardened neighbour.

*Leadership.* The apex of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, the Upper Brothers, comprised the leadership of DK. Pol Pot was Brother Number 1. The leadership was mostly invisible to the public but its will was omnipresent, incarnated in the *Ângkar*. Supported by the Chinese, Pol Pot, educated in France, presented himself as a Khmer nationalist, as anti-American, anti-Vietnamese, and anti-Thai.

### **People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989) and beyond**

*Context:* A force of 150,000 Vietnamese troops seized Phnom Penh on January 17, 1979 after months of military clashes between the two countries. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, in the first war to occur between formally communist nations, resistance was minimal. Phnom Penh fell without combat (Metha & Metha, 2013). With the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the city revealed its dark secrets, namely the extermination networks (Meng-try, 2005), including the sinister killing fields. The fall of the Khmer Rouge also represented the implosion of their radical utopia. The city was described as follows:

“Dr Thong Khon, a former medical student, recalled the eerie silence of the city, broken only by the occasional buzzing of flies and mosquitos – a Phnom Penh without people, without cars, without traffic” (Fawthrop & Jarvis, 2005, p.12).

Fawthrop and Jarvis (2005) added that the city approximated “a scene straight out of Dante’s *Inferno*” (p. 13). After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, depending on the authors’ political sympathies, the Vietnamese were represented as either liberators or as quasi-colonizers (Osborne, 2008). Independence, again, was a contested topic.

Hun Sen, one of the group of eight members of the People’s Revolutionary Council, announced on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1979, became Prime Minister in 1985, after being at the helm of Cambodia since the deposition of the Khmer Rouge. According to *The Economist* (2013, p. 56), Cambodia has attempted to present “a democratic façade” but remains institutionally weak. Political violence has not been eliminated. Episodes of politically motivated violence have been recurrent in every regime before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge (Chandler, 2008). Corruption is still endemic: according to Transparency International, Cambodia ranked as number 156 (out of 175 countries) in its 2014 survey. Poverty and corruption endure (Brinkley, 2011).

*Ideology.* The new People’s Republic of Kampuchea represented the beginning of a new era in which Cambodia’s existence depended on Vietnamese hegemony. The nation’s value system has been interpreted in terms of the “time-honored ideas of winner-takes-all political behavior” (Chandler, 2008, p. 296) and described as an entirely free market (Brinkman, 2011). Ideology in Cambodia, after the fall of DK until now, is clientelist, defined and redefined by groups of patrons and their clients, the *oknya* (the wealthy cronies of Hun Sen; see Brinkley, 2011), elites formed through pragmatic rather than ideological processes:

“In the two decades that Hun Sen has been his country’s prime minister, Cambodia has seemingly lacked an indigenous idea system to identify the philosophical character of its ruling elite. The restoration of Cambodian society and state institutions has been effected in the absence of any discernible overarching ideology” (Slocomb 2006: 378).

*Institutional factors.* Institutions remain fragile in Cambodia. Rule of law, democratic values, sharing of power, are all notions distant from Cambodian political practice. Corruption, poverty, fragile

institutions and political violence constitute major vulnerabilities in present day Cambodian society (Brinkley, 2011).

*Leadership.* Hun Sen, a young former Khmer Rouge officer, “barely educated, but clever and utterly ruthless – as one might expect of a young man trained by the Khmer Rouge and then by the Vietnamese military” (Brinkley, 2011, p. xvii) – led the country with an iron fist. As Brinkley (2011, p. 83) pointed out, with respect to top political leadership, he did not differ much from previous models: “that is how Cambodia’s leaders had always behaved.” As Brinkley elaborated, “plotting, scheming, bribing, and backstabbing to come out on top” (p. 83) are habitual tools of Cambodia’s political practice.

Figure 1 around here

### *Beyond 1989*

Cambodia is now a constitutional monarchy in which multi-party elections, deemed ‘free and fair’ by impartial international observers, have occurred for both central and local government. Cambodia belongs to both the United Nations and ASEAN. Cambodians are no longer at war with each other or with anyone else. However, past patterns repeat: corruption, nepotism and factionalism characterize the ruling elite and the mass of the people still suffer from poverty, environmental degradation, much of it related to the widespread use of Agent Orange, a toxic chemical defoliant, during the Nixon-Kissinger bombardment of Cambodia in the Vietnam War. Factionalism is held at bay through two decades of nepotism and carefully arranged marriages among families of the ruling elites, which have created a web of alliances, lubricated by corrupt channelling of international assistance (Slocomb 2006: 390).

