

UNDERGRADUATE POLITICAL SCIENCE HONORS THESIS:

**THE KHMER ROUGE CANON 1975-1979:**

**The Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia**

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*Sophal Ear*  
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TO CAMBODIANISTS OF ALL PARTIES

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*How many of those who say they are unreservedly in support of the Khmer revolution would consent to endure one hundredth part of the present sufferings of the Cambodian people?*

--François Ponchaud, 1977<sup>1</sup>

So concludes François Ponchaud's Cambodia: Year Zero, the first book to detail the "assassination of a people" being perpetrated in the name of socialist revolution in Cambodia. Hundreds of other books and articles on Cambodia have been published since 1977. Many have focused on the period during which the Red Cambodians or "Khmer Rouge" controlled the country which they renamed "Democratic Kampuchea" between 1975 and 1978. Under the Khmer Rouge, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians died from execution, forced labor, disease and starvation. Since it will never be possible to ascertain the exact number of deaths, estimates fall on a range. Michael Vickery estimates 750,000 deaths,<sup>2</sup> while Ben Kiernan adds to that another 800,000. Karl Jackson puts the figure near 1.3 million,<sup>3</sup> while the Campaign to Oppose the Return of the Khmer Rouge (CORKR) claims at least 1.5 million deaths. The Khmer revolution was perhaps the most pernicious in history; reversing class order, destroying all markets, banning private property and money. It is one worth studying for the ages, not for what it accomplished, but for what it destroyed.

The idea for this thesis grew from research into Cambodia's economic development and history for a simultaneous economics honors thesis.<sup>4</sup> In particular, a 1979 book entitled Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy by Malcolm Caldwell, was my first glimpse into a community of academics, I had no idea existed. To be sure, this community was not some extreme "fringe" faction of Cambodian scholars, but virtually all of them.<sup>5</sup> In other words, their view of the Khmer revolution ergo the Khmer Rouge, became the

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<sup>1</sup> Ponchaud, Cambodia: Year Zero (1978), p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Vickery, Cambodia: 1975-1982 (1984), p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, ed., Cambodia: 1975-1978, p. 3. He footnotes on the same page that this estimate "assumes 600,000-700,000 war-related deaths before the Khmer Rouge victory and a middle range-estimate of 5.8 million survivors at the beginning of 1979." (Jackson, p. 3n)

<sup>4</sup> This thesis, entitled "Cambodia's Economic Development and History: A Contribution to the Study of Cambodia's Economy," is available from the Academic Achievement Division, UC Berkeley.

<sup>5</sup> With the notable exceptions of Malcolm Caldwell (b. 1931), Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) and perhaps Edward Herman, these scholars were baby boomers who were either in graduate school or lecturing there. To put it

Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia or the STAV.<sup>6</sup> These scholars, many of whom worked for the Berkeley-based antiwar Indochina Resource Center, became the Khmer Rouge's most effective apologists in the West.<sup>7</sup> While they expressed unreserved support for the Khmer revolution, fully twenty percent of the Cambodian population may have perished due to execution, forced labor, illness, and malnutrition during the period 1975-1979.<sup>8</sup> From periodicals such as the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* and *Current History* to books like Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution and Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy, an unequivocal record of complicity existed between a generation of academics who studied Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge.

Reading Karl Jackson's Cambodia: 1975-1978 (1989), a footnote revealed that debate among scholars of contemporary Cambodia in the West, during the late 1970s, included "sympathetic treatment" of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime, namely the Khmer Rouge. The unassuming footnote, reprinted here, came from Timothy Carney's essay entitled, "Unexpected Victory."

Some representative points of view on the Pol Pot regime would include, on the critical side, Shawcross 1976a and 1978a and Lacouture 1977a, 1977b, and 1978. *Sympathetic treatment* is in Porter and Hildebrand 1976 and Summers 1975 and 1976. Also of interest is Chomsky and Herman 1977. Works by authors with greater background or better judgment in Cambodian affairs include Ponchaud 1976 and 1978 and Chandler 1977. Since 1979, in any case, few have remained sympathetic to the Democratic Kampuchea regime, as incontrovertible evidence has detailed its brutality, *dwarfing even Stalin's excesses*. [Emphasis added.]<sup>9</sup>

The list took on a life of its own, as the pieces to the puzzle of "Who, in academia, supported the Khmer Rouge?" came together. Here was, in effect, the origin of the "Khmer Rouge Canon". When Jean Lacouture published a book review of Ponchaud's Cambodia: Year Zero in 1977, he touched off an intense debate with American academic cum activist Noam Chomsky. Chomsky, who is a distinguished linguist, found erratas in both Lacouture's review and Ponchaud's book. In a series of polemical exchanges that were sometimes public, other times private, Chomsky referred to these mistakes as examples of deception and fraud that

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more succinctly, these were the students of the generation that followed George Kahin McTurnin and David P. Chandler.

<sup>6</sup> In essence, I borrow the idea of "standard total view" or STV from Michael Vickery. Vickery's STV stood for the media-Ponchaud-Barron-Paul view that terrible things like mass murder, genocide, and war crimes took place in Cambodia between 1975-1979. The standard total academic view or STAV is, in a sense, the mirror image of the STV.

<sup>7</sup> Shawcross' The Quality of Mercy (1984), p. 53, excoriates the Indochina Resource Center.

<sup>8</sup> This assumes 1.5 million deaths from a baseline population of 7.3 million.

<sup>9</sup> Carney, "Unexpected Victory," in Jackson, p. 33.

fueled anti-revolutionary propaganda against the Khmer Rouge by the media. Together with Edward S. Herman, Chomsky published an article in mid-1977 in the *Nation*, entitled “Distortions at Fourth Hand” that became the centerpiece of his argument against the media’s *frenzy* over Pol Pot.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, after the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime was toppled by Vietnam, the *Nation* article was followed by a book that continued to express doubt about the truthfulness of “alleged” Khmer Rouge crimes.

Between 1975 and 1979, “the movement of solidarity with the peoples of Kampuchea and Indochina as a whole”<sup>11</sup> as described by one of its members, Gavin McCormick, vociferously defended the Kampuchean revolution and its perpetrators. To be sure, there have been very few articles or books on this topic, since it is so unpleasant for those Ponchaud bluntly characterized as “unreservedly in support of the Khmer revolution,” to be reminded of their responsibility in what Jean Lacouture has called “the murder of a people.” The study of this movement is considered by some, especially those who continue to support Chomsky, to be wholly outside Cambodian studies. They suggest that it is more in line with American studies since Chomsky attacked the Western media’s propaganda machine as it gravitated around the “evils of communism.”

This thesis seeks to dispel this mitigating advance in favor of a wider Canon for pro-Khmer Rouge literature published between 1975 and 1979. “The Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979,” unlike other canons, is not an *official* list of works in this case, since no one has ever agreed to one (Carney’s list is a small exception). For a work to be listed and reviewed in the “Khmer Rouge Canon” requires that it have been written in the period 1975 to 1979 and, of course, have supported, whether explicitly or implicitly, the policies of the Khmer Rouge (hence the inclusion of Chomsky’s and Herman’s work). A second criterion involves the nature of the publication, namely print; the work must have been published in a reasonably well-known English-language periodical (*Current History*, the *Nation*, etc.), a monograph (Malcolm Cadwell’s South-East Asia by Cook University), or a book (Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution and After the Cataclysm).

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<sup>10</sup> For what is publicly available, see Ponchaud’s “Author’s Note for the English Translation” of Cambodia: Year Zero (1977); Lacouture, Survive le peuple cambodgien! (1978); Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm (1979). Independent from the authors who were involved in the debate, see Shawcross’ “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster” in Chandler and Kiernan, Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays (1983). Since the exchange was both public and private, much of it could be hidden from view. It is downplayed by Chomsky and Herman.

Beyond this requirement is the obvious need for the author of this thesis to have read that particular work in order to be able to review it. Of course, there are countless dissertations, newsletter articles (such as those in *News from Kampuchea* and *News from Democratic Kampuchea*), and other journal articles (from the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*) that will not be covered because they were unavailable or would have required extensive treatment or for lack of time. The Khmer Rouge Canon is by no means exhaustive, far too many other Indochina scholars deserve to be canonized, yet because of circumstances will have to wait.

This partial Canon offers a glimpse into the assumptions and logic, evidence and arguments that a generation of Western scholars used to defend the Khmer Rouge or rationalize their policies during the mid-to-late 1970s. Together, they created the standard total academic view. This glimpse, whether representative or not, is in and of itself a testament to Khmer Rouge's charm over academia.

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions on the STAV: First, in what military-political context did it develop? Second, what are examples of STAV scholarship, who made them, what arguments did they make, and why? Third, how does the Chomsky-Herman thesis fit in, differ from or was similar to the standard total academic view? Fourth, beyond the STAV, what were the counter-arguments, and for the members of the STAV scholars, Summers, Caldwell, Hildebrand, Porter, Chomsky, and Herman, what was the continuity and change in their political thinking (using Vickery's STV typology)?

In sum, this thesis deconstructs the standard total academic view on Cambodia and constructs the foundation for the Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979.

This foundation to the Canon is composed of, among numerous other works, Laura Summers' "Consolidating the Revolution" (December 1975) and "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia" (December 1976) in *Current History*, George C. Hildebrand's and Gareth Porter's *sine qua non* of the STAV: Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution (1976), Torben Retbøll's "Kampuchea and the Reader's Digest" in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (July-September 1979) and Malcolm Caldwell's towering essay "Cambodia: Rationale for A Rural Policy" in Malcolm Cadwell's South-East Asia (1979). To this list chapter 3 will add Noam Chomsky's and Edward Herman's masterful "Distortions at Fourth Hand" in the *Nation* (June 25, 1977) and After the Cataclysm(1979), though Chomsky and Herman are mindful to state that they are by

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<sup>11</sup> Shawcross, "Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster," in Chandler and Kiernan, Revolution and Its

no means defending the Khmer Rouge nor “pretend to know where the truth lies,” though most of what they do is to rehash the Hildebrand and Porter line in a more palatable design. Together, they are a significant body of scholarship from the STAV.

Three works come to mind with respect to how different facets of the STAV has been explored previously, William Shawcross’ essay “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster,” in Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea (1983),<sup>12</sup> Stephen J. Morris’ essay “Ho Chi Minh, Pol Pot, and Cornell” in the *National Interest* (Summer 1989), and Geoffrey C. Gunn and Jefferson Lee’s Cambodia Watching Down Under (1991). Shawcross and Morris, two individuals one would expect to find on separate divides, essentially agree that the Left failed--for one reason or another--to become a moral force with respect to Cambodia until 1979. This while some on the Left, particularly those in STAV, zealously defended the Khmer revolution. Shawcross focuses on the Chomsky-Herman thesis, while Morris tackles Cornell’s ties to the Khmer Rouge. Gunn and Lee offer an exhaustive though curiously insensitive view of the Australian connection to Democratic Kampuchea.

The context within which Khmer Rouge support incubated was the Vietnam War. To understand how students and scholars, presumed to be detached from peasant concerns, could have found solidarity with the peoples of Kampuchea and Indochina as a whole, one must first bear in mind the political atmosphere and conditioning from which grew the yoke of radical revolutionary support. It would be facile to strip the words of these academics from the context of history, a practice not unlike that being undertaken by current revisionists. But at the same time, these same activists cum academics must accept responsibility for how they reached their conclusions--namely the validity and credibility of the evidence they unceremoniously attacked when at the same time they (quite hypocritically) accepted Khmer Rouge leaders Ieng Sary’s or Khieu Samphan’s utterances as words to live by. Notwithstanding the pro-revolutionary ideological framework from which they were taught to think, including the strife-ridden 1960s and 1970s, one must still wonder how those who studied Cambodia and ostensibly loved her most in the West, became supporters of her worst enemy?

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Aftermath in Kampuchea (1983).

<sup>12</sup> Shawcross’ 1984 book, The Quality of Mercy covers some of these aspects too.



By the 1970 Kent State killings of four students, these more extreme elements of the STAV saw U.S. intervention not only as a mistake that had to be stopped and stopped now, but increasingly inched toward the *maquis*. After the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1979, many of these activists, scholars, and academics were forced to choose between supporting their old friends, namely the Vietnamese communists or Democratic Kampuchea, which would have implicitly meant supporting the Khmer Rouge to varying degrees. That was what Gunn and Lee have called the “two-sided switch.”<sup>13</sup> Yet even before that split, there was already division in the antiwar movement. Gunn and Lee describe it:

The first was the split within the left-liberal camp in the US. This was symbolized by the action of singer and civil rights activist Joan Baez in supporting a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* condemning Vietnam’s re-education camps and human rights abuses. Her sources of information included recently resettled refugees in America who had undergone incarceration despite their anti-American activism and NLF sympathies in the pre-1975 period. The result was splintering of the Indochina Lobby with pro-Hanoi hardliners increasingly condoning Vietnam’s slide into the Moscow camp.<sup>14</sup>

Douglas Pike, Indochina Archive director at UC Berkeley, fondly recalls a conference of antiwar activists not long after the *New York Times* advertisement appeared which turned into a shouting match between doves who now could not agree with one another on whether to support or condemn Hanoi. He may have been facetious, but Pike, who became famous for being an outspoken State Department hawk, saw more fury between them than he had ever seen between hawks and doves. There was no lost love between either side, to be sure, but one would perhaps have expected more civility from “pacifists.” As lines were drawn and crossed in the Third Indochina Conflict (the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam), similar lines were drawn in the West as well, where a distinctly pro-Hanoi faction critical of the Khmer Rouge formed, leaving behind only the truest believers in Pol Pot (i.e., the last of STAV scholars).<sup>15</sup> Like F.A. Hayek’s dedication of his classic 1944 treatise The Road to Serfdom to “Socialists of all parties,” this thesis is about some of these same socialists.

Those who romanticized the Kampuchean revolution and upheld the standard total academic view in the years following “liberation” as they always referred it (covered in chapter 2), were young, idealistic scholars, like Laura Summers and Gareth Porter both from Cornell’s South-East Asia Program (Albert Gore

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<sup>13</sup> Gunn and Lee, Cambodia Watching Down Under (1991), p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> Cambodian politics and studies is black and white. There is little gray. Kiernan calls it a “hall of mirrors.”

and Bill Clinton are from their generation), all of whom were baby boomers who had grown-up in the postwar era to a quagmire in Vietnam. This generation of Indochina academics, specialists on Cambodia, were very peculiar from those of the preceding generation, because they were far more mesmerized by the idea of a peasant revolution.

Chapter 2 of this thesis, entitled “Romanticizing the Khmer Revolution” is about the STAV scholars on Cambodia. It includes a brief review of Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan’s conclusions in his economics doctoral dissertation: “Cambodia’s Economy and Problems of Industrialization,”<sup>16</sup> as a backdrop to why they may have gotten attracted to the Khmer Rouge. For instance, Laura Summers, who partially translated the thesis in 1976 for the Berkeley-based antiwar group Indochina Resource Center (later renamed Southeast Asia Resource Center, then eventually disbanded) had already expressed unflinching support for the revolution in late 1975 and 1976. Her articles in *Current History*, titled “Consolidating the Revolution” and “Defining the Revolutionary State” are reviewed. An overview of the arguments in Gareth Porter and George C. Hildebrand’s Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, published in 1976 by the Marxist Monthly Review Press, follows Summers’ articles.

Also discussed in chapter 2 is Malcolm Caldwell, a scholar Gunn and Lee bestow the dubious distinction of being “Democratic Kampuchea’s leading academic supporter.”<sup>17</sup> His life cut short by a Khmer Rouge’s bullet (in a strange twist of fate), Caldwell was the founder of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, a periodical explicitly committed to supporting revolutionary movements in Asia and the author of Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War (1973) and several long essays on Cambodia’s post-revolutionary development, such as “Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy,”<sup>18</sup> published posthumously in 1979. The reader will see that the mistake made by each of these authors is academic. They question the validity of sources Khmer Rouge critics are using, but hypocritically take *prima facie* the claims by Khmer Rouge leaders like Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan. They romanticize the revolution in the theoretically palatable thesis of Khieu Samphan, or

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<sup>16</sup> It was partially translated by Laura Summers, “Cambodia’s Economy and Problems of Industrialization” *Indochina Chronicle*, September-November 1976, and later in full as Cambodia’s Economy and Industrialization in 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Gunn and Lee, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> This long essay was subsequently republished as a separate book by a little known East Indian group, Janata Prachuranalu, purporting to be “Friends of Kampuchea.”

Hou Youn, but do so at arms -length. Blinded by their own ideological biases, they believe themselves to be objective despite employing some very poor sources and methods.

In chapter 3, the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy is reconstructed. It is more a Ponchaud- Barron- Paul-Lacouture-Chomsky-Herman Controversy, to be sure, but that would sound tediously long. In early 1977, François Ponchaud wrote the first book detailing the struggle, under socialism, of the Cambodian people. That year, Barron and Paul published their own book, Murder of a Gentle Land (1977) an equally if not more damning broadside against the Khmer revolution and the Khmer Rouge. Ponchaud and Barron- Paul were among the first to see to sound the alarm on Cambodia. In 1976, Ponchaud had written in *Mondes Asiatiques* about the nature of the Khmer revolution.<sup>19</sup> After publishing his book, it was reviewed favorably by Jean Lacouture, but that review got a broadside from the leading, most intellectually formidable member of the antiwar movement, Noam Chomsky. At the *May Hearings* in 1977 on Human Rights in Cambodia, Gareth Porter trashed Ponchaud his uncritical use of refugees in Cambodia: Year Zero. A polemical exchange ensued among Chomsky, Lacouture, Ponchaud, and Bob Silvers, then editor of the *New York Review of Books* which had translated the Lacouture review titled “The Bloodiest Revolution.”

The Porter-Chomsky-Herman objections were numerous, but still Chomsky and Herman admitted that Ponchaud’s book was “serious and worth reading” though full of discrepancies and unreliable refugee reports which were contradicted by other refugees (who, for instance, had said that they had walked across the country and seen no dead bodies). This was vindication of the Khmer Rouge—reports of having seen no evil nor heard any evil. The Porter-Chomsky-Herman logic in a nutshell: Refugees are run away because they are displeased, thus will exaggerate, especially over time, if not lie about “alleged atrocities” altogether. Chomsky and Herman call for “care and caution,” nothing short of patronizing to today’s refugees from Guatemala, or El Salvador, or yesterday’s from Auschwitz. Chomsky and Herman latched onto a number of media mistakes which include three fake photographs, a fake interview with Khieu Samphan, and a handful of misquotations. A little more fairly treated was Ponchaud’s book, but the erratas first discovered by Ben Kiernan were blown out of proportion in Chomsky and Herman’s review of the Ponchaud book for the *Nation* and repeated verbatim two years later in After the Cataclysm (1979).

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<sup>19</sup> Ponchaud, “Le Kampuchea Democratic: Une Revolution radicale,” *Mondes Asiatiques*, August.

Chapter 4 of this thesis, titled “Beyond the STAV,” analyzes the aftermath of what amounted to a parenthetical note in the history of Western academia. Counterevidence is presented in three successive rounds: (1) Accuracy in Media’s analysis of human rights in the news for 1976, (2) positive and negative coverage of Cambodia from a variety of news sources for 1977, (3) William Shawcross’ test of the Chomsky - Herman thesis for 1975-1979. Following, the continuity and change in political thinking for each canonized STAV scholar is reviewed. To give a sense of possible outcomes, Michael Vickery’s Standard Total View typology is used, namely that they (1) accepted, or (2) partially accepted, or (3) mostly rejected the idea that the STV that Ponchaud-Barron-Paul-Lacouture had forwarded.

It is within this context that the conclusion, in chapter 5, attempts to weave common threads in the arguments of Summers, Caldwell, Hildebrand, Porter, Chomsky, and Herman. Only after having fully absorbed their impact can the reader pass judgment on the significance of their contributions to the “Khmer Rouge Canon.” What will emerge from this is the picture of a community of academics too consumed by the need to prove their theories supporting peasant revolutions to realize the consequences of their actions.

## CHAPTER 2: ROMANTICIZING THE KHMER REVOLUTION

*Universities are based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.*

--Thomas Jefferson

Our story begins, fittingly so, in the ivory towers of some of the world's finest universities. At the Sorbonne (University of Paris), for instance, where would-be Khmer Rouge leaders like Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn acquired their ideological training courtesy of the French communist party, and at Cornell University, where a generation of Cambodianists were increasingly attuned to revolutionary causes and movements. Stephen J. Morris reveals the legacy of the South-East Asia Program's (SEAP) at Cornell in his *National Interest* essay entitled "Ho Chi Minh, Pol Pot, and Cornell."<sup>1</sup> A cursory look at Morris' article shows the enormity of his thrust. He unravels a sordid tale of revolutionary fanaticism at Cornell's SEAP from the 1960s through the 1970s. Morris's censure starts at the very top with politics Professor George McTurnin Kahin and ends with Kahin's students. Some of his milder critics argue that his article lacks historical context. In order to avoid this pitfall, the following section discusses this context.

### *The Political Context*

In the late 1960s to the early 1970s, while the United States was still in Vietnam, American B-52s began massive "secret" bombings to eliminate North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia. In *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea*, Craig Etcheson writes,

The fact is that the United States dropped three times the quantity of explosives on Cambodia between 1970 and 1973 that it had dropped on Japan for the duration of World War II. Between 1969 and 1973, 539,129 tons of high explosives rained down on Cambodia; that is more than one billion pounds. This is equivalent to some 15,400 pounds of explosives for every square mile of Cambodian territory. Considering that probably less than 25 percent of the total area of Cambodia was bombed at one time or another, the actual explosive force per area would be at least four times this level.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Morris, the reader should note, has been "discredited," branded a "polemicist," worst, a "right-winger" and is guilty of "character assassination" as personally conveyed to me by Ben Kiernan, arguably the second leading scholar in Cambodia studies. Morris was graduate student, along with Kiernan, in Australia. He has vilified the Left with his "Chomsky on US Foreign Policy," *Harvard International Review*, 3, 4 (December-January 1981) and most recently with his editorial attacking Kiernan "The Wrong Man to Investigate Cambodia," *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1995. The *WSJ* classifies as vendetta scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (1984), p. 99.

This gave rise to a slew of American and Australian critics early on such as Noam Chomsky and Wilfred Burchett.<sup>3</sup> Later, British journalist William Shawcross made quite a name for himself for his *Far Eastern Economic Review* article entitled “Cambodia: The verdict is guilty on Nixon and Kissinger”<sup>4</sup> and his acclaimed *Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (1978). In both, Shawcross advances a “cause and effect” hypothesis that in essence condemns “Nixinger” foreign policy for creating the Khmer Rouge. Gunn and Lee (1991) offer insights into this bent, they write, “But if the mainstream press and academic interest had turned away from Cambodia in the wake of US retreat, leftist interest had been passionately ignited by the violence of the US saturation bombing of Cambodia.”<sup>5</sup> Those who became “passionately ignited,” grew ever more eager to see the *maquis* triumph in Cambodia.

Before constructing the Khmer Rouge Canon, we must first deconstruct the ideological framework “thought” to have guided the Khmer Rouge once they took power. Surely, had the world known of what would become of postwar Cambodia, few scholars or academics would have sympathized with the Khmer Rouge cause. What drew the young, idealistic students of Cambodia to it? It was the duality of peasants driven by academic cum revolutionary concerns. Additionally, any struggle against neo-colonialism would have made friends of STAV scholars who shared these values. At least part of the awe expressed for the Khmer Rouge leadership by the STAV scholars lay in its equally educated background. Khmer Rouge would-be leaders like Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn (who, like Trotsky, would be eliminated in purges) all received doctorates in economics or law from the University of Paris. These were, of course, the intellectual figureheads, not the anti-intellectual masterminds like Saloth Sar (known by his *nom de guerre* as Pol Pot), Son Sen, Nuon Chea, Ke Pauk, Mok, and Ieng Thirith.<sup>6</sup> Professor Chandler points out the “old canard” one too easily falls into every now and then, when one assumes that because of intellectuals like Khieu Samphan and Hou Youn, the Khmer Rouge were somehow an intellectually driven bunch. He writes,

The idea that a Ph.D. thesis forms the basis for a revolution is an example of academic *folie de grandeur*, from which I suffer occasionally myself. What built the Cambodian Communist party in my view was the phenomenon of continuing warfare in Indochina between 1945 and 1970. The

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<sup>3</sup> Burchett collaborated with Sihanouk for *My War with CIA* (1973).

<sup>4</sup> Shawcross, “Cambodia: The verdict is guilty on Nixon and Kissinger,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 7, 1977.

<sup>5</sup> Gunn and Lee, *Watching Cambodia Down Under* (1991), p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> For insights into Khieu Samphan’s share of responsibility under the Khmer Rouge (Communist Party of Kampuchea), see Heder, “Pol Pot and Khieu Samphan,” 1991.

party enjoyed Vietnamese patronage throughout this period. Those trained in France inhaled fumes from the French Communist Party. Mao helped. But the Khmer Rouge were never intellectually based. Khieu Samphan was and is, to his metaphors, the dog running in front of Pol Pot and other anti-intellectuals who wield power in the CPK [Communist Party of Kampuchea].<sup>7</sup>

Also, it seemed that their developmental strategy for Cambodia matched those of French-trained Marxist theorists like Amin Samir, one of the eminence to the World-Systems theory that called for autarkic development in the Third World. In this heretofore exploitation-exploited schema, where underdevelopment grows from the yoke of capitalism and international integration, a less-developed country can expect to develop only if it severs itself from the World-System (that is, the world itself). For Khieu Samphan, autarkic development was renamed “conscious, autonomous development” to make it appear more palatable. Later, conscious, autonomous development was re-christened “self-reliance.”

In September 1976, over a year after the Khmer Rouge took power, the Berkeley-based Indochina Resource Center (IRC) published a partial translation of Khieu Samphan’s 1959 economics dissertation.<sup>8</sup> At the time, it was meant as a vision into the new Kampuchea. Virtually no one recognizes that vision as the master plan for Cambodia, but the standard total academic view held that it was. In this sense, what the Khmer Rouge actually did or thought does not matter—at least not for our purpose here—since this is a study of the STAV on Cambodia, thus a study of Cambodian studies. Summers’ abridged translation intended to offer the world a peek into the mysterious Khmer Rouge and their plans for Cambodia. Khieu Samphan’s dissertation is unrevolutionary in most instances, though it exudes the same young, graduate student’s “humanitarian socialist ideals” that inspired other graduate students studying the Cambodia years later. For our purpose, what IRC circles believed was a plan for the postwar years, is sufficient to represent the standard total academic view. Of course, the dissertation being tame relative to the Kampuchea’s reality shows how far they off the mark. Yet, from that dissertation, of which the conclusion follows, the reader can see how the STAV perceived the Khmer revolution. Khieu Samphan’s conclusion states that:

The task of industrializing Cambodia would appear above all else a prior, fundamental decision: development within the framework of international integration, that is, within the framework of free external trade, or autonomous development.

International integration has apparently erected rigid restrictions on the economic development of the country. Under the circumstances, electing to continue development within the

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<sup>7</sup> Chandler, “Re: [The Killing Fields - Not a Noble Move],” e-mail communication, April 24, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Summers, “Cambodia’s Economy and Problems of Industrialization.” *Indochina Chronicle*, September-November 1976.

framework of international integration means submitting to the mechanism whereby handicrafts withered away, precapitalist structure was strengthened and economic life was geared in one-sided fashion to export production and hyperactive intermediary trade. Put another way, agreeing to international integration means accepting the mechanism of structural adjustment of the now underdeveloped country to requirements of the now dominant, developed economies. Accepting international integration amounts to accepting the mechanism by which structural disequilibria deepens, creating instability that could lead to violent upheaval if it should become intolerable for an increasingly large portion of the population. Indeed, there is already consciousness of the contradictions embodied in world market integration of the economy. Self-conscious, autonomous development is therefore objectively necessary. . . .<sup>9</sup>

In the first instance, Samphan offers two possible paths: “international integration” or “autonomous development”. Because of conditions imposed on the country by the “international integration” method of development, Samphan argues, autarkic modes of production are amplified. How does he reach that particular finding? By going back to the late 19th century, when the industrialized French penetrated the pre-industrial Cambodian economy, Samphan asserts that this disruption stopped the course of development for Cambodia. In other words, French colonization derailed the Cambodian economy. Using balance of trade and composition of trade analysis, to make his case, Samphan concludes that exploitation takes place when Cambodia and France trade, and that peasants too are exploited by urban elite who buy imported luxury goods which deplete foreign exchange reserves. Hence, the contention that “structural disequilibria” from “international integration” would lead to “social upheaval ... for an increasingly large portion of the population.” In other words, revolution. It seemed to make sense to the person who translated the thesis, Laura Summers, and still others who admired it, Malcolm Caldwell and Ben Kiernan, just to name two others.

Thus, the conclusion “objectively” reached, meant that “self-conscious, autonomous development”, i.e., autarky or “self-reliance” was the answer. It would be facile to ridicule this notion in this day and age, but in the context of economic history, autarkic development cast a spell on young, idealistic students who had grown increasingly critical of the “neo-colonial world”, in their words. As they looked elsewhere for space to forge ahead, their eyes stopped on Cambodia, where a fresh revolution had taken place, and its charming leaders had closed the country to the rest of the world. They were in love. As professor Chandler says, it is an “old canard” to place too much emphasis on Khieu Samphan’s thesis as the master plan, since, of course, the Khmer Rouge followed their own anti-intellectual national development policy of slavery; but for our purpose, what matters here is not what the Khmer Rouge thought or actually



did vis-à-vis the economy, but what the STAV scholars believed was happening. Equally inspiring to these scholars was Hou Youn's dissertation, "Kampuchea's Peasants and the Rural Economy." Like Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn stressed the exploitative dimensions of trade, not just between countries, but urban and rural regions. Siding with the peasant's plight, Hou Youn decried the "thievery" that took place when "The tree grows in the rural areas, but the fruit goes to the towns."<sup>10</sup> With this in mind, we turn momentarily to the military context of how the Khmer Rouge came to power.

### *The Rise of Democratic Kampuchea*

Cambodia is the transliterated name of Cambodja, the remnants of a once mighty Khmer empire that stretched out over much of Southeast Asia. Cambodia's contemporary history began with its colonization by France in 1883. Independence came after World War II, in 1953, and until 1970, Cambodia was a constitutional monarchy. The *coup d'état* which deposed Prince Norodom Sihanouk on March 18, 1970, brought to power the pro-American prime minister Lon Nol. Sihanouk, who has never been known to give up easily, immediately began a crusade to regain his country. Believing, like General Motors, that "What's good for GM, is good for America," Sihanouk believed that "What was good for Sihanouk, would be good for Cambodia." He created the resistance/maquis known as the National United Front for Kampuchea (FUNK) soon after his overthrow. FUNK was a coalition of communists and royalists. For the next five years, Cambodia was mired in wars on several fronts, both internally and externally.

[The] FUNK joined Vietnamese and Laotian communists on the "single battlefield" to struggle against "U.S. imperialism" under the banner of the United Front of the Three Indochinese People (UFTIP). Militarily, this entailed combined military operations--that is, guerrilla, conventional or proxy military action as was expedient and/or possible--conducted from "liberated" areas of the country.<sup>11</sup>

These "liberated" areas grew as it became clear that America would pursue a "retreat with honor" policy with respect to South Vietnam. By 1973, when the bombings on Cambodia had reached their zenith, PFLANK, the military wing of FUNK, "launched its first full-scale 'solo' offensive." Though was by no means a success, the "real significance of this offensive was political."<sup>12</sup> This was significant politically in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> As quoted in Caldwell, Kampuchea: Rational for a Rural Policy (1979), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Etcheson, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

the sense that Pol Pot's no-compromise policy, according to Etcheson, took center-stage for the communists who were becoming the real brains behind FUNK.

*The Rise of the Standard Total Academic View on Kampuchea*

The rise of Democratic Kampuchea paralleled that of a new consensus among scholars who studied Cambodia. Many had grown hysterical against the war and destruction of 1970-1975, and looked forward to the FUNK's victory. As increasing specie-speculation and corruption combined with large infusions of U.S. aid brought the economy into hyperinflation, the national product: rice, became increasingly scarce because of the war-destruction of agricultural capacity.<sup>13</sup> Shells reigned down on Phnom Penh for two months before April 1975, the beginning of a new lunar year for Cambodians, and the start of Year Zero for the Khmer Rouge. "Two thousand years of Cambodian history have virtually ended," declared Phnom Penh Radio in January 1976.<sup>14</sup> Cambodia's rebirth into Democratic Kampuchea would make heavy use of self-reliance. To almost all the scholars who had studied Cambodia, this made sense. Not just for its economics, which had been "objectively" proven by Khieu Samphan, but for its international politics too. David Chandler who briefly toyed with the standard total academic view, wrote in April 1977, "In the Cambodian case, in 1976, autarky makes sense, both in terms of recent experience--American intervention, and what is seen as Western-induced corruption of previous regimes--and in terms of Cambodia's long history of conflict with Vietnam."<sup>15</sup> That foreign policy dimension to self-reliance, became the justification for closing Cambodia's doors to all foreigners. Toward that end, Laura Summers, a lecturer in the politics department at the University Lancaster, England, began her apologia for Khmer Rouge activities.

A graduate of the South-East Asia Program at Cornell, Summers authored two articles in *Current History* about Cambodia. These articles, entitled "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution" and "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia," were published in December 1975 and December, 1976, respectively.<sup>16</sup> She was in England during these years, a point which will undermine her work and that of many other STAV

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<sup>13</sup> By 1974, Cambodia imported as much rice as it exported only years earlier. The loss in output is double net export or import.

<sup>14</sup> As quoted in Chandler, "Transformation in Cambodia," *Commonweal*, April 1, 1977, p. 210

<sup>15</sup> Chandler, "Transformation in Cambodia," p. 210.

<sup>16</sup> Summers, "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," also titled "Consolidating the Cambodian Revolution," *Current History*, December 1975; Summers, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,"

scholars canonized in this thesis. She did not fieldwork, interviewed no Cambodians for either articles. Summers' first article "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," ranks among the first attempts by scholars of her generation to justify the Khmer revolution that was achieved with the April 17th, 1975 fall of Phnom Penh to the FUNK.

The Khmers could not be certain about whether the [alleged American intelligence] document [regarding sabotage operations] contained authentic plans or speculative, contingency proposals. What was certain was the tenacious and frequently violent insistence of American governments upon controlling the course of Khmer politics.<sup>17</sup>

First, she makes no distinction between "Khmers," FUNK, Khmer Rouge--presumably they are one and the same. She takes at face value Khmer Rouge vice-premier Ieng Sary's explanation that documents of American sabotage were authentic. Becoming a virtual mouthpiece for the Khmer Rouge, she writes,

For Khmers who survived [the legacy of U.S. policies -- 600,000 killed, prolonged suffering and incidental charity], the awesome task was to transform accumulated bitterness and suffering into impetus for socio-economic reconstruction of the country all while normalising the country's foreign relations to prevent further harmful intervention.<sup>18</sup>

Praising the Khmer Rouge for their rice farming techniques, as Porter and Hildebrand would do in Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution in 1976, and justifying the need for the evacuation of Phnom Penh based on the fact that 3 million people would now have to be fed by the new regime, Summers contends that "[the] heavy [U.S.] bombing deterred many from voting with their feet until the day of liberation."<sup>19</sup> There is, she writes authoritatively, "little evidence of famine" although "food allowances in the solidarity groups are small."<sup>20</sup> On the positive side, "rice substitutes" are being grown, and the "end of war also means greater security for fishing and livestock industries."<sup>21</sup>

Her analysis of Cambodia's agricultural and industrial prospects leave much to be desired too. She does not cite any sources, official or otherwise, which would certainly cast doubt on how she procured her information. Despite this, she concludes that in Democratic Kampuchea, "Life is without doubt confusing and arduous in many regions of the country, but current hardships are probably less than those endured

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*Current History*, December 1976. "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," the manuscript was used, as recovered at the Indochina Archive. The page numbers thus conform to that manuscript.

<sup>17</sup> Summers, "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Summers, "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

during the war. It is mistaken to interpret postwar social disorganization or confusion as nascent opposition to the revolution.”<sup>22</sup> Laura Summers, who had been to Cambodia once before 1975, on a brief visit, knew very little of the hardships before “liberation” much less afterwards. She explains that,

Thus far, few Khmers have left the country and many of these are former officers from Lon Nol’s army or former civil servants who fear prosecution for wartime activities. No war crimes trials have, in fact, come to light probably because of an RGNU [Royal Government of National Union, i.e., the Khmer Rouge] decision to avoid deepening internal socio-political conflicts and bitterness in a time of reconstruction.<sup>23</sup>

Her naïveté is mind-boggling here, Summers assumes that those who wished to leave were actually allowed to do so, not to speak of the total and unnecessary use of tribunals for which the Khmer Rouge could very easily have simply been judge and executioner at once.

In discussing Cambodia’s foreign policy, the French Embassy and the Mayagez Affairs, Summers, of course, sides with the FUNK whom she knew were the Khmer Rouge. For our purpose here, a brief discussion of the French embassy incident will suffice. Before the Khmer Rouge “liberated” Phnom Penh, the French government had already discussed normalizing relations with them. Thus, the French did not intend to leave their embassy. “Hundreds of Frenchmen who had earlier refused to leave the country, journalists of several nationalities, Cambodian officials of the defeated military regime and diplomats from other foreign missions including the Soviet embassy, sought and received shelter from the French.”<sup>24</sup> This infuriated the Khmer Rouge, with whom she concurred. Diplomatic protocol would have forced the French to close down the embassy and re-open after the re-establishment of relations. Why had the government of France attempted such fraud? She explains, “Unhappy over the prospect of losing its remaining neo-colonial privileges, France hoped to maintain its large cultural mission in Cambodia and sought compensation for nationalized rubber plantations.”<sup>25</sup> Again, one must wonder how she arrive at such creative and perceptive conclusions.

Throughout the article permeates a sense of disproportion. For instance, Summers speaks of massive resettlement as though it were a normal affair. Her nonchalant treatment of evacuations stands in stark contrast to the seething sarcasm she expresses towards French and American actions with respect to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Summers, “Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution,” p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

the Royal Government of National Union (RGNU), the regime name for FUNK (which took power). “Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution” ended on another of many positive notes. The overall foreign policy of Democratic Kampuchea is praised, and its impact on the region assessed. “Among Asians, if not among other [sic], Khmer desires for peace and respect have been recognized and reciprocated.”<sup>26</sup> Laura Summers’ defense of the new Kampuchea is multifaceted. From domestic to foreign policy, the Khmer Rouge could do no wrong. She does a fantastic job of rationalizing away the more awkward Khmer Rouge policies such as expelling all foreigners. They were expelled, she argues, for historical reasons. After years of abuse by her neo-colonial master, who could blame Cambodia for wanting to kick the foreigners out? Her apologetics obfuscate the fragmentary reports coming of refugees who were, in fact, fleeing the country. Later, she suggests that they have reasons to lie: collaborators with the *ancien regime* perhaps? or worse, the discredited Americans! What emerges from this first English-language essay on the new Kampuchea is the picture of a still idyllic revolutionary State, divorced from reality.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Defining the Revolutionary State*

In her second *Current History* article regarding the new Kampuchea, published in December 1976, Summers is more reserved in her alacrity to praise Khmer Rouge accomplishments. One might call it cautious but very optimistic. In contradistinction, David Chandler, who felt the obligation to give the new leaders of Cambodia the benefit of the doubt, put it this way:

Can the regime recapture the grandeur of Angkor [in which the great temples were built in the 12th century] without duplicating the slavery (and by implication, the elite ) that made Angkor what it was? Is the price for liberation, in human terms, too high? Surely, as a friend of mine has written, we Americans with our squalid record in Cambodia should be “cautiously optimistic” about the new regime, “or else shut up.” At the same time, I might feel less cautions and more optimistic if I were able to hear the voices of people I knew in the Cambodian countryside fourteen years ago, telling me about the revolution in their words.<sup>28</sup>

The reverse is perhaps true for Laura Summers, who upon reading the comments of “emissaries” to Kampuchea, decides that all must be fine. Having acquired new material to propagate, she quotes, without so much as a single qualification (with respect to the controlled nature of the visit), the Swedish ambassador

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Summers, “Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution,” p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> In chapter 4, the reader will see that there was paucity of coverage, according to Shawcross (1983). Additionally, media coverage in 1975 focused not on the welfare of Cambodians, but that of foreigners still interned in the French embassy in Cambodia, according to Ponchaud (1978).

to China's observations while visiting Democratic Kampuchea as an invited guest of the new regime. Believing perhaps that the ambassador was free to visit all places yet saw "no signs of starvation," Summers generalizes this finding to contradict refugee claims of atrocities and starvation. But she goes too far, however, when she admonishes the ambassador for not recognizing what she insists is an obvious bomb crater in Siem Riep, caused by American bombs dropped some time during his visit of 1976. Of course, she was not an eyewitness nor an expert on bomb craters, not to speak of American-made ones.