Two things remain consistent in Cambodian institutional formation. First, in one guise or another, the ideologies framing different institutional formations all stressed nationalism. Second, this nationalism was always hitched to an espousal of socialism, albeit socialism with Khmer characters. What does this mean in practice?

“‘Socialism’ was the common ideological charter for modernization ... Each of the regimes believed that their own form of socialism was essentially Khmer because they saw it through the prism of the (misunderstood) traditional practice of mutual assistance, *brovas day kinear*, whereby rice farmers had to share their labour for ploughing, transplanting and harvesting so that all tasks could be completed within time limits enforced by the rains. This time-honoured practice allowed farmers to subsist in the erratic weather conditions and poor soils which are the norm in most of the Cambodian countryside. However, mutual assistance is not agrarian socialism. The cost value of each task was and still is carefully calculated and is repaid exactly in kind: one day’s ploughing, for instance, is worth three days of transplanting rice seedlings. Farmwork is not ideological, no matter what politicians think” (Slocomb 2006: 388-9).

Socialism, as an ideology of change, became a trope that preserved certain long-standing characteristics of the peasant life for the vast majority of Cambodians.

## **DISCUSSION**

As a succession of events, the evolution of Cambodia in the 1970s can be represented in Figure 1. Waves of disruptive changes, expressing moments of discontinuity with significant human implications, were the norm. Radical change and stability explanations of change are often presented in a dualistic mode, as irreconcilable forces (Fligstein, 2013). The case of Cambodia challenges this thesis with an intriguing, vicious circling possibility: that deep continuity may be the cause of major discontinuities and the nature of these discontinuities reinforce or keep intact deep forms of continuity (see Table 2). Seen as process and continuity, the disruptions of the 1970s were contingent events that led to social disruptions caused by a continuing institutional setting excluding political competition. In this sense, the visible discontinuities evident on the societal surface were, in fact, moments of continuity at the deeper level. A deep structural configuration reinforces the logic of exclusion and confrontation rather than one of inclusion and compromise that would allow the

creation of a continuous and flowing rhythm of change. The exclusionist and confrontational dynamic enacts change as the complete replacement of an entire institutional template by another template without challenging the deep structure of the society by contrast with the gradualist and incremental improvement of existing logics via small wins, emergence and “letting happen” (Chia, 2014). In this sense, this continuity/discontinuity duality may be paralleled to the dichotomy between rapid but superficial change and slow but decisive transformation that Gramsci uses in his theory of power and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971: 238-9)<sup>3</sup>.

Table 2 about here

Paradoxically, some discontinuities may support and be supported by deep forms of continuity. Punctuations by radical change can, in these conditions, become normal and consecutive. Discontinuity reinforces the continuities of a given institutional template as events become encoded, precisely, as breaches of normalcy. In this perspective, discontinuities are moments of tectonic change when an interpretive code of ideology, institutions and leadership is replaced without altering underlying fundamentals defining deep institutional order. Sometimes, visible structures change but deep processes remain in a form of continuity that is not accidental but a product of intense institutional work, i.e. “purposive action (...) aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Because “Cambodia lacks the institutions and adequate numbers of trained personnel needed for a mature democracy” (Brinkley, 2011, p.90), its institutions seem to be too fragile to express resilience and dynamic continuity. They collapse under pressure and similar small cadres then emerge from amongst the ruling elites as institutional brokers. Institutional work *simultaneously* maintains and disrupts institutions in Cambodia. The lack of institutional resilience and the limits of human capital lead to persistently dysfunctional patterns of institutional change. The action of institutional workers and institutional entrepreneurs

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<sup>3</sup> We would like to thank the thoughtful comment on this issue received from an anonymous reviewer.

simultaneously destroys old organizations but reproduces Cambodia's institutional disorder and structural continuity. Regimes change significantly but all are characterized by lack of the main pillars of democracy: human rights, pluralism and the rule of law (Chandler, 2008). Democracy institutionalizes peaceful political competition as a way to access power but the study of democratization reveals that it only becomes possible if consensus on new "rules of the game" across the different parties and leaders substitutes for violent struggles (Diamond, 2004; Rustow, 1970; Weingast, 1997; also Roberts, 2003 on the specific case of Cambodia). A form of democracy exists in contemporary Cambodia but it is one that is deeply distorted by the patronage system that the Prime Minister and long-ruling party are able to operate. Slocomb (2006: 392) refers to it as a 'caricature of democracy'.