On the status of Prince Sihanouk, who founded FUNK, but was subdued by the Khmer Rouge, she writes, "Since his retirement, Sihanouk continues to live in Cambodia, where, according to another visiting emissary, he enjoys the respect and affection befitting his status as an eminent nationalist."<sup>29</sup> The title of his memoirs Prisonier des Khmer Rouges (1986) is self-evident in contradicting that emissary's observations. Here, the mistake she makes is to believe too easily in emissaries. Far from being randomly selected, the emissaries who visited Cambodia were not chosen for their critical bent. It took the regime three-and-half years to invite Western journalists, a total of three to be exact. One of them was Malcolm Caldwell, a lecturer in Southeast Asian economic history at the University of London, and author of occasional essays, one book on Cambodia in the Southeast Asian war,<sup>30</sup> and newspaper articles in support of the Khmer revolution. He writes, in 1977 for the *London Times*, "Profound changes were needed, changes which could be brought about only by revolution..."<sup>31</sup> Caldwell, who, like Summers, is canonized in this thesis, was understandably biased towards the Khmer Rouge. One would think, given all this, that scholars like Laura Summers and Malcolm Caldwell, both of whom held the standard total academic view on Cambodia (see no evil, hear no evil), would turn to fresh sources of information or at least do some fieldwork where they could interview refugees and the like, but that apparently ranked low on their list of priorities.

Regarding the refugee accounts of atrocities, Summers for example, dismisses them for having received more attention than they literally "deserved." In a series of apologetics, she rationalizes their overuse by the Press as having "served to harden Phnom Penh's attitude towards Western journalism even

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<sup>28</sup> Chandler, "Transformation in Cambodia," p. 210.

<sup>29</sup> Summers, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia," *Current History*, Dec. 1976, p. 213.

<sup>30</sup> Caldwell's 1973 book with Lek Hor Tan, Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War, is significant in that it shows the inception of a revolutionary spirit, the beginning, as it were, of the end.

<sup>31</sup> Caldwell, "Inside Cambodia: the other side of the picture," *London Times*, July 20, 1977, p. 14.

as the government welcomed a few Asian journalists into the country.”<sup>32</sup> Not only were the Americans at fault for causing starvation and thus the evacuation of Phnom Penh, as her colleagues would argue, but the negative press was making them uncomfortable. Their no comment, closed doors policy was thus understandable! Laura Summers attributes everything the Khmer Rouge do to knee-jerk reaction to French and American malfeasance and imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

Summers then outlines, quite favorably, the constitution of Democratic Kampuchea with its radical collectivist ideas. After describing the elaborate process of writing the Democratic Kampuchea Constitution, which she concludes is a mixture of Leninist and peasant customs, she sings the preamble in obvious admiration, “happiness, equality, justice and true democracy reign without rich or poor people, without exploiting or exploited classes and where people live in harmony and the greatest national unity.”<sup>34</sup> This preamble was republished onto the fifth page of Long Live the 17th Anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, a propaganda booklet published by “Group of Kampuchean Residents in America” or G.K. Ran. The booklet contains a translation of Premier Pol Pot’s speech commemorating that 17th anniversary. In France and England, similar groups published press releases from the Royal Government of National Union of Democratic Kampuchea. These were the “*Comite des Patriotes du Kampuchea Democratique en France*” and the “British Kampuchea Support Campaign,” which, until 1991 lingered on.<sup>35</sup> Summers, who no doubt belonged to one, was by herself, a virtual think-tank. She did not have to take orders from anyone in order to formulate her justifications, but she did need considerable official information from official organs, to be so keen.

The evacuation of Phnom Penh, which was roundly criticized by the rest of the world as “barbaric” was really justified according to the standard total academic view which she supported. As her justification, she writes “By all accounts, however, universal conscription for work prevented a postwar famine,”<sup>36</sup> but

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<sup>32</sup> Summers, “Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,” p. 213.

<sup>33</sup> This view gained popularity during the Cold War. Soviet action was in fact reaction to American foreign policy.

<sup>34</sup> As quoted on in Summers, “Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,” p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> According to Gunn and Lee (1991), “Other committees which, in the main, emerged in intellectual defence of Democratic Kampuchea include the Uppsala-based publishers of Kampuchea in Sweden with support sections throughout that country. Other support circles emerged in West Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia.” (Gunn and Lee, p. 62)

<sup>36</sup> Summers, “Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,” p. 215.

admits that “It also appears that some work groups, in lieu of other forms of reeducation, are obliged to work harder and longer than others.”<sup>37</sup> One must wonder how she knows this, given that she has not been inside the country. Does she have a reference? No source is listed. With respect to statements from refugees and Khmer Rouge defectors sponsored by resistance groups abroad, Summers dismisses them entirely. She writes:

These public pleas for support and the public concern raised by sensational, but false, documents finally provoked the Paris Mission of Democratic Kampuchea to protest that some journalists were degrading their profession and that the French held a major share of the responsibility for allowing these activities to continue.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the documents to be discredited were, for instance, several faked photographs and interviews which between 1976 and 1977 were published in newspapers from Australia to America.<sup>39</sup> The issue of the photographs, in particular, will be summoned when the Chomsky-Herman book, After the Cataclysm is discussed in the following chapter.

In “Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,” Summers does admit, albeit sparingly, that life was difficult. As in her first *Current History* article, Summers compares the Khmer revolution with other historical revolutions, proposing that “Like the puritan revolution in England the Khmer revolution is the expression of deep cultural and social malaise unleashed by a sudden and violent foreign assault on the nation’s social structure.”<sup>40</sup> Her concern for the “difficulty” of life in the new Kampuchea is so disingenuous as to discount its value altogether. The urban “elite” were having problems because they were simply not used to farming the land! A remarkable discovery that took a year to reach. Summers throws that glimpse of sympathy away, however, when she adds, “What the urban dwellers consider ‘hard’ labor may not be punishment or community service beyond human endurance ... Such associations [with memories it invokes of Russian history] take what is happening in Cambodia out of its historical and cultural context.”<sup>41</sup> One must wonder what specific context she means, when she says that hard labor may not be punishment. In any case, Summers’ article proposes an embryonic theory of the Free Press that Chomsky and Herman would elaborate in 1979, and again as recently as 1988. To be sure, that theory was more sophisticated than

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.216.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Mariano, “Forced Cambodia Labor Depicted,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> Summers, “Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia,” p. 215.



the conceptual framework alluded to by Summers, but still it contained all the elements of this tragedy. She asserts that:

The United States press, not to be outdone, produced dramatic news reports and editorials based on refugee and unnamed intelligence sources. In retrospect, these reports were partly inaccurate and are still largely unverified. The flap illustrates the powerful and potentially dangerous force that is generated when the political machinations of a few capture the attention of a concerned and uninformed public.<sup>42</sup>

Like Chomsky and Herman, Summers dismisses the refugee accounts as bearing little evidentiary validity. Perhaps it is hubris that prevents her from paying more attention to these refugees, but that does not excuse her from taking them seriously. Therefore, as in other instances, she works these into a lather of ever-less reasonable justifications for why they would have unpleasant things to say about the new regime. Consistent with the STAV, she writes:

Clearly, they [the reported incidents] reflect the fears and expectations arising from the exile's position in the old society. Most Cambodians leaving the country in 1975 managed to do so without much difficulty as if the regime were acknowledging that they were among the few whose values could not be accommodated in a people's state.<sup>43</sup>

Summers concludes, in the same fashion as her first article, "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution," by returning to the realm of foreign policy and Kampuchea's position vis-à-vis its historical enemies. She notes that the new regime's posture towards Vietnam is cool, but that with its "Indian" brothers to the west and north, Thailand and Laos, respectively, relations have improved.

The Khmer revolutionaries have actively contributed to the post-war regional integration of Southeast Asia while consolidating Cambodia's position as a nonaligned [meaning socialist] state. Despite these signs of the growing acceptance of Cambodia's revolution, Phnom Penh has not yet relaxed its guard against hostile foreign powers who might still attempt to disrupt the people's state.<sup>44</sup>

This cautious but optimistic ending suggests that she grew more wary from December 1975 to December 1976 of what was in store for Democratic Kampuchea. In her first *Current History* article, Summers was cautious but very optimistic about every facet of the new regime's policies. By 1976, however, she had to defend the regime's increasingly battered record on human rights.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 216-217.

<sup>43</sup> Summers, "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia," p. 217.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

Laura Summers, it must be said, did not know for certain what was really going on in Cambodia. From her vantage point in Lancaster, England, she saw very little. However, she chose to write on Cambodia's revolution nonetheless. For other scholars whose canonical contributions are covered in this chapter, the standard total academic view reigned supreme. Like so many other students and scholars of her generation, Laura Summers was a romantic of revolutions. Self-reliance and non-alignment were code-words that suggested breaking away from the World-System, i.e., imperialism, the same imperialism which she blamed for destroying Cambodia during the first half of the 1970s. Combined with this STAV on Cambodia was her incredibly low suspicion of official RGNU explanations for why certain policies were undertaken. Instead, she hypocritically exercises a "healthy" skepticism towards the media. What emerges from these two contributions to the "Khmer Rouge Canon" is the picture of an academic far too obsessed with rationalizing every objectionable Khmer Rouge action, to realize that the more severe and numerous the objections, the more likely some grain of truth was in them.

#### *Starvation and Revolution*

At Cornell, George McTurnan Kahin, director of the Southeast Asia program from 1961 to 1970, and professor of international relations at the University since 1951, became an expert on the Vietnam conflict. One of his students was Gareth Porter, soon to become a leading "scholar" on both Cambodia and Vietnam. Kahin's foreword to Gareth Porter's and George C. Hildebrand's book, Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution (1976), praises it for "what is undoubtedly the best informed and clearest picture yet to emerge of the desperate economic problems brought about in Cambodia largely as a consequence of American intervention, and of the ways in which that country's new leadership has undertaken to meet them."<sup>45</sup> Porter, who was probably a classmate of Laura Summers, co-authored the most famous book of all Khmer Rouge defenses published.

#### *The Khmer Rouge Canon's Sine Qua Non*

*Nowhere was the war so brutal, so devoid of concern for human life, or so shattering in its impact on a society as in Cambodia. But while the U.S. government and news media commentary have contrived to avoid the subject of the death and devastation caused by the U.S. intervention in Cambodia, they have gone to great lengths to paint a picture of a country ruled by irrational revolutionaries, without human feelings, determined to reduce their country to barbarism. In shifting the issue from U.S. crimes in Cambodia to the alleged crimes of the Cambodian revolutionary*

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<sup>45</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution (1976), p. 7.

*government, the United States has offered its own version of the end of the Cambodian war and the beginning of the new government.*

--Porter and Hildebrand, 1976<sup>46</sup>

In 1976, SEAP graduate Gareth Porter, and his colleague George C. Hildebrand published a small, unread, but important book entitled Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution. It is important for two reasons: first, it was the first English-language book of the events unfolding in Cambodia (becoming the *sine qua non* for proponents of the standard total academic view).<sup>47</sup> Second, it rationalized everything the Khmer Rouge did and were doing (from the evacuation of Phnom Penh residents and hospital patients to the forcing of monks into hard labor). It became a veritable bible for defending the Khmer Rouge. Kiernan, Chomsky, Herman, and Caldwell all referred to the book favorably. In Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, Porter and Hildebrand offer what appears to be insurmountable evidence contrary to the reports of atrocities taking place in revolutionary Cambodia, renamed Democratic Kampuchea.

#### *Porter and Hildebrand's Sources*

Using "suppressed" documents and "official" bulletins courtesy of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea, they argue that the April 17th, 1975 evacuation of Phnom Penh, was due to the U.S. war on the people of Cambodia, which resulted in the overpopulation of Phnom Penh (from 600,000 to 23 million between 1970 and 1975) and therefore its necessary evacuation. Furthermore, they argue that the explosion of corruption under the Lon Nol regime was the direct result of U.S. foreign aid, and that in turn, it exacerbated death, malnutrition, and disease in Phnom Penh, making it uninhabitable. Curiously, Porter and Hildebrand in their 100 plus pages book refer to the Khmer Rouge only by their more palatable coalition name of NUFK (National Front for a United Kampuchea, also known as "FUNK" in French acronyms).<sup>48</sup> They pepper their book with propaganda photos directly from the new regime.

In chapter 2, titled "The Politics of Starvation in Phnom Penh" Porter and Hildebrand attack the media reports of atrocities, as did Summers in *Current History*, because they were based on a single account written by Sydney Shandberg for the *New York Times* three weeks after the evacuation while cooped up in the French embassy. Porter and Hildebrand write, "The article was a weak foundation for the massive

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> The first book was a French book: Steinbach, Phnom Penh Libere (1976). A cursory look at the endnotes of the Porter and Hildebrand book indicates that it is used extensively as a source.

historical judgment rendered by the news media. It contained no eyewitness reports on how the evacuation was carried out in terms of food, medical treatment, transportation, or the general treatment of evacuees.”<sup>49</sup> While it is true that Shandberg could not venture outside the embassy, from his vantage point he see more than Porter and Hildebrand could have, while in the United States. The point of not having eyewitnesses to corroborate or contradict reports of atrocities will becomes important when the Chomsky-Herman book is discussed at length in the following chapter. Continuing their critique of the mass media, Porter and Hildebrand write, “Nor was there any extensive analysis of the reasons Shandberg attributed to the revolutionary leadership for the action.”<sup>50</sup> Here, Porter and Hildebrand refer to the circumstances of postwar Cambodia, circumstances which they insist were deplorable because of U.S. actions that prompted the evacuation. Like Chomsky-Herman, they assert the evacuation saved lives.

Porter and Hildebrand discount stories similar to *New York Times* journalist Sydney Shandberg’s as sensational (by of their titles alone) and write “commentators and editorialists expected revolutionaries to be ‘unbending’ and to have no regard for human life, and because they were totally unprepared to examine the possibility that radical change might be required in that particular situation.”<sup>51</sup> Nowhere is the romance with revolutions more obvious than it is here. Porter and Hildebrand expect revolutionaries to bend and to be humanitarian because their indoctrination had taught that revolutions were good. Phnom Penh was in the jaws of starvation when the Khmer Rouge “liberated” it, so they argued, and that there was no other alternative than to evacuate everyone. By defending the Khmer Rouge, via justification of their policies, Porter and Hildebrand resort to official explanations and sources of information. Revolutions notwithstanding, there is no mention of any crime committed by the Khmer Rouge during the evacuation. On the other hand, numerous counterexamples of reasonable, if not caring Khmer Rouge behavior and demeanor, are forwarded.

More rigorous analyses supported by actual evidence suggests a rather more cynical desire to shut the economy down, reverse class order, and enslave the urban population. The controversy over the evacuation continues despite compelling evidence that suggests it was unnecessary and provoked

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<sup>48</sup> Porter and Hildebrand use “Khmer Rouge” when they must quote its use, but prefer NUFK (FUNK).

<sup>49</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

numerous deaths. The Khmer Rouge's contempt for city dwellers is self-evident in one of their post-liberation broadcasts:

Upon entering Phnom Penh and other cities, the brother and sister combatants of the revolutionary army . . . sons and daughters of our workers and peasants . . . were taken aback by the overwhelming unspeakable sight of long-haired men and youngsters wearing bizarre clothes making themselves undistinguishable [*sic*] from the fair sex. . . . Our traditional mentality, mores, traditions, literature, and arts and culture and tradition were totally destroyed by U.S. imperialism and its stooges. Social entertaining, the tempo and rhythm of music and so forth were all based on U.S. imperialistic patterns. Our people's traditionally clean, sound characteristics and essence were completely absent and abandoned, replaced by imperialistic, pornographic, shameless, perverted, and fanatic traits. (FBIS IV, May 15, 1975:H4)<sup>52</sup>

The anti-American theme was nothing new. After all, the FUNK fought U.S. imperialism. Perhaps, because of this, the followers of the standard total academic view were especially drawn to it. Ben Kiernan, who followed the STAV, interpreted this as forgivable nationalism. Porter and Hildebrand maintain that the evacuation was a reasonable course of action given low food reserves without American aid in sight. In retrospect, however, food supplies in Phnom Penh were not sufficiently low as to justify an evacuation to the countryside. If anything, it was the two month long shelling of the capital by the FUNK that resulted in the stranglehold on Phnom Penh. Furthermore, evidence that the evacuation was planned well before April suggests that strategic advantage, not the well-being of the citizens mattered to the Khmer Rouge. Hou Youn's dissertation had sufficiently maligned cities as to make them appear useless to the country. Not only was class order reversed, but city dwellers would be made to farm the land, in a complete occupational reversal. Charles Twinning explains:

An extraordinary [Cambodian communist] party congress held in February 1975, reportedly presided over by Khieu Samphan, is generally thought to have made the decision to evacuate cities and abolish all currency after the takeover. The fact that the cities were all emptied within several days of the fall, with the people knowingly directed to spots in the countryside where they camped at least temporarily, does not give the impression of a sudden, knee jerk action. This had all been organized before hand.<sup>53</sup>

Another Porter and Hildebrand justification for Phnom Penh's evacuation is that since 5/6 of the population of Phnom Penh were refugees from the countryside, they were simply being returned to the countryside. This explanation sounds, oddly enough, reasonable. But why then, would over 800,000 peasants turn up dead?

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>52</sup> Jackson, ed., Cambodia: 1975-1978 (1989), p. 44.

Moreover, Porter and Hildebrand were concerned about the image of the Khmer Rouge as somehow inhumane. A romance with revolution dictates that it be humanitarian and just. Porter and Hildebrand describe the difficult choices the Khmer Rouge faced, and how their actions were rational.

Above all else, the NUFK [FUNK] leadership had to be concerned with food and health. The concentration of a large part of the population in the cities, where they were unproductive and totally dependent on foreign aid, posed grave dangers. On the one hand, attempt to maintain an adequate supply of rice for the urban population would have disrupted the existing highly organized system of agricultural production; on the other hand, extremely overcrowded conditions, combined with the breakdown of all normal public services, made the outbreak of a major epidemic highly probable.<sup>54</sup>

With this in mind, the evacuation made sense to Porter and Hildebrand. The reasoning followed that: first, the conversion of unproductive labor to productive labor (from city to countryside) would prevent starvation and second, epidemics necessitate evacuations. Porter and Hildebrand assert that the 600,000 city dwellers of Phnom Penh (i.e., those who were supposed to be there to begin with) were justifiably taken into the countryside because their labor was needed for the task of cultivating rice. The claim becomes nothing short of utopian fantasy when they write, “The 500,000 to 600,000 urban dwellers would by growing their own food, by freeing others from the task of getting food to them, substantially increase the total produced. By remaining unproductive during the crucial months, on the other hand, they would reduce the amount of food available to everyone.”<sup>55</sup> Their logic is devoid of realistic consideration for the human toll, just as Summers’ nonchalance reigned over the idea of evacuating millions away from home. When they take at face value Khmer Rouge vice-chairman Ieng Sary’s claim that, “By going to the countryside, our peasants have potatoes, bananas, and all kinds of foods,”<sup>56</sup> they lose all sense of reality or objectivity. Stephen Morris said it best, “Serious students of communist regimes know that public utterances by communist officials and their media may or may not be true. But they are always made to serve a political purpose.”<sup>57</sup> Porter and Hildebrand accept all the positions and policies of the new regime, re-printing without reservation propaganda pictures of postwar Cambodian workers in the fields and factories working “happily”.

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<sup>53</sup> Twinning, “The Economy,” in Jackson, *Cambodia: 1975-1978*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>54</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, pp. 42-43.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Morris, “Ho Chi Minh, Pol Pot, and Cornell,” *National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 54.

Countering charges that the print media's characterization of the evacuation as a "death march," is another falsehood Porter and Hildebrand dispel. They argue that such untruths were "fostered by U.S. government statements, including 'intelligence documents,'"<sup>58</sup> They cite accounts contradicting claims of untoward behavior by the Khmer Rouge onto the population of Phnom Penh shortly after April 17. Most were from Phnom Penh Libere: Cambodge de l'autre sourire (1976), the very first book that favorably treated the Khmer Rouge evacuation of Phnom Penh. Gunn and Lee call it a "studied" account as opposed to the "banalized" version seen in the motion picture "The Killing Fields". Porter and Hildebrand conclude from this that the "death march" characterization was "unfounded."

Finally, leaving nothing to chance, Porter and Hildebrand hold that "the temporary clearing of most hospitals, far from being inhumane, was an act of mercy for the patients."<sup>59</sup> They argue that the hospitals of Phnom Penh had become overcrowded and unhealthy. It was thus necessary, for the well-being of the patients, to evacuate them. And what could they expect onto the elsewhere? Porter and Hildebrand offer as an alternative a propaganda photo of a Khmer Rouge surgical team operating in 1974 as proof that better care was just a countryside away. Jean Lacouture retells an encounter he had with a Khmer Rouge supporter in which the former argued that "under the Lon Nol regime, medical practice was in the hands of the Americans, corrupt and decadent. These poor souls had to be ripped out, at all cost, from this alienating medical facility. [To which I replied:] A new 'conspiracy of white coats.'"<sup>60</sup> Porter's and Hildebrand's falls near the Norwegian journalist's.

The shameless propagandizing continued without refrain. Having rationalized the more gruesome Khmer Rouge actions, Porter and Hildebrand legitimize the leadership and sing its praises. They conclude the second chapter of Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, rather self-assuredly, by claiming that:

A careful examination of the facts regarding the evacuation of Cambodia's cities thus shows that the description and interpretation of the move conveyed to the American public was an inexcusable distortion of reality. What was portrayed as a destructive, backward-looking policy motivated by doctrinaire hatred was actually a rationally conceived strategy for dealing with the urgent problems that faced postwar Cambodia.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, pp. 47-48.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Lacouture, Survivre le peuple cambodgien! (1978), pp. 134-135.

<sup>61</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, p. 56.

In chapter 3, Porter and Hildebrand explain the reasons behind Cambodia's agricultural revolution by legitimizing the Khmer Rouge leadership. In a juxtaposition of academic and peasants, they assert that because some of the Khmer Rouge leaders are doctors of philosophy, namely Khieu Samphan, Hou Youn and Hu Nim, which makes their policies well-thought out and legitimate. This romanticization seen not just here but elsewhere in Malcolm Caldwell's, Laura Summers' and Ben Kiernan's contributions to the STAV on Cambodia.<sup>62</sup> In a recent editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* opposing the U.S. State Department's half-million dollar grant to Yale University for the creation of database on Khmer Rouge crimes to be headed by Ben Kiernan, Stephen Morris writes, "Mr. Kiernan wrote that 'Khieu Samphan's personality--particularly his assuming manner, ready smile and simple habits--endeared him to Khmer peasants. Himself a peasant by birth, he is said to have been somewhat ascetic in his behavior, but never fanatical and always calm.'" <sup>63</sup>

Expectations of famine by Western intelligence sources for 1977 were dismissed by Porter and Hildebrand in light of FUNK broadcasts that claimed superb rice harvests due to superior two-cycle rice-farming under Khmer Rouge leadership. They write:

Tiev Chin Leng, former director of the port of Sihanoukville and a member of the NUFK [FUNK] residing in Paris, the 1975 crop amounted to 3.25 million tons of paddy, or about 2.2 million tons of rice. For the Cambodian people this bumper harvest represents 250 grams of rice per meal per adult, and 350 grams per meal per worker on the production force.... In addition meat eating has increased, In the past, under the influence of Buddhist tradition, the peasants took little part in the slaughtering of animals, and ate very little meat.<sup>64</sup>

Both points (including the statistics) reappear in Malcolm Caldwell's posthumously published essay turned book Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy (1979) reviewed in the following section. The unending gullibility of Porter and Hildebrand is itself incredible. However, that was not the end of it. For instance,

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<sup>62</sup> Kiernan himself is not canonized because none of his STAV works were available for review, but secondary sources indicate that he was quite favorable to the Khmer Rouge during their reign. See chapter 3 and 5 for more on this. The original sources, if available, would be Kiernan, "Revolution and Social Cohesion in Cambodia" presented to the ASEAN Seminar (at which Caldwell was the main speaker) and published under The ASEAN Papers, Townsville: James Cook University for Transnational Co-operative, Sydney, 1979; and "Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia," *Australian Outlook*, December 1976. There were still many, many others who were STAV scholars. Some have recanted their views, as did Ben Kiernan. Others have yet to admit to having done anything wrong. Kiernan's apologetic piece in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1979 is covered in chapter 5.

<sup>63</sup> Morris, "The Wrong Man to Investigate Cambodia," *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1975. The Kiernan quotation originates from a June 1975 *Dyason House Paper*.

<sup>64</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, pp. 85-86.



Porter and Hildebrand believed that forcing monks to work was not an act that could “fairly be represented as religious persecution,”<sup>65</sup> because everyone else, they argued, old and young was forced to work, too.

Although Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution is about Cambodia, a good portion of it is devoted to blaming America for the starvation which, as it turns out, was tampered by the Khmer Rouge’s liberation of Phnom Penh. Porter and Hildebrand leave no stone unturned in their critique of U.S. intervention and its destruction of Cambodia. Porter and Hildebrand describe a scissors-like extraction mechanism curiously like the Soviet law of primitive socialist accumulation, when they explain that modern industry would be fueled by “capital raised by the expansion of agricultural production.”<sup>66</sup> Their conclusion makes Cambodia the victim not of the Khmer Rouge, but of the Americans and the half decade of underdevelopment and destruction by U.S. bombs. In addition, the U.S. media, according to Porter and Hildebrand, was a co-conspirator in this cover-up, by not doing justice to Cambodia. Porter and Hildebrand fastidiously conclude that:

Cambodia is only the latest victim of the enforcement of an ideology that demands that social revolutions be portrayed as negatively as possible, rather than as responses to real human needs which the existing social and economic structure was incapable of meeting. In Cambodia—as in Vietnam and Laos—the systematic process of mythmaking must be seen as an attempt to justify the massive death machine which was turned against a defenseless population in a vain effort to crush their revolution.<sup>67</sup>

As Porter and Hildebrand romanticize the “social revolutions,” they reveal their motive: defending the Khmer revolution. Far from being scholarly or objective, they make evident their biases by citing, without so much as a pathetic reservation or qualification, the propaganda which forms their defense of the Khmer revolution ergo the Khmer Rouge. What they achieved, unquestionably, was the temporary confounding of the events in the new Kampuchea, perched from half the globe away, they played a role in legitimizing it for another three years. Next, we canonize the significant contributions of Malcolm Caldwell. Caldwell was an author, STAV scholar, tireless Khmer Rouge defender, and finally a victim of the Khmer Rouge themselves.

#### *Malcolm Caldwell’s Kampuchea*

Another academic who romanticized the Khmer revolution and its revolutionaries was Malcolm Caldwell, a lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He was an

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

economic historian “committed to the struggle of the colonized, oppressed, and impoverished against imperialism and neo-colonialism.”<sup>68</sup> In short, Caldwell became the leading academic supporter of the Khmer Rouge. His colleagues write upon his assassination that he “would not have liked to have gone down in history as an academic in the usual sense of the term. He would have wanted to be remembered as an activist on the British Left and an anti-imperialist fighter.”<sup>69</sup> Caldwell published a number of articles<sup>70</sup> before submitting the draft of a paper titled “Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy” was published after his death in 1979 under the auspices of James Cook University of North Queensland.<sup>71</sup>

The introductory note by Hering and Utrecht in Malcolm Caldwell’s South-East Asia echo similar points gathered from Porter and Hildebrand (1976) as well as Summers (1975 and 1976),

The Western Press, apparently feeling insulted and being outraged, excelled in negative reporting on developments in Kampuchea under the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime. Not only did strongly exaggerated reports on the mass killings in the regime appear in the Western mass media, but also reports of crop failures and hunger in Kampuchea. Contrary to this unfavorable reporting in the Western newspaper, Malcolm was able to find *more reliable data* and compose *a much more favorable account* of economic development in Kampuchea in the last two years before the Vietnamese invasion of January 1979. [Emphasis added.]<sup>72</sup>

As the STAV scholars mobilized against the media’s “negative reporting on developments in Kampuchea” they joined by one of their elder statesmen, Malcolm Caldwell. Although negative coverage did appear from various newspapers and magazines, it was never as concerted or organized as the editors assert, at least not until 1979. If anything, these reports were “fragmentary” according to analysis done for 1976 by Accuracy in the Media.<sup>73</sup> Hering and Utrecht furthermore add,

Malcolm showed much concern about the incessant stream of disturbing reports on the high number of Kampuchean killed by their own leaders. There were, for Malcolm, two questions to be answered properly. The first was the likelihood or unlikelihood of the very high figures indicating 2 or 3 million people being killed. He made some investigations into the reliability of reports such as

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<sup>67</sup> Porter and Hildebrand, p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> Hering and Utrecht in Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell’s South-East Asia (1979), p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Caldwell, “Inside Cambodia: the other side of the picture,” *London Times*, July 20, 1977, p. 14, where he asserts that “only the most serious criminals were executed.”

<sup>71</sup> Janata Prachuranalu, an organization which also published the essay alone in a book titled Kampuchea: Rational for a Rural Policy, also in 1979, will be used simultaneously, since there are minor differences, including different introductory notes by the editors. The monograph published at James Cook University was part of its Southeast Asian Monograph series and included the draft of “Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy” in addition to two other articles on Southeast Asia also by Caldwell. The monograph was entitled Malcolm Caldwell’s South-East Asia and edited by Bob Hering.

<sup>72</sup> Hering and Utrecht in Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell’s South-East Asia, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Irvine, “Media Can’t See the Mountains for the Molehills,” *AIM Report*, No. 21, part I, November 1977.

the ones distributed by the French priest Ponchaud. It was Noam Chomsky who drew Malcolm's attention to the fact that Ponchaud had heavily corrupted the newsreel broadcast by Radio Phnom Penh. Also some studies by Ben Kiernan convinced Malcolm of the serious fraud committed by Ponchaud, Barron and Anthony [Paul] in their reporting on Kampuchea after April 1975.<sup>74</sup>

Caldwell's dramatized concern for these "disturbing reports" resulted in his own attack on the media and his further determination to prove them wrong. On the very night he was killed, December 23, 1978, Caldwell was in Phnom Penh at the invitation of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime. Having visited the country on a guided "tour" and interviewed Pol Pot, he became even more convinced that the allegations against the Khmer Rouge by refugees were false. Furthermore, the connection to Chomsky and Ponchaud's ballyhooed erratas is elaborated upon in chapter 3 regarding the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy.<sup>75</sup> Caldwell, like his STAV colleagues, Summers, Porter, and Hildebrand have in some fashion or another quoted one another (circulating references). Leaving original inquiry much to be desired, they seek the truth from the ivory towers of their Universities. The preface to the Janata Prachuranalu published book Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy, likewise admonishes the Western press:

Caldwell's paper nails the lie to another aspect of the propaganda, viz. that the Kampuchean revolutionaries were following a mad path of building a socialist society. He has not only shown this path is correct but that it is the best-suited, not only for Kampuchea, but also for most of the underdeveloped Third World countries in the age of imperialism.<sup>76</sup>

To the contrary, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and all three television networks in 1976 were reticent about human rights in Cambodia. As we will see in chapter 4, Accuracy in Media found that very few stories relative to those on South Korea and Chile appeared in this mass medium.

Yet the editors, in considering the prospects for Cambodia since the January 1979 invasion by Vietnam, contend that "Already within six months after its outbreak [the invasion] it has turned Kampuchea from a rich exporting country into a deadly place of hunger. It has rapidly annihilated the hard-won results of a unique development-model."<sup>77</sup> What is remarkable here is the blame placed on everyone except the Khmer Rouge. For instance, we saw that America had caused starvation to beset Phnom Penh, thus causing

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<sup>74</sup> Hering and Utrecht in Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> In their footnote regarding Ponchaud and Barron and Paul, Hering and Utrecht resort to *ad hominem* attacks. They write in "Ponchaud was frustrated by the loss of his parish in Cambodia. Like their fervently anti-Communist publisher, Reader's Digest, Barron and Anthony [Paul] aim at the annihilation of communism throughout the world." (Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 11n)

<sup>76</sup> Preface to Caldwell, Kampuchea: Rationale for Rural Policy (1979), p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

the need for an evacuation. Hering and Utrecht forthrightly inform the readers of Malcolm Caldwell's Southeast Asia that Malcolm told Ernst Utrecht: "If it is true that Pol Pot has also killed Khmer Peasants, I have to make a different evaluation of Kampuchea's development-model. Killing an innocent peasant is a token of fascism."<sup>78</sup> More transference—from calling the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime communist and "good" to fascist and "bad". Where will it end? No one knows.

In the first of three articles in Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, written for the China Policy Study Group in London Caldwell chastises the media and the Barron-Paul book Murder of a Gentle Land (1977) for perpetuating lies about the Khmer Rouge and their intentions. Caldwell writes:

Faced with determined attempts on the part of both the Western and the Soviet media to portray it as a crazed pariah, Kampuchea has--without abandoning its policy of "first things first" (i.e., irrigation and rice)--succeeded in convincing many of its Asian neighbours and other Third World countries that the calumny is unwarranted. Two things are of note here: first, much of the Moscow/Hanoi propaganda is drawn from the *notorious Reader's Digest* book by Barron and Paul, Murder of a Gentle Land. Which has long since been refuted and discredited in the West (it was serialized in Hanoi radio); second the wilder allegations against Kampuchea current in the West never gained much popular credence or currency in neighbouring countries (in Thailand because it is common how refugee stories are selected and magnified). [Emphasis is Caldwell's.]<sup>79</sup>

Caldwell's *ad hominem* attack on Barron's and Paul's book is of particular note, again, because Chomsky and Herman deploy their resources against it too. In addition, Ponchaud's Cambodia: Year Zero, was also assaulted by Caldwell and his STAV colleagues (Porter, Kiernan,<sup>80</sup> Chomsky, and Herman) as a cesspool of hearsay and falsehoods. Because the Barron-Paul gained early popularity in the U.S., and was the more vulnerable of the two, Caldwell and friends worked tirelessly to undermine that one, particularly. Caldwell dismisses them based on their conclusion that "the revolutionary regime is atavistic, anachronistic, barbaric, rustic ascetic, anarchic, cruel, irrational, and intent upon commanding a forced march back to the Dark Ages."<sup>81</sup>

In that essay, "Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy" or Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy, Caldwell begins reasonably enough:

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<sup>78</sup> As quoted by Utrecht in Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> Ben Kiernan "convinced Malcolm [Caldwell] of the serious fraud committed by Ponchaud, Barron and Anthony [Paul] in their reporting on Kampuchea after April 1975" (Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 7).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

To most of the outside world, events in Cambodia (Democratic Kampuchea) since its liberation in 1975 appear totally outlandish and incomprehensible. Most commentators conclude that the charitable explanation for them list in bungled and inept improvisation by ignorant and ill-organised cadres floundering in disastrous circumstances and sustained only by opportune callousness and monopoly of firearms. This study argues that, on the contrary, the leaders of the Cambodian Revolution had evolved both short-term tactics and long-term socio-economic strategy, based upon a sound analysis of the realities of the country's society and economy, in the years before liberation; that in the face of great difficulties they have attempted with some successes to implement these in the last three years; and the chosen course is a sound one whether one judges it in terms of its domestic appositeness or in terms of its reading of the future international economy.<sup>82</sup>

This thesis forces him to reach back into the economic dissertations of Khieu Samphan and leads him as well to the unreserved use of Government of Democratic Kampuchea bulletins and official explanations--just as the *sine qua non* of the Khmer Rouge Canon, Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution by Porter and Hildebrand resorted to in 1976. For example, Caldwell quotes *favorably* from the translation of Pol Pot's "17th Anniversary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea" speech as well as Ieng Sary's assertion in front of the U.N. general assembly that "Our objective is to make our country a modern agricultural and industrial country."<sup>83</sup> In addition, by quoting extensively from Khieu Samphan's thesis "Cambodia's Economy and Problems of Industrialization," Caldwell asserts that it is the backbone to the development-model being used by Democratic Kampuchea. Hence, further indication that the STAV was that the dissertation was a master plan. Like Laura Summers, Porter, and Hildebrand, Caldwell is quick to report the observations of the ambassador Kaj Bjork and other invited emissaries without reservation. In addition, he cites Porter's and Hildebrand's Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution over 15 times<sup>84</sup> and has this to say of their book,

[It] compensates to some extent for the dereliction of the vast majority of Western scholars, "experts" and journalists reputed to have, or who themselves profess to have an interest in Cambodia (an interest, that is, aside from being paid to read about it and to comment on it). In what follows in this section I draw heavily upon Porter and Hildebrand. But I would like to stress that their book is indispensable and should be read by everyone.<sup>85</sup>

"Birds of a feather," it is said, "flock together." Caldwell could not have found a more authoritative book to reference his own work. From his perch in England, he looked not Cambodians, but his colleagues for what made the Khmer Rouge tick.

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<sup>82</sup> Caldwell, "Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy," Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 27.

<sup>83</sup> Caldwell, Kampuchea: Rationale for a Rural Policy, p. 38.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., see endnotes.

<sup>85</sup> Caldwell, "Cambodia," Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 46.

The similarities do not end there, however. Caldwell did not excel at hiding his admiration for the Khmer Rouge leadership. Hence, like his STAV colleagues, he romanticized about the revolutionaries who were both peasants, but academics too. These were theoretician who were not afraid of a little hard work. He writes:

It should be emphasized that radicals like Khieu Samphan and the others were not “theoretical leftists”. On the contrary, they always not only stressed the importance of cadres throwing themselves into manual labour alongside peasants, but set a personal example. They scorned material rewards and comforts, fully sharing the lives of the poor. Phnom Penh had no attractions for them, and since liberation they have continued to retain their working offices deep in the rural areas and to take turn at field work. They thus understood and understand peasant problems infinitely better than those western scholars who now appoint themselves to pass judgment on them from afar.<sup>86</sup>

Caldwell’s description of Khieu Samphan sound strikingly similar to Ben Kiernan’s “ascetic” characterization as quoted by Stephen Morris.<sup>87</sup> Moreover he makes an excellent point about the “western scholars” who “pass judgment from afar.” The lesson remain unlearned.

Summers, Porter, Hildebrand were fond of the superior farming abilities of the new Cambodia. The double or triple rice-cropping methods of the Khmer Rouge were indeed incredible. It became, however, a source of objections when the fact that double rice-cropping, as pointed by David Chandler, was “an achievement unequaled since the days of [12th c.] Angkor.”<sup>88</sup> In awe of such a feat, Caldwell rationalizes the “close” supervision of city dwellers who were sure not to share these goals. He writes:

Urban dwellers re-settled from Phnom Penh in 1975 could not possibly have at once shared that outlook and it need occasion us no surprise that to begin with they required close supervision when put to work shifting earth and collecting boulders; we should bear this in mind when evaluating refugee stories, particularly those referring to the immediate post-liberation period.<sup>89</sup>

Caldwell, like Summers, considers the hardships that city-dwellers faced, yet like her, his facade wears thin. From justification, Caldwell turns to apologia for Khmer Rouge. He is shameless in singing the praises of what Prince Sihanouk has compared to propaganda that outstripped Joseph Goebbels. Caldwell’s romanticization of the Khmer revolution is apparent when he describes that,

The forethought, ingenuity, dedication and eventual triumph of the liberation forces in the face of extreme adversity and almost universal foreign scepticism, detachment, hostility and even outright sabotage ought to have been cause for worldwide relief and congratulation rather than the disbelief

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<sup>86</sup> Caldwell, *Kampuchea*, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Morris, “The Wrong Man to Investigate Cambodia.”