#### **Four logics sustaining the vicious circle**

As pointed out by Malhotra and Hinings (2015), more needs to be known about the mechanisms that relate continuous and discontinuous change of institutions. To understand change in complex social systems, one needs to consider the interplay of successive layers of accumulated historical memories of the past that create both continuity *and* discontinuity, as if change is inscribed on an institutional palimpsest that maintains layers of continuity when change is being produced on the surface. Current institutional work (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012) overlays previous institutional work even if its goal is to remove existing templates: these cannot be wiped out; there is no clean slate, they endure, sedimented and repressed even, in the institutional patterning. The case suggests that even radical departures from the past incorporate it in their projects, projecting it into the future. The persistence of the past, in this case, results from three interrelated aspects of the context's dynamics – an exclusivist ideology, exclusivist institutional/dominant logics, and an extractive leadership (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

*Exclusivist ideology.* An exclusivist ideology is a "totalizing system of meaning based on pronounced in-group and out-group identifications, permitting no shared forms of identification

between groups and premised on a hostile rejection of the out-group” (Verjeda, 2002, p. 40). In Cambodia, ideology has always served to define and exclude the out-group, creating an extreme case of an institutional template favouring contentious political action (Tilly, 2007). The Republic excluded the monarchy and the communists. The Khmer Rouge excluded the “New” people (new class) and the CPP excluded its opponents, the electoral process notwithstanding. The world of Cambodian politics has been consistently divided into in-groups and out-groups, with clear demarcation lines between those *with* and those *outwith* of power, built on sociological and political fault lines. The Khmer Rouge years become particularly revealing in emphasizing the ideological processes generating exclusivist fault lines. Exclusivist ideologies were also activated as sources of rents for extractive leaderships (Diamond, 2010; North et al., 2009), obstructing forms of gradual change.

*Exclusivist institutional logic.* The exclusivist ideology establishes who dominates the institutional system and benefits from its rents. An exclusivist institutional logic, destitute of the necessary amount of political consensus, constitutes a serious obstacle to the creation of positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5), that is, those focused on the common good. Dominant elites acted as powerful interest groups (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2000), active in the protection of their power relations rather than in the creation of solid institutions.

Even major international reform-oriented pressures have faced strong resistance from those that were supposed to welcome them. For example, after six years of work, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the UN-backed tribunal, produced only three convictions. The international press observed that the tribunal faced at best the indifference, if not the hostility, of the government (*The Economist*, 2013). Hun Sen declared his opposition to it. The episode illustrates how the rule of law and legal system are active institutional creations. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cambodia’s democracy has been described (in 2014), as “bruised, bloodied and probably broken” (*The Economist*, 2014, p. 41).

*Extractive leadership.* The ideology of exclusion leads to institutional destitution of significant parties of Cambodia's political spectrum and supports the ascent of an extractive mode of leadership: those in key positions of power see themselves as having the means and the right to use the system in their own favour. The lack of adequate political checks and balances concentrates power in the hands of a dominant coalition, the patrons and their *oknya*. This, in turn, reduces political consensus to a matter of alliances and makes gradualist evolution, resulting from competing interests and political competition, more difficult to achieve and to consolidate, because of the common habitus of elite social formation.

Political leaders in Cambodia have traditionally adopted a winner-takes-all leadership (Brinkley, 2011), which constitutes not only a source of institutional fragility but also locally legitimated predatory behaviours to rivals and towards the country's resources and resource flows into it (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009). For the elites, power relations define a form of absolute domain, an extractive operation performed within an exclusionist institutional frame. Such a leadership approach has been strongly rooted, even by the non-monarchic rulers of Cambodia, in the symbolic role of the monarchy.

A culture of generalized obedience is also critical to facilitate support of a dominant logic. Cambodian society has been actively socialized in a political logic of obedience. Leadership tends to be highly personalized and the one who rules, rules absolutely. Contestation is a dangerous exercise in Cambodian politics, as shown by politically motivated killings that occurred before, during, and after the Khmer Rouge regime. Things have changed somewhat with Hun Sen but limits to power, an impartial rule of law, a system rich in checks and balances, democratic leadership turnover, are all institutional practices unfamiliar to Cambodians.

As explained by North et al. (2009), emerging countries have all been "limited access orders", that is, characterized by restricted political and economic forms of competition and dominated by coalitions of political elites. These coalitions all receive economic rents that potentially sustain order.



Change in this type of institutional field occurs only when one elite coalition replaces another, usually through contentious means. In this case, Cambodian elites have in the past defended different ideological propositions but their exclusivist and extractive logic persisted as routine. As an illustration, even the radically anti-materialistic Khmer Rouge leaders practiced luxurious extraction, as described by an American journalist who visited Pol Pot:

“The Khmer Rouge guest house was the very latest in jungle luxury. It was clearly modeled on the sumptuous hunting lodges to which French planters of the past invited guests for weekend shoots ... Plates of fruit brought from Bangkok were renewed each day. The best Thai beer, Johnny Walker Black Label scotch, American soft drinks and Thai bottled water was served” (Brinkley, 2011, p. 60).

*Violence as a political instrument.* Violence has persisted in the Cambodian political landscape before and after the Khmer Rouge regime. During the monarchy, opponents “disappeared”, Lon Nol’s period was a time of civil war; the Khmer Rouge built their regime through a paroxysm of violence; Hun Sen used violence to gain uncontested power. Peripheral contenders, misaligned with the status quo, thus had little to lose by attempting to refashion the entire institutional order (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). When changes took place, therefore, the winner took all, an extreme form of a zero-sum power game<sup>4</sup>. In the absence of consensual acceptance of the rules of the game for accessing power, change can only occur through violent uprisings, preventing peaceful contest for political dominance and gradual institutional evolution. The use of violence, thus, reinforces the exclusivist logics and the forms of extractive leadership referred above. After 1989, where the relations of power and legitimacy of political contenders are roughly balanced, radical change has been speedier rather than slower, at least in terms framed by elite factional alliances and demanded by significant external stakeholders. As one of our anonymous reviewers pointed out: “What is at issue is the nature of the change. A change that entails a change in habitus is a real social change,

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<sup>4</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous referee for the analogy with the zero-sum games.

while a change that simply involves institutional change based upon coercively imposed structures is something else which is actually superficial, even when it involves the rhetoric of year-zero.”

### **Five major findings**

The analysis of the Cambodian institutional context in and around the emergence of the Khmer Rouge regime indicates that explosions of discontinuity may be critical to reinforce deep structural forms of continuity. The process corresponds, in some respects, as well as challenging the precepts of punctuated equilibrium theory: “as long as the deep structure is intact, it generates a strong inertia, first to prevent the system from generating alternatives outside its own boundaries, then to pull any deviations that occur back into line” (Gersick, 1991, p. 19). The convergence period predicted by punctuated equilibrium seems to be non-existent, however. The absence may, in turn, be explained by institutional conceptual frames such as those presented by Greenwood and Hinings (1996, p. 1028): “the rigidity of tight coupling and high structuredness produces resistance to change; however, should institutional prescriptions change dramatically, the resultant organizational response would be revolutionary, not evolutionary.”

The Cambodian institutional context consisted of a highly structured, tightly coupled power configuration that resisted institutional change and imposed high inertia. When it changed, it changed radically. Previous work by Garud et al. (2013, p.19) pointed out that “completely substituting the old with the new is often not practical or possible” and the Cambodian political order has been characterized by non-existent political consensus, leading to a succession of violent attempts to substitute old with new, rather than to let the system internally generate emergent, gradualist, and spontaneous possibilities via recombination and institutional bricolage.

From the previous analysis, we extract five major findings on the relationship between change and continuity. First, introduction of radical novelty is problematic as it often involves deep breaks with the past. Social systems are too complex to be managed as if history could be forgotten. Vibrant institutional systems produce innovation allowing the new to overlap with old, pre-existing

arrangements (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). Second, revolutionary changes can become normal, in the sense of habitual. Cambodia experienced a succession of political regimes in a short period of time, meaning that radical change became something recurrent rather than an exceptional process. Third, even after a revolutionary period, a system can re-emerge with its deep structure intact, unrevised. In this sense, complex change is not teleological (Gersick, 1991): it can occur without progress. Fourth, many attempts at transformation of complex systems, such as the organization of the state, initiate reformist change to adjust or compensate for internal and external perturbations without changing the deep structural order, i.e. “the rules of the game” (Gersick, 1991, p.16). One consequence is the likely reduction of change efforts to first-order changes, changes that do not produce deep change – even when the surface of the system is shaken by events triggering waves of massive alteration. As Gersick (1991, p. 18) pointed out, “human systems in equilibrium may look turbulent enough to mask the stability of the underlying deep structure.” Our fifth and final conclusion follows: a system may converge on a form of equilibrium consisting in the protection of its stable core via revolutionary replacement of the entire surface system on a regular basis, i.e., by making revolutionary change habitual: the normalization of revolution and violence would be the order of the regime, a demand of a deep structural order, uniting all the contenders in an implicitly shared worldview.