<sup>88</sup> Chandler, “Transformation in Cambodia,” p. 210.

<sup>89</sup> Caldwell, *Kampuchea*, p. 46.

and execration with which it was in fact greeted. . . But if manipulators have a very good reason to distort and obscure the truth we do not. Indeed we have a clear obligation to establish and propagate it with every resource at our command.<sup>90</sup>

With “forethought,” “ingenuity,” and “dedication” too, Caldwell triumphs over his colleagues as the “leading academic supporter of the Khmer Rouge.”<sup>91</sup> He is mistaken when he asserts that there was universal foreign skepticism of the winning side, since most of the negative reporting was fragmentary even in 1977. The real media campaign began, according to Shawcross after the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam in 1979, at the time ex-STAV scholars like Ben Kiernan switched to the Vietnamese side. Caldwell’s assertion that “manipulators” are behind the propaganda campaign against the Khmer revolution is not original. Summers explored that idea approvingly, while Chomsky and Herman will develop it to absurdity in their theory of the Free Press covered in the next chapter.

In the second-half of his paper-turned-book, Caldwell places the Khmer revolution in the context of international and historical perspective. Being somewhat more enthusiastic than his colleagues or perhaps more openly so, Caldwell proposes a counterfactual cloaked in a reprimand,

Those who orchestrate the chorus of vilification and scurrility against Democratic Kampuchea do not accept that have responsibility to let us know what they think the country might have looked like today [1978] had the Revolution been crushed; what they would do even today were they to be by some miracle vested with absolute power in Phnom Penh; and what the prospects of the country would be were either of these conditions fulfilled in contrast to the prospects that clearly open out to it now under its present revolutionary government.<sup>92</sup>

His *tour de force* reaches its nadir with this baseless comparison. The opposite is what one often wonders, when looking back at the years 1975-1979 for Cambodia. Upon reflection, in what must appear to be an entirely unfounded argument, Caldwell asserts that Cambodia is better off with the Khmer revolution. Sheer fantasy? Not to the STAV. Porter and Hildebrand went so far as to justify the evacuation because it had, in their opinion, saved lives. Chomsky and Herman allude to that and more when they compare postwar Cambodia to the horrid American devastation of the country during the war, as the reader will discover in the next chapter.

The conclusions, which Caldwell draws are so distanced from reality as to make them unrecognizable. He predicts that the revolution in Kampuchea marks the beginning of “the greatest and

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>91</sup> Gunn and Lee, p. 75.

necessary change beginning to convulse the world in the later 20th century and to shift it from a disaster-bound course to one holding out promise of a better future for all.”<sup>93</sup> With this in mind, however, he does feel that the alternative to the Kampuchean solution, inverting the World-System, “would not be a good option, in either sense (moral or rational): even the richest countries of the world today are still disfigured by poverty and gross inequalities.”<sup>94</sup> For that assertion to be made, the “poverty and gross inequalities” in the First World would have to be equal to greater than those in the new Kampuchea. To it, one might wonder whom Ponchaud had in mind when he pointedly asked, “How many of those unreservedly in support of the Khmer revolution would consent to endure one-hundredth part of the current suffering of the Cambodian people?” Whether they would consent is dubious, but we know from this chapter who four of them are: Malcolm Caldwell, Laura Summers, Gareth Porter, and George C. Hildebrand. Speaking for the peasants of the world, Lecturer Malcolm Caldwell of the University of London writes that there can be no doubt, “that the lesson [of the Khmer revolution] will not long be lost upon the as yet unliberated peasants.”<sup>95</sup>

### *Conclusion*

We know that the Cambodianists who wrote in support of the Khmer Rouge used similar arguments. That much was self-evident of Laura Summers, Gareth Porter, and George C. Hildebrand. Malcolm Caldwell, whose impact was equally impressive while in England with Summers, but nowhere near Cambodia, upheld the STAV on Cambodia. As exemplary STAV scholars, they have earned their place in the “Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979.” These defenders of the Khmer revolution were influenced to some degree or another by the charisma or intellect of some of the Khmer Rouge leadership, namely, Khieu Samphan and Hou Youn, as evidenced in Caldwell’s note that Khieu Samphan was truly a man who practiced what he preached. They romanticized the Khmer revolution and its revolutionaries by rationalizing the policies of the Khmer Rouge and believing that all contrary evidence was the work of manipulators and counter-revolutionary agitators. Furthermore, they convinced themselves of the Khmer Rouge mission to liberate peasants from the domineering urban parasites. But at what costs, one wonders, to the peasants themselves? Fully half if not more of the casualties of revolution were rural Khmer. They were fascinated by

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<sup>92</sup> Caldwell, *Kampuchea*, p. 45.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*



the idea that according to the Constitution, “exploiter and exploited” would no longer exist, and that “justice and harmony” for all would prevail in happy Kampuchea.

After the Vietnam War, these scholars were inclined to disbelieve refugees who had a vested interest in vilifying Democratic Kampuchea and its rulers, the Khmer Rouge, since they were running away from something or another to begin with. As this logic was picked-up by Chomsky and Herman, it became the central argument against the mounting refugee reports of atrocities as will be seen in the next chapter.

Another major point reiterated in the works of all four authors is that America must be held accountable for most of the postwar problems, since, they argue, it had created the deplorable pre-liberation conditions. But this was a two pronged argument, not only was America to blame for the annihilation of a country, but it was the Khmer Rouge who were the protagonists, heroic in their effort to stave off starvation by evacuating the cities. It is expounded upon repeatedly by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy, a controversy tackled in chapter 3. Summers, Caldwell, Porter and Hildebrand saw themselves through the prism of a struggle against neo-colonialism.

Their complete trust in the righteousness of Khmer Rouge actions was shown at its extreme when Porter and Hildebrand argued that the evacuation of even hospitals was an act of mercy. The consistent threads encountered in the works reviewed is the result of complete and utter naiveté in quoting the claims the Khmer Rouge. Sihanouk knew as much even while a prisoner of the Khmer Rouge. No hesitation nor reservation to quote Ieng Sary or Khieu Samphan’s explanations was expressed by any of the four STAV scholars reviewed. It seems clear, therefore, that the mistakes which led each author to reach his/her respective conclusion was in fact academic. To be sure, there were judgments colored by ideology, but even a Marxist who possessed some objective fibers could see that speaking to common people might help. Peer review is a cornerstone of academia, but when the standard total academic view is to sing the praises of the Khmer revolution, what next? The STAV’s methods led them to generate conclusions that were simply implausible when stacked on top of one another. Had they thought more critically, perhaps, they would not be canonized.

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<sup>95</sup> Caldwell, Kampuchea, p. 91.

### CHAPTER 3: THE CHOMSKY-LACOUTURE CONTROVERSY

*Questions that are obviously crucial even apart from the legacy of the war--for example, the sources of the policies of the postwar Cambodian regime in historical experience, traditional culture, Khmer nationalism, or internal social conflict--have been passed by in silence as the propaganda machine gravitates to the evils of a competitive socioeconomic system so as to establish its basic principle: that "liberation" by "Marxists" is the worst fate that can befall any people under Western dominance.*

–Chomsky and Herman, 1979<sup>1</sup>

So argued the celebrated political activist Noam Chomsky and his sidekick Edward S. Herman in After the Cataclysm, one of the most supportive books of the Khmer revolution (especially since it was written after the end of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime), yet least rejected among the works canonized, to originate from the standard total academic view on Cambodia. Chomsky had been involved with the antiwar movement since the early days of Vietnam, and had made a name for himself as an outspoken critic of the war. Born in 1928, he is the world-famous MIT linguist who advanced the grammatical system known as transformational, or generative, grammar. By the late 1960s, however, he became engrossed in the debate over U.S. intervention in Vietnam, becoming one of its most formidable and ingenious critics. With the end of the War, however, few imperialist causes remained to rebel against, and he was left with no real enemy to fight. Chomsky's long record on Indochina started with his book entitled *American Power and the New Mandarins* (1969). It was followed up with At War with Asia in 1970, he was also affiliated with the progressive *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, another hotbed for the STAV. Not long after 1976, when Ben Kiernan, Chanthou Boua, and their collective published *News from Kampuchea*, an Australian newsletter devoted to bringing news to refute the "imperialist media," Chomsky re-emerged as force to be reckoned with in the debate over Cambodia.

Gunn and Lee speculate that *News from Kampuchea* was published as a catalyst to the Barron-Paul book Murder of a Gentle Land (1977) which was the first English-language book to lambaste the Khmer revolution for its brutal excesses. A long excerpt was first published as a *Reader's Digest* article in February 1977. François Ponchaud's book, Cambodia: Year Zero, followed on the heels of that article by Barron and Paul, and was more authoritative since Ponchaud had lived in Cambodia from 1965 to 1975, and could speak

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm (1979), p. 136.

Khmer. Unfortunately, Cambodia: Year Zero was Cambodge: Annee Zero (1977) until 1978, when it was translated from the French. What Gunn and Lee call the “endeavor to deconstruct distortions and bias in western press coverage of Democratic Kampuchea” became *News from Kampuchea*’s prime directive. That endeavor was joined by Chomsky and Herman when they began a public campaign against the media in their *Nation* article titled “Distortions at Fourth Hand.”<sup>2</sup> Chomsky, who has a tendency to write letters to the editor, criticized the *Christian Science Monitor*’s editorial of April 26, 1977 entitled “Cambodia in the year zero.” He was later condemned by the *Wall Street Journal* for his “heroic efforts to disprove the bloodbaths in Cambodia,”<sup>3</sup> but well regarded by some of the scholars reviewed in the previous chapter.<sup>4</sup>

Together with Herman, Chomsky devised an attack strategy on the media that would allow him to criticize Ponchaud, Barron-Paul, and the media for specific erratas, but without the appearance of searching for facts on Cambodia. His favorable position towards the Khmer revolution would be hidden by the cloak of criticizing the print media’s biases. Of the individuals who were sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge, Chomsky and Herman merit closer scrutiny because of the sophistication of their argument. The Khmer Rouge Canon is about the STAV and Cambodia, not the STAV on the media. That is how Chomsky’s supporters like to retell his involvement. Their attack on the media was far too thin a facade to protect Chomsky and Herman from being canonized. It is for that purpose that this chapter is devoted to the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy. First it attempts to reconstruct the Controversy in chronological order, second it deconstructs the Chomsky-Herman thesis and shows how it parallels the Porter-Hildebrand-STAV thesis on Cambodia. The Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy became the last stand for the critics of the Khmer Rouge critics. But, one might wonder, what does Jean Lacouture have to do with this, and who is he? Lacouture was instrumental in inciting Chomsky and Herman into a polemical exchange. Because of Lacouture’s extremely favorable review of the Ponchaud book in the *New York Review of Books* entitled

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<sup>2</sup> Chomsky and Herman, “Distortions at Fourth Hand,” *Nation*, June 25, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm p. 347n.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky and Herman thank Laura Summers, Ben Kiernan, Torben Retboll (who will be discussed in this chapter), among others, for “important information and helpful comments” (After the Cataclysm p. 343n).

“The Bloodiest Revolution,”<sup>5</sup> combined with his opposition to the Vietnam War, Lacouture was like traitor to Chomsky and friends.<sup>6</sup>

To counter Lacouture, Ponchaud, Barron, and Paul, Chomsky and Herman used evidence from Summers, Caldwell, Kiernan, Porter, and Hildebrand.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Chomsky and Herman placed a rather ingenious spin on the U.S. State Department’s findings, making them appear to agree with their own sense that the magnitude of the tragedy in Cambodia, though significant, was nowhere near those reported by the media or Lacouture or Ponchaud or Barron and Paul. The Chomsky-Herman objections were numerous, but they centered on the media’s unabated use of discredited sources. Three layers of objections were apparent from the Chomsky-Herman standpoint: (1) Ponchaud’s book had four erratas, which were further exacerbated in Lacouture’s review, (2) Barron and Paul’s book was itself attacked then dismissed, even more harshly, than was Ponchaud’s book, (3) the print media, which used the two books and/or Lacouture’s review, was accused of having suppressed evidence favorable to the Khmer Rouge, and propagated untruths (such as fake photos and in particular a fake interview with Khieu Samphan). Chomsky and Herman made full use of these layers, as they painted a sinister picture of conspiracy and propaganda against the Khmer revolution by the Western media.

#### *The Chomskian Context*

Chomsky is no stranger to radical politics. He has written countless books and articles attacking U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. media. His background in linguistics makes him a formidable debater, and even his enemies call him a genius. Chomsky shies away from excessive demagoguery, but not from polemical exchanges. What separates him from the amateur activists cum academics in chapter 2 is his luster

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<sup>5</sup> Lacouture, “The Bloodiest Revolution,” *New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1977, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Lacouture also helped Sihanouk publish *L’Indochine vue de Peking* (Indochina viewed from Beijing) (1972), a book written while Sihanouk was in exile and leading (on the surface) the FUNK from Beijing China.

<sup>7</sup> Another hotspot in the controversy involved William Shawcross, Gareth Porter, and François Ponchaud. Shawcross’ “The Third Indochina War,” *New York Review of Books*, April 6, 1978, excoriates both the Hildebrand-Porter book and the Barron-Paul book. He asserts that the two books are mirror images of one another because they used questionable sources but opposite ends. This drew blood from Chomsky and Herman who could not stand by while Porter was attacked. Porter himself kept busy at the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., writing letters to the editor which denounced their negative coverage of the new Kampuchea, and testifying at the 1977 May Congressional Hearings in which he denied there was a policy of “physically eliminating whole classes, of purging anyone who was connected with the Lon Nol government,” etc., in the new Kampuchea. Porter’s counterassault on Shawcross can be found in “An exchange on Cambodia,” *New York Review of Books*, July 20, 1978.

as a professional sophist or armchair *academicien de grandeur*. His extensive experience has taught him to anticipate potential quagmires and to make certain that token allowances are peppered throughout his works. He uses these vague concessions to make himself appear more or less “objective,” always high-minded and (partially) right in retrospect, when he later quotes himself selectively.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately for Chomsky, he does far too little of that to appear remotely objective. Chomsky wrote the preface to Malcolm Caldwell and Lek Hor Tan’s Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War (1973) published by the Monthly Review Press (which would also publish Hildebrand and Porter’s Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution among other Marxist works).<sup>9</sup> Chomsky’s vision of Cambodia’s future, to which he credits U.S. foreign policy, bears no resemblance to reality. He writes:

The misery and destruction for which Nixon and Kissinger bear direct responsibility are crimes that can never be forgotten. By the impulse it has to the revolutionary forces, this vicious attack may have also prepared the ground, as some observers believe, not only for national liberation but also for a new era of economic development and social justice.<sup>10</sup>

A revisionist favorable to Chomsky might interpret a “new era of economic development and social justice” in a negative sense, but Chomsky would be the victim of historical revisionism. Others may argue that the years after “liberation” were productive, as did the canonized authors covered in chapter 2, but that would be historical revisionism on Cambodia. What is self-evident, however, is Chomsky’s research techniques and predictive sensibilities. He uses far too little empirical evidence to create theories, which in turn do not predict very well.

In his book, At War with Asia (1970), Chomsky exudes the same peasant romanticism which younger, less experienced members of the STAV displayed shamelessly, when referring to Khieu Samphan. Chomsky was no idealistic graduate student, though he was a world-renowned scholar, when he wrote the following words:

Perhaps someday they [Nixon and Kissinger] will acknowledge their “honest errors” in their memoirs, speaking of the burdens of world leadership and the tragic irony of history. Their victims,

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<sup>8</sup> In chapter 4, the reader will discover that Chomsky and Herman in Manufacturing Consent (1988) selectively revise their own arguments in After the Cataclysm (1979) to prove that they “remain on target.”

<sup>9</sup> Caldwell and Tan’s book was not reviewed in chapter 2 because it was written in 1973, well before the “liberation” of Phnom Penh. However, it offers an important peek into Chomsky political development and serves as a background to justifying his canonization along with Herman for “Distortions at Fourth Hand” (*Nation*, 06/25/77) and After the Cataclysm.

<sup>10</sup> Chomsky in “Preface” to Caldwell and Tan, Cambodia in the Southeast Asian War (1973), p. xi.

the peasants of Indochina, will write no memoirs and will be forgotten. They will join the countless millions of earlier victims of tyrants and oppressors.<sup>11</sup>

To the contrary, if Nixon blamed himself for anything, it was for having left Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge partly because of Watergate.<sup>12</sup> Whether the peasants of Indochina blame Nixon and Kissinger more than they do their revolutionary leaders is something Chomsky may never want to ask. He is not an empiricist, nor does he pretend to be. The true “tragic irony of history” would not end here however, Chomsky’s exploitation of Indochinese peasants would continue throughout the 1970s.

By 1977, Chomsky was itching for a new target, since he did not have Nixon and Kissinger to kick around anymore. With his long-time collaborator Edward Herman, Chomsky found the Western media and its alleged differential treatment of atrocities in Cambodia versus East Timor, a convenient Trojan horse for a new wave of attacks on “imperialism” at the expense, of course, of the peasants he loved. Chomsky’s onslaught was unrelenting, he began with a broadside on May 2, 1977 to the *Christian Science Monitor* for its editorial “Cambodia in the year zero” (*CSM*, 04/26/77) based on Jean Lacouture’s “The Bloodiest Revolution” (*NYRB*, 03/31/77). He followed with personal correspondence to Lacouture and Bob Silvers, editor of the *New York Review of Books*, which published the translated Lacouture review. This correspondence resulted in a clarification by Lacouture in “Cambodia: Corrections” (*NYRB*, 05/26/77). Still unsatisfied with these results, Chomsky and Herman published a book review in the *Nation* on June 25, 1977, entitled “Distortions at Fourth Hand” in which they dismissed the Barron-Paul book as “third rate propaganda”<sup>13</sup> and called the Ponchaud book “serious and worth reading” but full of erratas and unreliable, especially since it was based on interviews with refugees. Chomsky and Herman pioneered, with Ben Kiernan, a new way to look at refugees: suspiciously. The *Nation* article was then followed by correspondence to and from Ponchaud, until the republication of the *Nation* article in the antiwar newsletter

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<sup>11</sup> Chomsky, *At War with Asia* (1970), p. 187.

<sup>12</sup> Nixon, “I Could See No Reason to Live,” *Time*, April 2, 1990. Nixon writes, “the events that followed our withdrawal from Vietnam, including the plight of the boat people and the more than 1 million slaughtered by the new communist rulers of Cambodia, showed that media critics who said we were on the wrong side were mistaken.” In “Paying the Price,” *Time*, April 2, 1990, Nixon’s answer to the question: “Looking back on the Vietnam War, what second thoughts do you have?” is “I was asked that about [the invasion of] Cambodia once after a speech at Oxford. I said, “Yes, I wish I’d done it sooner.” That was a shocker. And going further, Why didn’t you do the May 8 bombing and mining sooner? Why didn’t you do the December bombing sooner? And the point was, it should have been done sooner, but for one thing, I didn’t feel first that the traffic would bear it within the Administration.”

*Indochina Chronicle* published by the notorious IRC, 1977. In 1978, Ponchaud's book appeared in the U.S., finally translated, followed by Lacouture's Survive le peuple cambodgien! (Cambodians Survive!) in France that same year. The following year, Chomsky and Herman, irritated by this outcome, published After the Cataclysm (1979) which covered "Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology." That book deserves a special place in the Khmer Rouge Canon, not just for recycling the Porter and Hildebrand line, which it does--but for its originality, inventiveness and ingenuity. These are qualities which have allowed Chomsky and Herman to maintain to this day that they were right all along.