### **History, institutional change and organization theory**

Studying institutional change from an historical perspective offers a number of vantage points. First, it provides context to the understanding of human behaviour, overcoming the dichotomy between action and structure that has haunted social sciences (Elias, 1978; Giddens, 1984). Second, it reveals how temporality constructs actions and routines, following the suggestive approach in Cohen et al. (1996). In a third instance, it provides a fruitful perspective for understanding processes of institutionalization. As stated by Suddaby et al. (2014, p.111), “a historical approach to studying institutions will enhance our understanding of institutions as a historical process, rather than as

abstract, reified structures”. In this study, explaining the relation between continuity and discontinuity would not be possible if a temporal perspective was absent. Finally, a historical perspective mitigates attempts to understand change processes in organizations and society as a result of “Big Bang theory” types (Golden-Biddle, 2013) stressing planned, teleological change. These models assume change as occurring on a large scale, all at once, as something purposefully guided and steered.

By contrast with a perspective on change as something purposefully guided and steered, we identified change as a vicious circularity of repeating political bursts of activity triggered by contingent events. As predicted by punctuated equilibrium theorists, big bang discontinuities may in fact hide deep forms of continuity (Gersick, 1991). However, contrary to it and to institutional theory predictions, discontinuities emerging as radical change can be frequent and fast. When a system becomes viciously circular (Cunha & Tsoukas, 2015; Masuch, 1985), radical change can become prevalent as a customary mechanism of political competition. The production of institutional discontinuities may be built over some necessary continuity. By doing so, we contribute to the study of the mutually constituting relationship between power and institution: institutions mould power processes but power processes create inherent instabilities that challenge the existing power circuitry. The effort is relevant because, as Lawrence, Leca, and Zilber (2013, p. 1028) remarked, “although power and institutions may be intimately related (...), how their relationship plays out in empirical contexts has been seriously under-examined.”

## CONCLUSION

Can a given institutional order be represented as a *tabula rasa* upon which a desired logic can be inscribed, as if nothing prior existed? The radical experiment of the Khmer Rouge regime suggests that this is not the case and that studies of change often suffer from an a-historicism that limits their explanatory power: institutions should instead be viewed as palimpsests. The utopia of a pure society was a product of persistent social forces that helped to situate the regime as continuity *and*

discontinuity, an apparently credible alternative in the midst of dysfunctional institutional arrangements. The whole new political template of the Khmer Rouge was built over deep forces of continuity, rooted in the peasantry and a mistaken conception of agrarian socialism as well as a dysfunctional, in terms of organizing acuity, understanding of the role of urban elites. As Lanzara (1999, p. 346) remarked, systems are

“history-dependent. Prior system’s history constrains the ways materials and components are reassembled and reinterpreted. Thus, structures embody some kind of historicity inasmuch as they are dependent on the specific sequence of moves, events or transient constructs that lead to their construction (...) Basically, new systems are built, sometimes literally, *on the ruins* and *with the ruins* of old systems” (italics on the original).

Viewing change processes as a-historical limits the understanding of their dynamics and unfolding. Change processes in human communities are shaped by collective identities that emerge from distributed agency (Howard-Grenville, Metzger & Meyer, 2013) rather than from centrally controlled change. Consider Chia’s (2014, p. 10) explanation: “rather than visibly and assertively intervening into organizational situations to make them bend to our will, either incrementally or through large-scale planned initiatives, change is accomplished by merely *relaxing* already established organizational ‘structures’” (italics in the original). And he adds (p. 23) that “managing change, then, is about ‘letting change happen’.” In Cambodia, there has not been much “letting go”. Change has been so tightly controlled that it prevented real *process* change (persistent, distributed, collective, un-heroic) from happening. When the system moves from one template to another, it maintains its deep structure intact, in a demonstration that unfreezing at the top of an institutional order may actually protect its deep structure. It is as if the identifiable agents of “owned” change (Lon Nol, Pol Pot, Hun Sen), were in fact the instruments of history (Cunha, Rego, & Clegg, 2011) necessary for allowing “unowned” change (Chia, 2013) to protect itself.

The extreme case of Cambodia in and around “Year Zero” is an invaluable source of learning about utopian change processes and the conditions that facilitate their rise and fall. Citizens should be sceptical when sudden change is legitimated by an extreme ideology; when this occurs, typically, there is not much “letting happen” but instead an excess of control. Change, in this case, consisted in the substitution of those “in control”. In the absence of a lack of space for change to happen in an emergent un-owned way, in deep structural terms, nothing much really changed. As the novelist Lampedusa (1958) predicted in *Il Gattopardo*, something sometimes has to change to keep things intact. This study shows, in conclusion, that continuity in discontinuity is a complex dialectic, expressing elements of duality, operating at multiple levels. As such, to understand how discontinuous change unfolds, one needs to carefully consider the forms of continuity that may occasionally erupt as shocks of discontinuity.

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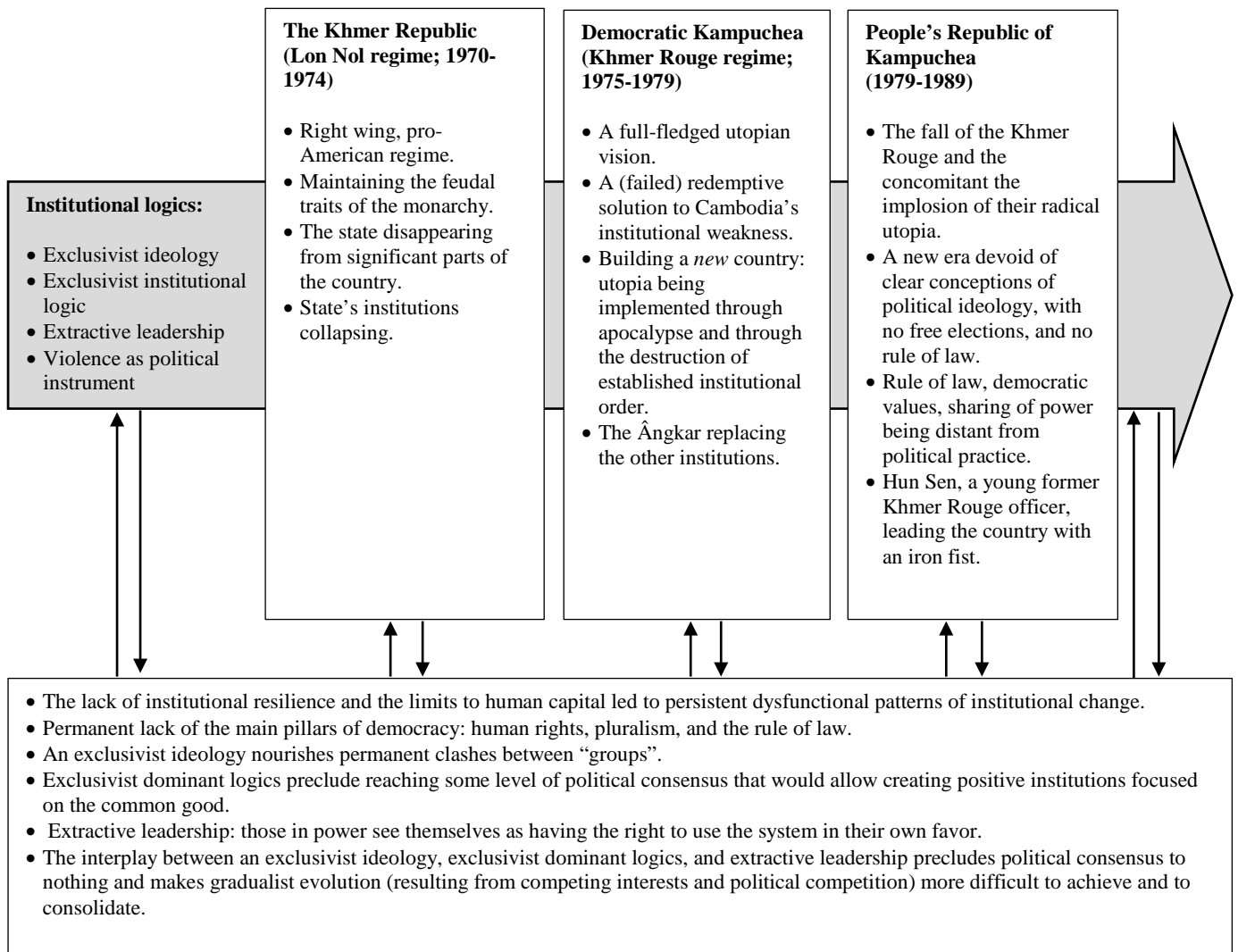
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**Figure 1. Discontinuities supporting continuity supporting discontinuities**