#### *The Genesis of the Controversy*

The February 1977 edition of *Reader's Digest* published a condensed version of John Barron and Anthony Paul's Murder of a Gentle Land. This book, like Ponchaud's Cambodia: Year Zero, became a favorite resource for the Western media in their effort to shed light on the mysterious Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime. The Barron-Paul book, which followed some months later, told of harrowing tales of hope and despair in the new Kampuchea. These lucid anecdotes, gathered from interviews with Cambodian refugees in Thailand, painted a picture of misery for those still living in the country. Self-described, it "is an account of the monstrous dark age that has engulfed the people of Cambodia."<sup>14</sup> Barron and Paul criticized the mass media for not publicizing the mayhem and murder taking place in Cambodia. Barron and Paul write, "[The] world largely has remained silent. No outraged student protest on campuses. There is no great outcry in Congress. No one demonstrates on Pennsylvania Avenue, the Champs Elysee or Trafalgar Square about what "peace" has brought to Cambodia."<sup>15</sup> The 1970 Kent State University student protest against Nixon's "secret" bombing of Cambodia was replaced by utter silence in the year 1977. The Australian *News from Kampuchea* described the Barron-Paul book as "full of untruths and exaggerations because it is based on unreliable second-hand sources."<sup>16</sup> In the preface to Murder of a Gentle Land, Barron and Paul underline their endeavor:

We believe that the documentation conclusively shows that cataclysmic events have occurred in Cambodia and that their occurrence is not subject to rational dispute. We hope that upon learning of

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<sup>13</sup> Chomsky and Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand," p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Barron and Paul, "Murder of a Gentle Land," *Reader's Digest*, February 1977, p. 228.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted in Gunn and Lee, Cambodia Watching Down Under (1991), p. 66.

these events, people in all parts of the world will act to halt the ongoing annihilation of the Cambodian people and to spare the world a repetition of their tragedy.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, because of the paucity of coverage, Barron and Paul were the first to publish an English-language study unfavorable to the Khmer revolution. This was almost two years after the fact, and in the mean time Summers, Porter, and Hildebrand had already published their works upholding the STAV on Cambodia. The Barron-Paul book instantly antagonized the STAV. “Indeed,” write Gunn and Lee “it would almost seem that the *Reader’s Digest* article [of February, 1977] was the catalyst for the emergence of *News [from Kampuchea]*.”<sup>18</sup> There were, however, some erratas in the book from which that article was based. Chomsky and Herman found two citations which were non-existent. The citations were for important quotations--and thus proof enough to gloat that the book was “third rate propaganda.”<sup>19</sup> The Barron-Paul book was predictably dismissed by Chomsky, Herman, and the STAV. Chomsky and Herman would question even the “Acknowledgments” section of the Barron-Paul book because they incriminated themselves by thanking experts in U.S. State Department and Thai officials.<sup>20</sup> And, like Hering and Utrecht in their “Introductory Note” to Malcolm Caldwell’s South-East Asia, Chomsky and Herman attempted guilt by association on Barron and Paul because the publisher, *Reader’s Digest*, has an anti-Communist bias.

The second broadside came when Jean Lacouture, an academic and supporter of the antiwar movement and the FUNK, reviewed Ponchaud’s Cambodia: Year Zero (French edition published in January 1977) in the French periodical, *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Lacouture, whose namesake I use as part of the Controversy, took on the difficult task of fighting Chomsky. Lacouture’s review, “The Bloodiest Revolution,” was translated and published in the March 31, 1977 edition of the *New York Review of Books*. The review had a number of mistakes which were corrected in “Cambodia: Corrections” (*NYRB*, 05/26/77). These corrections were prompted by Noam Chomsky, who brought these errors to the attention of Robert Silvers, editor of the *NYRB*. At about the same time, Chomsky wrote a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor* regarding an editorial titled “Cambodia in the year zero” (*CSM*, 04/26/77) which he correctly surmised was based on Lacouture’s review of the Ponchaud book. Chomsky’s objections were, as usual,

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<sup>17</sup> Barron and Paul, Murder of a Gentle Land (1977), p. xv.

<sup>18</sup> Gunn and Lee, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Chomsky and Herman, “Distortions at Fourth Hand,” p. 35.



methodical and blunt. He writes, “I judge from the editorial that the author had not read the book, but relied on a review that appeared in the *New York Review of Books*. That is rather dubious practice at best.”<sup>21</sup>

### *The Bloodiest Revolution*

Jean Lacouture’s eloquence comes across well even when translated. His review of Ponchaud’s book in the *NYRB* became a lightning rod for opinion page editors. Soon, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Washington Star*, and the *Economist* issued opinion page editorials admonishing the Khmer revolution.<sup>22</sup> This no doubt caused significant alarm, if not distress, on the part of those who opposed American intervention in Southeast Asia. They were, in essence, being told that their struggle against the War had resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of people in Indochina. The Chomskian line was to attack and discredit the Western media for basing its stories and editorials on third-hand accounts. Chomsky’s personal complaint with *CSM* stated that, “The editorial is based on the third-hand source: the review of a book which transmits (and interprets) reports of refugees. We are unable to check the accuracy of the first link, but can check the second, since both the book and the review are available.”<sup>23</sup> Chomsky is correct in his assertion, but he offers no better alternative. To be sure, there is no way that one can check the story of a refugee, just as there is no way one can check the story of a suspect if he has no alibi. However, refugees and suspects are not one and the same, though Chomsky and friends might confuse the two. Painfully aware, the *News from Kampuchea* agreed, noting “Obviously, the way most refugees see the revolution is not the same way Kampuchean working people might see it.”<sup>24</sup> The distinction of “working” as opposed to “not used to working” escapes the current author, but it has the same aftertaste that Caldwell and Summers left behind in chapter 2: romanticizing the Khmer revolution (or its peasants).

Lacouture’s review was perceived by his ex-colleagues in the STAV as an indictment from one of their own. It became a personal affair for some, like Chomsky and Herman, who had prided themselves with the idea of never being wrong. Lacouture was implying that something hideous was happening in the new

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<sup>20</sup> Chomsky and Herman’s own acknowledgments for the chapter on Cambodia in *After the Cataclysm* leave much to be desired.

<sup>21</sup> Chomsky in a letter to editor Charlotte Saikowski of the *Christian Science Monitor*, May 2, 1977.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, “Cambodia in the year zero,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 26, 1977; Buckley, “Don’t stand for the Cambodian slaughter!,” *Washington Star*, September 11, 1977; and “Counting the cost,” *Economist*, July 1977.

<sup>23</sup> Chomsky in a letter to editor Charlotte Saikowski of the *Christian Science Monitor*, May 2, 1977.

Kampuchea, an idea the STAV did not want to believe. Far detached from a mealy-mouthed accusation,

Lacouture compared modern-day Kampuchea to Auschwitz. He writes:

The new masters of Phnom Penh have invented something original, auto-genocide. After Auschwitz and the Gulag, we might have thought this century had produced the ultimate in horror, but we are now seeing the suicide of a people in the name of revolution; worse: in the name of socialism... Here the leaders of a popular resistance movement, having defeated a regime whose corruption by *compradors* and foreign agents had reached the point of caricature, are killing people in the name of a visions of a green paradise. A group of modern intellectuals, formed by Western thought, primarily Marxist thought, claim to seek to return to a rustic Golden Age, to an ideal rural and national civilization. And proclaiming these ideas, they are systematically massacring, isolating, and starving city and village populations whose crime was to have been born when they were, the inheritors of a century of historical contradictions...<sup>25</sup>

Few have spoken so eloquently yet been so slandered for doing so much good to so many, as was Lacouture. He was not meek about calling Cambodia's ordeal a socialist experiment gone awry--an experiment which he initially supported. He was among the first to undergo one side of a "two-sided switch" to use Gunn and Lee's typology. From an ardent supporter of the FUNK he switched sides to become one of its most formidable critics. Lacouture's timing, too, is significant. Few Western academics had realized their own "historical contradictions" in explaining why, if Vietnam had been bombed many more times than Cambodia, its new rulers were not practicing anywhere near the same degree of brutality as those of the new Kampuchea. Lacouture's legitimacy within the antiwar circle, from having been an antiwar activist himself and scholar on Vietnam,<sup>26</sup> meant that he could not be contemptuously dismissed as a "right-winger."

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<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Gunn and Lee, p. 66. Referenced in *News from Kampuchea*, vol. 1, no. 2., June 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Lacouture, "The Bloodiest Revolution," *New York Review of Books*, March 31, 1977, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Chomsky and Herman complain that Lacouture's French study on the "colonial period and the U.S. intervention [has] gone unreviewed, unnoticed, and untranslated" (*After the Cataclysm*, p. 343n).

### *Lacouture's Erratas*

The Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy had only begun. Chomsky's personal letters to Lacouture and Silvers resulted in corrections that appeared the *New York Review of Books* some weeks later. This would prove useful for Chomsky and Herman since they could underscore their points with proof. Lacouture made errors which he corrected in "Cambodia: Corrections" (*NYRB*, 05/26/77). But to their dismay, Lacouture's corrections article was even more articulate than his original review. It is a *mea culpa* of the sincerest form, one that is made in public. Lacouture writes:

The pseudo revolutionaries in Cambodia have locked their country away from the eyes of the world, have turned many of their people into cadavers or mere cattle; they have not only killed Lon Nol's officials but have also murdered their women and children, maintaining order with clubs and guns. I think that the problem that presents itself today is that of the life of a people. And it is not only because I once argued for the victory of this regime [RGNU], and feel myself partially guilty for what is happening under it, that I believe I can say: there is a time, when a great crime is taking place, when it is better to speak out in whatever company, than to remain silent.<sup>27</sup>

Far distanced from Summers' proud, but naive assertion in her December, 1975 *Current History* article, "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution" that there had been "no war crimes trials," Khmer Rouge "justice" was swift and merciless. Lacouture drew even more blood by implicating the entire antiwar movement and all the scholars who upheld the STAV on Cambodia. Not to be outdone, Chomsky and Herman counter-attacked with their own *tour de force* in "Distortions at Fourth Hand."<sup>28</sup>

### *Distortions at Fourth Hand*

Chomsky's and Herman's "Distortions at Fourth Hand" published in the *Nation*, and republished in the *Indochina Chronicle*, was an editorial cloaked in a book review of the Hildebrand-Porter, Barron-Paul, and Ponchaud books. They were positively rambunctious with Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, dismissive of Murder of a Gentle Land, and weary of Cambodia: Year Zero. In order to understand in what context After the Cataclysm was published in 1979, a cursory analysis of Chomsky's and Herman's 1977 article is necessary. "Distortions at Fourth Hand" begins with a review of the post-liberation Vietnamese literature and weans cynical conclusions regarding how an author or journalist may get published. "The technical name for this farce," write Chomsky and Herman, "is 'freedom of the press.'"<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the paltry

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<sup>27</sup> Lacouture, "Cambodia: Corrections" *New York Review of Books*, May 26, 1977.

<sup>28</sup> Chomsky and Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand," *Nation*, June 25, 1977.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

“media analysis” which they perform is itself nothing short of a farce. They pick a few stories here and there, turn them into representative samples, and suddenly they have a theory of how the press supposedly works. This practice is at best heuristic, though far from compelling. From these such weakly formed theories, Chomsky and Herman assert, “If dictators were smarter, they would surely use the American system of thought control and indoctrination.”<sup>30</sup>

The baseline for their reasoning can be found in the first few paragraphs of the article. They show a dual motive for historical revisionism (standard practice today for some historians): (1) discrediting those opposed to the war, (2) serving American foreign policy interests. Resigned, Chomsky and Herman write:

It was inevitable with the failure of the American effort to subdue South Vietnam and to crush the mass movements elsewhere in Indochina, that there would be a campaign to reconstruct the history of these years so as to place the role of the United States in a more favorable light ... Well suited for these aims are tales of Communist atrocities, which not only prove evils of communism but undermine the credibility of those who opposed the war and might interfere with future crusades for freedom.<sup>31</sup>

What was more inevitable, perhaps, was that Chomsky and Herman would fall into their own trap. Reversing, for a moment, their statement, one can conclude that they were themselves busy hoping for and practicing historical revisionism on Cambodia. Theirs is a warped history of media coverage, as Shawcross will show in chapter 4. Uncovering distortion and bias in the press became an obsession which fed on itself and convinced Chomsky and Herman of the righteousness of their cause and theory. For instance, to support their theory of censorship in the press, they bemoan the low circulation level of the *New England Peacework* (an antiwar journal) and *News from Kampuchea* (circulation less than 500).<sup>32</sup>

It is in this twisted context that Chomsky and Herman’s onslaught on the mass media began. They were meticulous, if not retentive, in pointing the minor faults of the Western press. They blew out of proportion a few erratas, which they latched onto and repeated in *After the Cataclysm*. They rebuked the media, along with Ponchaud and Barron-Paul, for shamelessly using refugees whom no objective person could trust. Why? Refugee stories could not be substantiated. Like Hildebrand, Porter, Summers, and Caldwell, Chomsky and Herman accuse the U.S. government of war-induced famine, but hypocritically assert that Khmer Rouge quick thinking in evacuating Phnom Penh served to rescue the population from

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Chomsky and Herman, “Distortions at Fourth Hand,” p. 31.

starvation. Chomsky and Herman want to have their cake and eat it too. For instance, after dwelling on the several allegedly faked photographs of a man being murdered by the Khmer Rouge, and another pulling plows,<sup>33</sup> they conclude that “Even if the photograph had been authentic, we might ask why people should be pulling plows in Cambodia, the reason is clear, if unmentioned. The savage American assault on Cambodia did not spare the animal population.”<sup>34</sup> Their logic is as appalling as Hildebrand and Porter’s brazen defense of the Khmer Rouge evacuation of Phnom Penh’s hospitals, though Chomsky and Herman do that too.

While Chomsky and Herman review the Porter-Hildebrand book, Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, glowingly, they criticize and dismiss the Barron-Paul book in what must amount to nothing less than an *ad hominem* attack on the publisher, *Reader’s Digest*. They use guilt by association in pointing out that Barron and Paul resorted to experts in the U.S. State Department as well as Thai authorities, all of whom had vested interest in excoriating the Khmer Rouge.<sup>35</sup> They forget, or perhaps ignore, the source of much of the information for the Porter-Hildebrand book: propaganda photos and unadorned “official” explanations. In fact, Chomsky and Herman offer not one single criticism for the methods and evidence used in that book. As was shown in the previous chapter, Porter and Hildebrand naively quote Ieng Sary’s claim that that “By going to the countryside, our peasants have potatoes, bananas, and all kinds of foods.”<sup>36</sup> To be sure, Chomsky and Herman contribute original ideas, but they are insufficient to balance their seething biases.

In 1978, Ponchaud’s “Note for the English Translation” of Cambodia: Year Zero, discusses the “polemical exchange” between himself, Noam Chomsky, Robert Silvers, Edward Herman, and Jean Lacouture. He writes,

[Chomsky] drew my attention to the way it Cambodia: Year Zero was being misused by antirevolutionary propagandists. He has made it my duty to ‘stem the flood of lies’ about Cambodia—particularly, according to him, those propagated by Anthony Paul and John Barron in Murder of a Gentle Land.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 358n.

<sup>33</sup> The validity of these photographs has, to this day, not been determined. David Chandler himself, does not know, but thinks it no longer matters anymore.

<sup>34</sup> Chomsky and Herman, “Distortions at Fourth Hand,” p. 31.

<sup>35</sup> It is ironic, though, that Chomsky and Herman themselves turn to the U.S. State Department when they want to downplay the magnitude of atrocities.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Ponchaud, Cambodia: Year Zero (1978), p. xiii.

Ponchaud, who was himself sympathetic to the peasant cause initially, did not want to appear outlandish in reporting the stories he had recorded from refugees in Thailand and France. Having lived in Cambodia from 1965 to 1975, longer, one might note, than anyone else mentioned in this entire thesis, Ponchaud could speak Khmer fluently and thus communicate with refugees without the need for a translator whose interest it might be to distort the refugee stories. Ponchaud took offense with Chomsky and Herman's suggestions that he could have been misled by bourgeois refugees, which he was careful to avoid. In describing the process, he writes:

The first precaution I took was to look for the context of the refugees' stories and to see how they should be interpreted. These people had been traumatized by the cyclone that had swept through their society, by loss of those closest to them, and, in some cases, by the loss of their privileges and by the new necessity of performing hard work with their hands ... In weighing the value of each refugee's testimony, his personality has been taken into account; I was instinctively suspicious of people who had "revelations" to make and came bearing sensational tidings. I also mistrusted those who spoke French and those who came from wealthier classes, who had lost too much under the new regime. I was mainly interested in the ordinary people, army privates, peasants, laborers, who could neither read nor write nor analyze what they had seen but whose illiterate memories could supply exact details.<sup>38</sup>

Ponchaud took great care and caution with the refugees, some could say, he was even biased against those who had suffered the greatest loss, namely the wealthier individuals. The "ordinary people" who composed his sample were telling him awful things about the new Kampuchea, things which he felt obligated to report to the world. So what was the big problem with using these refugees? Randomness of sampling? Geographical parity? All good points that cannot, in any case, be controlled. Chomsky and Herman argued a little of that, but their number one concern was with refugees in general. Were they trustworthy? In other words, a refugee is the ultimate self-selector--he/she moves his/her body to another location.

Chomsky and Herman were, of course, quick to point out that they were not dismissing refugee accounts outright, merely that great "care and caution" had to be used whenever refugees were involved. After all, no independent observer could corroborate the horrid tales coming from refugees. Yet in a country where no one is allowed access unless by invitation, how could an independent observer gain such entry? They admitted that there were few objective onlookers, to be sure, but that did not mean that refugees could be objective sources. Notwithstanding this difficult situation, they maintain that,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

Refugees are frightened and defenseless, at the mercy of alien forces. They naturally tend to report what they believe their interlocutors [sic] wish to hear. While their reports must be considered seriously, care and caution are necessary. Specifically, refugees questioned by Westerners or Thais have a vested interest in reporting atrocities on the part of Cambodian revolutionaries, an obvious fact that no serious reporter will fail to take into account.<sup>39</sup>

This ostensibly unprejudiced analysis is only too convenient for the purposes of undermining Ponchaud, Barron-Paul, and the media. One can only wonder whether Chomsky and Herman would have warned the same of Albert Einstein, a refugee himself. And what of Nicaraguan refugees from the days of Daniel Ortega as opposed to today's Guatemalans? Ponchaud's exhaustive study, based on the life-stories of fifty-six refugees from Thailand, is deemed "serious" and "worth reading" but "lacks the documentation provided in Hildebrand and Porter and its veracity is therefore difficult to assess."<sup>40</sup> Chomsky and Herman's curious juxtaposition of Cambodia: Year Zero with Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, giving the latter the edge on "documentation," is nothing short of a farce.

"Distortions at Fourth Hand" gives a preview of what one can expect from Chomsky and Herman in After the Cataclysm. One of the points stressed in the introduction to this chapter was Chomsky's ability to keep things vague by offering token allowances to his critics. In the article, Chomsky and Herman end with the same qualifications they use in After the Cataclysm, which makes the latter a longer broken-record of "Distortions at Fourth Hand." In what sense are Chomsky and Herman careful to absolve themselves of any responsibility? For instance, Chomsky and Herman craftily hide their argument in the cloak of academic sophistry when they profess that they "do not pretend to know where the truth lies amidst these sharply conflicting assessments [Ponchaud versus Hildebrand and Porter, dismissing altogether Barron and Paul]..."<sup>41</sup> If that were the case, then why would Chomsky and Herman sing the praises of Porter and Hildebrand? Chomsky and Herman say that all they want to do is to point out the imbalance of treatment that:

filters through to the American public is a seriously distorted version of the evidence available, emphasizing alleged Khmer Rouge atrocities and downplaying or ignoring the crucial U.S. role, direct or indirect, in the torment that Cambodia has suffered. Evidence that focuses on the American role, like the Hildebrand and Porter volume, is ignored, not on the basis of truthfulness or scholarship but because the message is unpalatable.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chomsky and Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand," p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Chomsky and Herman, "Distortions at Fourth Hand," p. 35.

The mission is not, in itself, objectionable, since it deals with how the media “filters” news for mass consumption. At the same time, one might ask how Chomsky and Herman can judge that filter if they do not “pretend to know where the truth lies.” Instead, they default to a position where, because there is, in their view, confusion on what is going on in Cambodia, utmost skepticism must be practiced with all information originating from Cambodian refugees.

*Cambodians Survive!*

In June 1978, Jean Lacouture published his own book on Cambodia, titled Survive le peuple cambodgien! (Cambodians Survive!). The book was never translated into English, but Lacouture’s thesis is relevant to the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy. Survive le peuple cambodgien! is practically the confession of an ex-FUNK supporter that begins with these passionate words:

*La honte aurait suffi... La honte, a elle seule, justifiait que l'on ecrivit ce petit livre--qui est d'abord un cri d'horreur. La honte d'avoir contribue, si peu que ce soit, si faible qu'ait pu etre en la matiere influence de la press, a l'instauration de l'un des pouvoirs les plus oppressifs que l'histoire ait connus. [trans. Shame would have sufficed... The shame, alone, would have justified that this book be written--which is firstly a cry of horror. The shame of having contributed, even as little as it was, as weak as its influence could have been on the mass media, to the establishment of one of the most oppressive powers history has ever known.]<sup>43</sup>*

Lacouture’s shame is no doubt sincere. He admits that he mistakenly thought the Khmer revolution would bring peace to Cambodia, but that instead it brought to power one of the most totalitarian regimes in the history of the world. Following on his string of *mea culpas*, from “The Bloodiest Revolution” to “Cambodia: Corrections” to now Survive le peuple cambodgien!, Lacouture was further aggravating Chomsky and Herman in America. In the final chapter entitled “*Un genocide plebecite* [trans. A genocide of the common people],” he leaves not a scintilla of doubt that, based upon what he has observed whether from second or third hand accounts, a monstrous Age had enveloped Cambodia. He accuses Chomsky of complicity in light of the Cambodian genocide. This is the most severe blow to the Chomskian thesis because it unmasks all the layers of sophistry which protect it. In essence, Lacouture accuses Chomsky of being an accomplice to the “murder of a people.” He writes:

*Plus tristes, plus grave, l'attitude prise, face au genocide cambodgien, par un certain nombre d'intellectuels americains adversaires de la strategie asiatique de Washington, dont le plus notable, et respectable, est a coup sur Noam Chomsky. [Il] deploya toutes les ressources de son genie*

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<sup>43</sup> Lacouture, Survive le peuple cambodgien! (1978), p. 5.



*dialectique pour demontrer, a moi et a la communaute scientifique et progressiste americaine, qu'il n'etait pas possible de porter d'accusation precise contre un pays ou n'avait pu penetrer un enqueteur serieux et sur lequel de nombreux temoignages jetaient en doute sur ceux, terribles, que nous citons...* [trans. More unfortunate, more serious still, the position taken with respect to the Cambodian genocide by a certain number of American intellectuals opposed to the Washington consensus on Asia, of whom the most notable and respectable is Noam Chomsky. [He] deployed all the resources of his dialectical genius to show me and the scientific and progressive American community that it was not possible to accuse a country where no serious inquirer had gained access in addition to the numerous testimonies that contradicted the ones we have cited here...]<sup>44</sup>

Lacouture's indictment of Chomsky and friends for ignoring the Cambodian genocide fell on deaf ears. His description of the exchange as centering around the scale of atrocities is correct. Chomsky and Herman both maintained that since no objective observers were present, no one could be sure of the scale of atrocities. Furthermore, by so insisting, Chomsky thus rejects the 1977 statistic proposed by Ponchaud, namely 1.2 million deaths.<sup>45</sup> He rejects it in part because it originated from the U.S. embassy in Bangkok, which was sure, according to him, not to know what it was talking about. Later, in *After the Cataclysm*, Chomsky insinuates that the scale is not hundred of thousands dead, but "hundreds or thousands." Lacouture's final words to Chomsky are perhaps his most severe, yet. Lacouture asserts, "*Le Cambodge et les Cambodgiens sont en marge de cet univers ethique ... Si Noam Chomsky et ses amis [Herman, Caldwell ou Bragg] en doutent, qu'ils etudient les dossiers, les cultures, les faits.*" [trans. Cambodia and Cambodians are on their way to ethnic extinction ... If Noam Chomsky and his friends [Herman, Caldwell or Bragg] doubt it, they should study the papers, the cultures, the facts."<sup>46</sup> Lacouture and his book were both dismissed in an endnote to the Chomsky-Herman book the following year (1979). In the main text of *After the Cataclysm*, Lacouture is found guilty by the righteous Chomsky and Herman court of an "incredible moral lapse."<sup>47</sup> And what exactly is this "moral lapse"? That of ignoring the U.S. responsibility in all that has happened to Cambodia since liberation. Next, we examine the link between the Chomsky-Herman thesis and the standard total academic view on Cambodia.

*Chomsky, Herman, and the STAV*

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>45</sup> Since it is believed that in 1978, the Khmer Rouge intensified their purges and clamped down even harder on their enemies, the death toll of up and until 1977 was probably not 1.2 million but less. However, it is still remarkable that this estimate is very close to the final non-trivial death toll estimate of 1.5 to 1.6 million.

<sup>46</sup> Lacouture, *Survive le peuple cambodgien!*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>47</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, p. 140.

Before delving into After the Cataclysm, we momentarily note Torben Retbøll's "Kampuchea and the Reader's Digest," an essay published in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, which was affiliated with Noam Chomsky.<sup>48</sup> The article covered the much-maligned Barron-Paul *Reader's Digest* book, Ponchaud's book and Lacouture's review. Like other articles on Kampuchea in *BCAS*, Retbøll's was peppered with propaganda photos of workers "happily" at work. Such pictures could visualize Democratic Kampuchea in a normal light, a difficult task at best. The *BCAS* was itself a powerhouse for the STAV on Cambodia. Laura Summers and Ben Kiernan were both contributors in late 1979. Summers held that Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia months earlier meant, in the pejorative, that Vietnam had lost its "revolutionary way."<sup>49</sup> Kiernan, on the other hand, made his side of a two-sided switch in that same *BCAS* issue, following Summers' article. He switched sides to support the "good Khmer Rouge" in the words of Stephen Morris. These were the pleasant Vietnamized Khmer Rouge of the eastern zone, not fanatical and always calm.

But returning now to Torben Retbøll's article, which preceded the Chomsky-Herman book, in it he forwards the same two falsified references Chomsky and Herman grasped out of the Barron-Paul book Murder of a Gentle Land. Retbøll's assertions are important because they represent support for the Chomsky-Herman thesis and a direct link to the STAV on Cambodia through the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. A point emphasized throughout Retbøll's essay is that Barron and Paul were committing something sinister and that ergo their whole book was up-to-no-good. The same Chomskian treatment for Ponchaud is in store. Retbøll vilifies him. He writes "The petty deceit which [Ponchaud] practices here and which is very easily exposed is not very likely to increase our confidence in those parts of his account which we are unable to verify."<sup>50</sup> Like Chomsky and Herman, Retbøll's critique of refugees calls for "care and caution" but ultimately leads back to the bottom line: suspicion. He writes,

Those relatively few persons who have cared about the facts and who quite unjustly have been branded as apologists of the new Kampuchea—such as, for instance, the late Malcolm Caldwell,

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<sup>48</sup> Retboll, "Kampuchea and the Reader's Digest," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 11, No. 3, June-September, 1979, pp. 22-27. Chomsky served as either as an editor to or on the board of the *BCAS*. He was also on the advisory board of *The Malcolm Caldwell Memorial Trust Fund*. *BCAS* paid tribute to the late Caldwell as the Chomsky of England.

<sup>49</sup> Summers, "In Matters of War and Socialism, Anthony Barnett Would Shame and Honor Cambodia Too Much," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 11, no. 4, October-December, 1979.

<sup>50</sup> Retboll, p. 24.

Noam Chomsky and Ben Kiernan--have all stressed that refugee accounts *should* be taken seriously and that there has been considerable suffering for the population. But they have also insisted that Kampuchea's isolation from the outside world is no excuse for believing everything, and that information about this country therefore should be treated with the utmost skepticism. [Emphasis is Retbøll's.]<sup>51</sup>

In an attempt to exculpate his colleagues, Caldwell, Chomsky, and Kiernan, Retbøll instead aggravates his own position and theirs. The few refugee accounts Chomsky and friends were taking seriously were ones that were favorable to the new Kampuchea. The bias against the majority of refugees is so severe that the only instance where a refugee critical of the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime is given equal treatment is when Chomsky taints him with CIA and drug-trafficking ties. Indeed, Retbøll's interpretation of the Chomskian position in the final sentence to his article corroborates Lacouture. Because no pure and "objective" viewers could be found, as the result of Khmer Rouge "self-reliance" foreign policy, the STAV defaulted to a position of "utmost skepticism" favorable to the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime. Next, we return to Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman and the only work in the Khmer Rouge Canon to still be defended by its authors. As sufficient evidence, in 1988, Herman, writing for himself and Chomsky, told the editors of the *New York Review of Books*,

Mr. Nordland's review [of Haing Ngor's [A Cambodian Odyssey](#)], which rests on one of the myths of the Pol Pot Era [that the Khmer Rouge "tried to exterminate or at least deliberately work to death a majority of the population"] as well as a now institutionalized lie about our own work on the subject [that Noam Chomsky attributed the deaths of the Pol Pot era to "nothing but" a war-induced famine], shows that our effort was and remains on target.<sup>52</sup>

As his evidence that the Khmer Rouge did not try to exterminate or work to death the majority of the Cambodian population, Herman points to the fact that the Khmer Rouge were "unable to come anywhere near meeting its objective."<sup>53</sup> We now turn to the book Herman refers to as the victim of an "institutionalized lie": [After the Cataclysm](#)

*Dialectical Acrobats in After the Cataclysm*

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman in the last stand for the STAV on Cambodia, authored [After the Cataclysm](#). It was the last stands because the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia had taken place in late December 1978, and the incontrovertible evidence to which Timothy Carney referred to in the footnote to his

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Herman, "Chomsky and the Khmer Rouge," *New York Review of Books*, March 27, 1988.

essay “Unexpected Victory” would pour down on the STAV shortly. At that point, the members of the STAV had to choose which side they were going to follow: the Vietnamese communists who maintained that atrocities and mass murder were taking place in neighboring Cambodia, or the Khmer Rouge who denied having committed such atrocities. The canonized scholars, in chapter 2, had quickly moved to counter the hysterical Western media and its bloodthirsty coverage of the new Kampuchea. The Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy had simmered for two years, and in 1979, the Chomsky-Herman book After the Cataclysm: Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology,” became the STAV’s final stand.

By 1979, to deny the existence of Khmer Rouge atrocities had become an untenable position given the mounting evidence pointing to unprecedented excesses. Chomsky and Herman were therefore very careful not to spread themselves too thinly when expressing “utmost skepticism.” In other words, they used language that would be vague; After the Cataclysm was peppered with token allowances and qualifications. For instance, Chomsky and Herman state that: “When the facts are in, it may turn out that the more extreme condemnations were in fact correct.”<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately for them, the facts were already in years earlier, when terrified Cambodians began to escape across the Thai border even before April, 1975.<sup>55</sup> Later, Chomsky and Herman add,

Perhaps evidence will be forthcoming to support the claim of the British Foreign Office that “many hundreds of thousands of people have perished in Cambodia directly or indirectly as result of the policies of the Communist government,” evidence more credible than the material on which they uncritically relied.<sup>56</sup>

How credible was the evidence Ponchaud, Barron-Paul, and Lacouture relied upon? How credible were terrified refugees? Not credible enough for Chomsky and Herman.

Chomsky and Herman’s tone on Cambodia in After the Cataclysm is set, in the very first sentence of the chapter by that namesake: “The third victim of *U.S. aggression and savagery* in Indochina, Cambodia, falls into a different category than postwar Vietnam and Laos. [Emphasis added.]”<sup>57</sup> After the Cataclysm is not and does not pretend to be a work of original research, no Cambodian refugees were interviewed or for

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. It would seem that the death of 750,000 Cambodians, the statistic Herman refers to in his letter, constitutes a mere 10 percent of the population, hence not a majority.

<sup>54</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 293.

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Twinning, “The Economy,” in Jackson, ed., Cambodia: 1975-1978 (1989).

<sup>56</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 293.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

that matter asked to be interviewed. After the Cataclysm is, if anything, a voluminously endnoted book. Chapter 6, on Cambodia, has 427 endnotes in 159 pages. Many of these endnotes are superfluous *ad hominem* attacks and commentary mixed with conniving cynicism. With no pretense to know where the truth lies, Chomsky and Herman attempt to undermine the credibility and validity of all sources critical of the Khmer Rouge. Their task, say the authors, “is not [to] establish the facts with regard to postwar Indochina but rather to investigate their refraction through the prism of Western ideology, a very different task.”<sup>58</sup> This convenient cloak allows its authors to legitimately attack the media’s coverage of the new Kampuchea, while appearing not at all concerned with searching for “truth” in and of itself. Chomsky’s defenders like to point out that he is performing “media analysis” not Khmer Rouge crimes analysis. That is why they object to categorizing the Chomskian thesis as a chapter in Cambodian studies.

Chomsky and Herman promote a theory of the Free Press which they engender from anecdotal evidence. That theory postulates that “the more severe the allegations of crimes committed by an enemy [of the American government], the greater (in general) the attention they receive.”<sup>59</sup> That tendency, they argue, appears only when communist countries are alleged to have committed these crimes. They juxtapose the case of East Timor’s massacres against that of Cambodia’s postwar regime and fervently maintain the hypocrisy of the media coverage when, on the one hand direct U.S. government cover-up of the massacres of Timor’s citizens leads to media silence, and on the other, those crimes being alleged of the Khmer Rouge are turned into a media frenzy. These examples, if correct, would surely put a dent in the armor of the Western media. For one, the Chomsky-Herman thesis that “If dictators were smarter, they would surely use the American system of thought control and indoctrination,”<sup>60</sup> would sound positively plausible.

The Free Press, Chomsky and Herman point out, was “unable to conjure up the bloodbaths in Cambodia,” (a sentence which mysteriously appears in one variant or another, sometimes with the word “exultant” in the work of Caldwell and that of Porter and Hildebrand). They rationalize that the widespread media use of three fake pictures and one To be sure, Chomsky and Herman contribute original ideas, but they are insufficient to balance their seething biases. Ponchaud’s letter (08/17/77) to Chomsky makes clear

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>59</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 140.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

that there were mistakes in Lacouture's review (which were acknowledged and corrected), and that some quotes were of dubious origin in Cambodia: Year Zero. But Ponchaud also makes clear he has grave concerns with Chomsky's dismissal of refugee testimonies, especially since they are so numerous and gruesome. In one memorable point in the letter, Ponchaud pointedly asks Chomsky "How many Khmer refugees have you interviewed, where, when, in which language?"<sup>61</sup> manufactured interview with Khieu Samphan by *Famiglia Christiana*, in which when asked "what had happened to all these [1 million missing] people," Samphan was quoted "It's incredible how concerned you westerners are about war criminals."<sup>62</sup> These instances of fraud were the tip of the counter-revolutionary propaganda iceberg. Chomsky and Herman are careful, however, not to deny the likelihood that atrocious crimes occurred in the new Kampuchea, though they doubt the scale is in the hundreds of thousands. By 1979, however, Chomsky and Herman had not cared to assess the new evidence, such as many more refugee reports, but then again, it was not their goal. "Media analysis" was their goal. But if that were the case, why did they feel compelled to suggest, contrary to Ponchaud and friends, that the Porter and Hildebrand book was on target when it had been but a bold-faced apologia for the Khmer Rouge? The Chomsky and Herman logic is simple enough: since no one can objectively assess the scale of atrocities in Cambodia, it would be wrong to speculate. "The record of atrocities in Cambodia is substantial and often gruesome," say Chomsky and Herman, "but it has by no means satisfied the requirements of Western propagandists, who must labor to shift the blame for the torment of Indochina to the victims of France and the United States [namely, the Indochinese countries themselves]."<sup>63</sup> Who would Chomsky and Herman rather blame for the "torment of Indochina"? Taking a cue from their younger colleagues in the STAV, Caldwell, Summers, Porter, and Hildebrand, Chomsky and Herman concur in blaming the United States. For instance, they argue that the media never takes into account the deplorable postwar conditions of the country (due mainly to "U.S. aggression and savagery") and the necessity of evacuating Phnom Penh to prevent impending starvation (again, due mainly to "U.S. aggression and savagery").

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<sup>61</sup> Ponchaud in a letter to Noam Chomsky, August 17, 1977, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>63</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 136.

Chomsky and Herman reject Ponchaud's assertion that there is a *prima facie* case against the Khmer Rouge. They question the credibility of refugees or what they are alleged to have said. They write:

Most of the well-publicized information concerning postwar Cambodia derives from reports of refugees--or to be more precise, from accounts by journalists and others of what refugees are alleged to have said. On the basis of such reports, these observers draw conclusions about the scale and character of atrocities committed, conclusions which are then circulated (often modified) in the press or the halls of Congress.<sup>64</sup>

Refugees tend to exaggerate stories, over time, Chomsky and Herman argue, which makes them less than ideal "objective" sources of information. In addition, Chomsky and Herman discredit some refugees altogether with their singular example of Pin Yathay whom they taint with alleged ties to the CIA and drug-trafficking.<sup>65</sup> Instead, they point to the experience of other expatriates (many of whom were not Cambodians, such as those found in Phnom Penh Libere) who saw no untoward behavior by the Khmer Rouge during the evacuation of Phnom Penh. According to them, the "censorship" of these favorable accounts by the mass media is additional fuel for counter-revolutionary bias. Chomsky and Herman perform what amounts to a defense of the Khmer Rouge cloaked in an attack on the media. They are high-minded when they demand documented evidence to point towards a "central direction and planning of atrocities," things which they know to be utterly impossible to find since no foreign observers are allowed entry unless invited.

"Serious inquiry" Chomsky and Herman declare, should examine the following issues: "(1) the nature of the evidence available; (2) the media selection from the evidence available; (3) the credibility of those who transmit their version of refugee reports and draw conclusions from them; (4) the further evidence they select and present."<sup>66</sup> They establish that the evidence is at best to be taken under advisement, though that would be generous. Their observations on the trustworthiness of the evidence has been covered previously. They argue that the media's selection of the evidence is biased against the Khmer Rouge. They question the credibility of those who transmit the evidence, mocking the Barron-Paul book as they had done two years earlier in "Distortions at Fourth Hand." They facetiously call the publisher, *Reader's Digest*, "that noteworthy journal of cool and dispassionate political analysis."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>65</sup> Pin Yathay published his own book in 1980 entitled L'Utopie meurtriere.

<sup>66</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm, p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

Chomsky and Herman are themselves cool and dispassionate towards their old friend and colleague Jean Lacouture, when they write,

We disagree with Lacouture's judgment on the importance of accuracy on this question, particularly in the present historical context, when allegations of genocide are being used to whitewash Western imperialism, to distract attention from the 'institutionalized violence' of the expanding system of subfascism and to lay the ideological basis for further intervention and oppression.<sup>68</sup>

The "expanding system of subfascism" that is being whitewashed by allegations of "genocide" has little basis, but their jihad goes on. They assert that Lacouture is trying to apologize for imperialism, when in fact, it is they who, at every opportunity, whitewash Khmer Rouge atrocities by obfuscating the evidence. Why is it, then, that if they were so uncertain of where the truth lay, that they could be so sure America was to blame? No one knows for sure, but we can examine what they have to say on the American role in the evacuation of Phnom Penh.