**Table 1. Description of data**

<b>Data types</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Use in analysis</b>
Personal memoirs	One way of learning about the Khmer Rouge years consists in exploring the period through the eyes of the survivors of the regime. The memoirs we consulted offer different points of view, including normal citizens (Denise Affonço, Rithy Pahn) and S-21 prisoners (Vann Nath, Bou Meng)	Personal memoirs offered vivid descriptions, rich in context and emotion. They helped to understand everyday life conditions.
Academic books	A rich bibliography explores the case of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. Our research team has been exploring the central bibliographic corpus on the theme since 2009. In addition to the international sources, easily available, we gained access to relevant local works in our visits to Cambodia.	These sources provide a general overview of the Khmer Rouge years (e.g., Kiernan, 2008), as well as discussions of specific aspects of life in DK and of the regime, including the terror network of organizations associated with state security (Chandler, 2000), private life (Le Vine, 2010),
Videos	Some videos complement other sources, offering visual approaches to the topic. The work of Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh is an important source of information	Rithy Panh's oeuvre includes two fundamental documents to study the Khmer Rouge regime: <i>S-21 The Khmer Rouge Killing machine</i> and <i>Duch, le maître des forges de l'enfer</i> .
DCCAM publication <i>Searching for the Truth</i>	DCCAM publishes this journal, which represents a valuable source of information on the case of the Khmer Rouge years and after. Books published by the Centre are also important for exploring specific facets of the regime.	Offers several informative elements about life in DK. Were used to complement academic work as a source of contemporary exploration of the DK period by Cambodians.

**Table 2. Lines of continuity and discontinuity, 1970-1989**

Aspects	<b>Period I: Khmer Republic (1970-1974)</b>	<b>Period II: Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)</b>	<b>Period III: People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989)</b>
<i>Discontinuity:</i> Ruling regimes	<b>Regime:</b> Pro-American regime supported by a national assembly discontinued the Monarchy.	<b>Regime:</b> Radical communist regime, practiced genocide against the “enemies of the people”.	<b>Regime:</b> Vietnamese protectorate.
	<b>Ruler: Lon Nol</b> Pro-American military; served as prime-minister: “A strident nationalist whose anti-communism was matched only by his anti-Vietnamese rhetoric” (Verjeda, 2002, p. 46). His period was described as dominated by corruption.	<b>Ruler: Pol Pot</b> Educated in France; anti-American, anti-Vietnamese, anti-Thai. Supported by China.	<b>Ruler: Hun Sen</b> A young Khmer Rouge officer: “barely educated, but clever and utterly ruthless – as one might expect of a young man trained by the Khmer rouge and then by the Vietnamese military” (Brinkley, 2011, p.xvii)
	<b>Political status</b> Civil war, with a significant part of the country controlled by the communists.	<b>Political status</b> Totalitarian rule; opposition, real or imaginary, was not allowed.	<b>Political status</b> Vietnamese protectorate; the country was still represented in the UN by the Khmer Rouge.
<i>Continuity:</i> Institutional logics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Exclusivist ideology:</b> it defines who is in or out of power, creating a template favouring contentious political action.</li> <li>• <b>Exclusionary institutional logic:</b> regimes counter the possibility of emerging institutional logics. The ruler’s logic is the only logic. Institutional polyphony is actively countered and neutralized.</li> <li>• <b>Extractive leadership:</b> Cambodian top leaders sustained the logic of extraction, using public resources for their private benefit. The distributions of rents served to conserve power by keeping a dominant class aligned with the status quo.</li> <li>• <b>Violence as a political instrument:</b> the corollary of the absence of consensus on the rules of competition for power. Violence is also a means to institute and reinforce the exclusivist logics and extractive forms of leadership.</li> </ul>		