Like Hildebrand and Porter, Chomsky and Herman argue that the deplorable war conditions made the evacuation of Phnom Penh's residents necessary.<sup>69</sup> They write,

In the first place, is it proper to attribute deaths from malnutrition and disease to the Cambodian authorities?... It surely should occur to a journalist or the reader to ask how many of the deaths in Cambodia fall to the U.S. account. There is evidence on this matter, but it is systematically excluded from the press.<sup>70</sup>

The politics of food and starvation, a favorite topic of Caldwell, Porter, and Hildebrand, is not lost to Chomsky and Herman, when they postulate that if Phnom Penh had six to eight days of food after liberation, "the evacuation of Phnom Penh, widely denounced at the time and since for its undoubted brutality, may actually have saved many lives."<sup>71</sup> They forget that it was because of the Khmer Rouge's two month long siege of Phnom Penh that made the city a living hell for the 2 million refugees who now flooded her streets. Having it both ways, Chomsky and Herman argue in a self-contradictory logic that: (1) had there been starvation, it was due to American aggression and savagery; (2) that there may not have been starvation, or at least not as much as there could have been thanks to the brilliant Khmer Rouge evacuation strategy.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 149-150.

<sup>69</sup> There is remarkable irony in the fact that the Khmer Rouge used precisely the threat of U.S. bombs to scare its residents into an evacuation. There were, of course, no bombings.

<sup>70</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, p. 152.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 160.



Even when the issue of the evacuation of hospital patients is faced, Chomsky and Herman resort to the same justification offered by Hildebrand and Porter. They find a rationale for everything. They offer the same reasons as Porter and Hildebrand to justify the evacuation of all patients, namely that the conditions were deplorable, and that it was, in effect, an act of mercy. Lacouture, who objected to the evacuation and used it as an example of a gravely inhumane act, recalls a conversation he had with a Norwegian journalist who, like Chomsky, Herman, Porter, and Hildebrand, justified it this way:

*[Il m'a dit] "Mais vous ne savez pas que sous le regime de Lon Nol, la medecine etait aux mains des Americains, corrompue et decadente. Il fallait a tout prix arracher ces malheureux a ce corps medicale aliene..." [je lui dit:] Un nouveau "complot des blouses blanches." [trans. [He said to me:] But didn't you know that under the Lon Nol regime, medical practice was in the hands of the Americans, corrupt and decadent. These poor souls had to be ripped out, at all cost, from this alienating medical facility. [To which I replied:] A new "conspiracy of white coats ."]<sup>72</sup>*

In virtually every instance, the Chomsky-Herman thesis is parallel to the Porter-Hildebrand-STAV thesis. We may ask then, what were the differences? Chomsky and Herman simply added a media analysis cloak in addition to the aforementioned token allowances, to create a more palatable design. Their design, however, strays into *reductio ad absurdum*, when it compares the Khmer Rouge crimes to the "robbery and murder" committed by U.S. troops:

occupying Japan or their participation in mass murder of members of the anti-Japanese resistance in the Philippines, to take a case where the armed forces in question and the society from which they were recruited had not suffered anything remotely like the savagery that the Khmer Rouge had endured.<sup>73</sup>

Chomsky and Herman taking pity on the Khmer Rouge for why they committed gruesome crimes can otherwise be seen as an apology on their behalf. Its impact is nothing short of the *sine qua non* of the Khmer Rouge Canon: Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution.

The similarities between the Chomsky-Herman thesis and the Porter-Hildebrand-STAV thesis have been elaborated, but little has been said on their differences. For instance, Chomsky and Herman are not, unlike Hildebrand, Porter, Caldwell, and Summers, so gullible as to use emissary testimonials without qualification. Anyone believing that the Khmer Rouge would allow the sight of starving people or dead bodies in view of visitors would clearly be less than objective, they warned. Yet they do not see the STAV scholars, with whom they agree and rely upon, as having been anything less than objective when these

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<sup>72</sup> Lacouture, Survive le peuple cambodgien!, pp. 134-135.

authors plastered, without qualification, the comments of emissaries favorable to the new Kampuchea. Chomsky and Herman are careful to say directly that they are not among those “defending the Khmer Rouge,” a position that they maintain is highly unpopular even to them. But that is exactly what they do. They cite the Porter-Hildebrand book in the same glowing light as they did in “Distortions at Fourth Hand.” In the span of two years, Chomsky and Herman had discovered nothing new.

Finally Chomsky and Herman play the old broken-record of exposing erratas in the Barron-Paul book, in Ponchaud’s book, and in the media. It is much ado about nothing, in retrospect, given that to this day we still do not know whether the three photographs that were published in newspapers across the world were fake or real. Even to Chomsky and Herman, this did not seem to matter since, “Even if the photograph had been authentic, we might ask why people should be pulling plows in Cambodia, the reason is clear, if unmentioned. The savage American assault on Cambodia did not spare the animal population.”<sup>74</sup> They anticipate every contingency, as was alluded to earlier. But at the same time, this shows that they have their own preconceived version of truth, despite their claims of not pretending to know where the truth lies amidst these conflicting stories. They are resolute in concluding that:

There is no doubt that many hundred of thousands, if not millions of people have perished in other third world countries in the same period as a direct or indirect result of the policies of Western powers, victims of aggression, starvation, disease, hideous condition of work, death squads, etc. Furthermore, this will continue, with continuing Western responsibility but without government protest or media exposure. The conclusions from such a comparison seem obvious.<sup>75</sup>

It is no wonder to the reader that having passed such historical judgment on “Western powers,” Chomsky and Herman could not have been expected to look beyond the STAV on Cambodia. With such polemical conclusions, Chomsky and Herman’s “heroic effort to deny the bloodbaths”<sup>76</sup> is exposed for what it really is: a defense of the Khmer Rouge cloaked in sophisticated “media analysis.” While it served them well to write a book of mostly unoriginal ideas, as seen from the standpoint of chapter 2, hundreds of thousands, not “hundreds or thousands” as Chomsky and Herman insinuated, would die in Cambodia.

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>73</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, pp. 248-249.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 293-294.

<sup>76</sup> As quoted in Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm* p. 347n.

The Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy has been described in different if not contradictory terms by its participants. Lacouture and Ponchaud called it a “polemical” exchange, while Chomsky and Herman took it quite seriously. They were all partly right. The Controversy was a polemical exchange, which is unfortunate, because it was also very serious. It added insult to injury for the thousands of refugees fleeing Cambodia, not to speak of those who never lived to read the Chomsky-Herman-STAV thesis. What is apparent in the Chomsky-Herman line of argument is the attempt to divorce seeking truth from establishing it positively. There can be no doubt that Chomsky and Herman, unlike Summers, Caldwell, Porter, and Hildebrand tried their best to put on an objective face. They qualify both the emissaries’ and refugees’ stories with warnings, but they quote only the emissaries, not the refugees.

The 1977 and 1979 works of Chomsky and Herman, and those of Summers, Caldwell, Retbøll, Kiernan, Hildebrand, and Porter, are today remembered only in a footnote. Though they may be a parenthesis in history, these scholars and the standard total academic view they shared cannot be forgotten. The mistake they made was fundamentally the same: they were so caught-up in the idea of a peasant revolution that they did not to stop and ask the peasants themselves how they liked the ride. Additionally for Chomsky and Herman, the elder statesmen of the Left, their mistake was perhaps most egregious: Chomsky and Herman rejected the very idea of searching for truth, which at least those canonized in chapter 2 had pretended to do. Instead, they embarked on a high-minded crusade against media, based on secondary and tertiary evidence which they themselves accused the media of having used. For Chomsky and Herman, their hypocrisy knows no bounds. In the following chapter, we look beyond the STAV on Cambodia.

## CHAPTER 4: BEYOND THE STAV

*Perhaps someday they [Nixon and Kissinger] will acknowledge their “honest errors” in their memoirs, speaking of the burdens of world leadership and the tragic irony of history. Their victims, the peasants of Indochina, will write no memoirs and will be forgotten. They will join the countless millions of earlier victims of tyrants and oppressors.*

--Noam Chomsky, 1970<sup>1</sup>

*Now you're telling me you're not nostalgic,  
then give me another word for it.  
You were so good with words,  
and at keeping things vague.  
'Cause I need some of that vagueness now  
it's all come back too clearly.  
Yes I loved you dearly,  
and if you're offering me diamonds and rust,  
I've already paid.*

--Joan Baez, 1975<sup>2</sup>

Throughout this thesis, the canonized authors who found solidarity with the Khmer Rouge or simply the “Khmer peoples” claim that the Western media undertook an unprecedented propaganda campaign against the new Kampuchea. Furthermore, they assert that this campaign began soon after the fall of Phnom Penh.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Noam Chomsky,

The U.S. role and responsibility have been quickly forgotten or even explicitly denied as the mills of the propaganda machine grind away. From the spectrum of informed opinion only the most extreme condemnations have been selected, magnified, distorted, and hammered into popular consciousness through endless repetition.<sup>4</sup>

Upon closer examination, if anything were “magnified, distorted, and hammered,” it would be that very dubious assertion by the STAV on Cambodia of an unprecedented propaganda campaign. How often do capital cities of 2-3 million people get evacuated? In the history of the world this had never happened, until Phnom Penh. François Ponchaud notes that in France, under which Cambodia had been a colony until 1953,

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<sup>1</sup> Chomsky, *At War with Asia* (1970), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Coda to Joan Baez' song “Diamonds and Rust.”

<sup>3</sup> Porter and Hildebrand cite, for instance, “Cruelty in Cambodia,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 1975; “Exodus in Cambodia,” *Washington Star*, May 11, 1975; Jack Anderson and Les Whitten, “U.N. Ignores Cambodia Death March,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 1975; William Safire, “Get out of Town,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1975; Tom Wicker, “Revolution in Cambodia,” *New York Times*, May 12, 1975; and for editorials see “Cambodia's Crime,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1975; Max Lerner, “A New Hard Communism,” *New York Post*, May 14, 1975; “The Murder of Phnom Penh,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 10, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *After the Cataclysm*, p. 135.

newspaper coverage focused on the French embassy affair. In chapter 2, Summers referred to it as the “French Embassy Affair,” and denounced the French government for violating protocol. Ponchaud was more concerned, however, with the paucity of coverage on the death march itself. He writes:

The Khmer revolution has shown how woefully ill informed the French were. In April and May 1975 French newspapers gave most of their coverage the fate of the foreigners interned in the French embassy in Phnom Penh. Nothing could be more natural than that the press should rise up to denounce violations of human rights in Spain, Latin America, and South Africa. But nothing could be less justifiable than that so few voices should be raised in protest against the assassination of a people. How many of those who say that are unreservedly in support of the Khmer revolution would consent to endure one hundredth part of the present suffering of the Cambodian people?

With that said, Ponchaud exposes one of the biggest untruths about the media coverage of the new Kampuchea. Contrary to the STAV’s assertion that there was a media frenzy against the policies of the new regime, this chapter shows that coverage was fragmentary and not concerted. According to Ponchaud, the press denounced human rights violations elsewhere more than it did in the new Kampuchea. More rigorous media analysis by Shawcross shows that the onslaught began after the publication of Chomsky and Herman’s *After the Cataclysm*, when incontrovertible evidence surfaced after the Vietnamese invasion.

*Round One: “Media Can’t See Mountains for Molehills”*

Accuracy in the Media (AIM), a group Chomsky and Herman denounce as “right-wing,” found that for 1976, there were many times more stories and editorials by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* on the condition of human rights in South Korea and Chile than there were on Cambodia, Cuba, and North Korea, combined. This is especially surprising given that the *New York Times* was home to Sydney Shandberg, winner of a Pulitzer-prize for his coverage of the evacuation of Phnom Penh during the French embassy affair. Porter, Hildebrand, Chomsky, and Herman all criticized his article for starting a brouhaha over the evacuation of Phnom Penh. The November 1977 *AIM Report* rebuked the press in its headline: “Media Can’t see the Mountain for the Molehills.” Editor Reed Irvine, rhetorically asks, “Are Cambodia, Cuba, and North Korea ... relatively free from human rights violations ... in comparison with Chile and South Korea?”<sup>5</sup> For the readers of the *AIM Report*, he writes, “the answer may seem so obvious that you may wonder why we pose such a silly question.”<sup>6</sup> Later, Irvine insists that “For starters, the media might try giving the mountainous crimes of the Cambodian communists the kind of attention that they have been

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<sup>5</sup> Irvine, *AIM Report*, November 1977, Part I, No. 21, p. 1.

devoting to the relative molehills of human rights violations taking place in countries such as Chile and South Korea.”<sup>7</sup> Irvine is evidently outraged with the imbalance, as was Ponchaud with the French media’s paucity of coverage on Cambodia.

Irvine derived from the *Television News Index and Abstracts* a statistical table on media coverage of human rights in Chile, South Korea, North Korea, Cuba and Cambodia. The news organizations covered were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the three television networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC. The findings were startling.<sup>8</sup> The table covers 1976, and had by then passed the first anniversary of the evacuation of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge. In table 4.1, the reader will see that contrariwise to the Porter-Hildebrand-Chomsky-Herman claims, the *New York Time* and *Washington Post* published four and nine stories on human rights in Cambodia, respectively.

**Table 4.1: Human Rights in the News 1976**

	Chile	South Korea	North Korea	Cuba	Cambodia
<i>New York Times</i>	66	61	0	3	4
<i>Washington Post</i>	58	24	1	4	9
Sub-total	124	85	1	7	13
ABC	5	2	0	0	1
CBS	5	3	0	0	2
NBC	3	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	13	5	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	137	90	1	7	16

Source: *AIM Report*, November 1977, Part I, No. 21, p. 2.

According to table 4.1, Chile received more than eight times the coverage “on human rights problems” as compared to Cambodia. Pinochet was no angel, but he was no Pol Pot either. South Korea was covered merely 5.6 times more often. The total allocation of media resources to Cambodia paled in comparison to the massive campaign against Chile and South Korea, two non-communist countries.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the reason why

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> The *AIM Report*, it must be noted, took only two newspapers and three networks, granted all of which are major mainstream sources of news. Chomsky and Herman note a number of other, more diverse, sources ranging from the *New Republic* to the *Economist* that have, they argue, contributed to a media frenzy over Cambodia.

<sup>9</sup> A second part to the report was published, according to Chomsky and Herman, in May 1978 and “reprinted as a full-page advertisement in the *Washington Post* (2 June 1978). Accuracy in Media, which publishes the *AIM Report*, is a well-financed *right-wing* group which is concerned that the media do not adhere to the doctrines of *state propaganda* with sufficient loyalty, and under the guise of defending “accuracy” exerts pressures of various kinds to overcome this unfortunate situation. The alleged failure of the media to give

Chomsky and Herman use anecdotal evidence to prove their theories, is because they know that aggregate analysis would show that they were wrong.

*Round Two: "Massacre Stories a Big Lie"*

The charge that there was a propaganda campaign as it pertains to Chomsky's and Herman's theory of the Free Press is unsubstantiated for 1977. Porter, Hildebrand, and Summers insinuated that campaign's presence as early as 1975 and 1976. For the year 1977, coverage picked-up, but it remained dispersed. Stories appeared in a variety of newspapers, but these were not all negative. For instance, on March 30, 1977, the New York *Guardian* headlined a story by George C. Hildebrand "Kampuchean refugee challenges terror stories circulated in the U.S.A." in which refugee Khoun Sakhon says "I don't know what I'm doing here [in America], I feel I belong back there [in the new Kampuchea]."<sup>10</sup> By mid-1977, while in Washington D.C., Gareth Porter wrote to the editor of the *Washington Star*: "It requires hard work to dig through the available data and sift reliable from unreliable reports, but it is evident that the *Star* does not wish to be bothered with the task. And the value of your conclusions is therefore very doubtful."<sup>11</sup> A review of the Porter-Hildebrand book, Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, in June 1977 found that:

Refugee accounts portray the new leaders [of Democratic Kampuchea] as wildly irrational, visionary fanatics. Hildebrand and Porter disagree. Their sources? More than three hundred footnotes referring to suppressed information, confidential AID, World Bank and IMF reports, accounts of foreign diplomats and French journalists as well as the author's own *conversations with Cambodia's spokesmen*. Read this book to get a *fresh, well-documented and scholarly interpretation*; then make up your own mind, It could prove to be one of the most *unsettling experiences* you've read *since* reading the *Pentagon Papers*. [Emphasis added.]<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the reviewer did not attempt to reconcile these diametrically opposed views, instead he compares the Porter-Hildebrand book to the antiwar movement's favorite "Pentagon Papers." In October 1977, Yuri Antoshin declared that, "A new era, an era of peace, independence and socialist change, has opened before

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sufficient attention to "the Cambodian holocaust" is one of their staples. [Emphasis added.]" (Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm p. 346n) What is truly unfortunate is how easily Chomsky and Herman resort to *ad hominem* attacks which undermine their own credibility.

<sup>10</sup> Hildebrand, "Kampuchean refugee challenges terror stories circulated in the U.S.A.," *New York Guardian*, March 30, 1977. A smaller headline states, "Massacre stories a big lie."

<sup>11</sup> Porter, letter to the editor, *Washington Star*, late May 1977. The letter was in response to an editorial entitled "The Lessons of Cambodia," *Washington Star*, May 14, 1977.

<sup>12</sup> The review is available at the University of California Indochina Archive, in the Cambodian vault, in Berkeley, CA.

[Kampuchea].”<sup>13</sup> To be sure, media coverage in 1977 included negative stories, but these were dispersed, not concerted. For instance, it was in early 1977 that *Reader’s Digest* published the Barron-Paul book excerpt, at about the same time that Lacouture’s review appeared in the *New York Review of Books*. Later, in October, Morton Kondracke’s “How Much Blood Makes a Bloodbath?” appeared in the *New Republic*. Kondracke, who was in Bangkok, Thailand, interviewing refugees on the border writes:

[The] doves who pooh-poohed the bloodbath theory also were wrong and cannot escape the fact by saying, “oops it happened in Cambodia.” Some anti-war activists try to blame Cambodia’s fate on the United States, claiming that American bombing “destroyed the fabric” of the Khmer society, uprooted its population and accelerated communist “revolution” ... but the doves themselves had better explain why similar things haven’t happened in Vietnam, where the bombing and uprooting were worse, and more sustained. Clearly, Cambodia has fallen into the hands of monsters.<sup>14</sup>

Kondracke, who makes assertions similar to Lacouture’s, interviewed twelve refugees for the story. The fall of Saigon took place a month after the fall of Phnom Penh, and it is true that the Vietnamese communists were more restrained than the Khmer Rouge were in seeking vengeance. For one thing, they did not evacuate Saigon. Writing for the *New York Times* later that October, Henry Kamm quotes a refugee as saying “Americans are good,” a statement he finds “unfounded in view of Cambodia’s experience with the United States.”<sup>15</sup> More rigorous media analysis of the period immediately following the 1975 evacuation and 1979 invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam suggests that the STAV’s skepticism not only added insult to injury, but could have influenced public opinion sufficiently to kill the potential for a Cambodian cause before 1979. There was no *cause celebre* for Cambodia, as we shall next see.

### *Round Three: “Some Perceptions of a Disaster”*

Further examination of the media by William Shawcross in his 1983 essay “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster”<sup>16</sup> reveals that, contrary to Chomsky and Herman, many reporters covering Cambodia were actually sympathetic to the Khmer Rouge. Shawcross, who became famous for blaming the actions of the Khmer Rouge on the United States, thought that very few journalists “wanted to believe the bloodbath theory.” Some of the journalists, according to Shawcross, were so bold as to sing to the tune of “She Was Poor But She Was Honest” with the following lyrics:

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<sup>13</sup> Antoshin, “Kampuchea: On the new path,” *New Times*, October 1977, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Kondracke, “How Much Blood Makes a Bloodbath?,” *New Republic*, October 1, 1977, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Kamm, “Refugees Depict Cambodia As Grim, Work-Gang Land,” *New York Times*, October 31, 1977.



Oh will there be a dreadful bloodbath  
When the Khmer Rouge come to town?  
Aye, there'll be a dreadful bloodbath  
When the Khmer Rouge come to town.<sup>17</sup>

Chomsky and Herman made no mention of this in their own high-minded media analysis. Why? Simply because they saw only what they wanted to see: evidence which would prove media bias against the Khmer Rouge. Shawcross' own analysis found that:

Chomsky and Herman believe that the press coverage of Democratic Kampuchea from 1975-79 amounted to "a propaganda campaign" of "vast and unprecedented" scope. It is true that there was a lot of coverage during this period, but there was *not* the intensity which developed in the fall of 1979, after their book was published. Why was that? An important reason is that in the 1975-78 period, governments did not in fact put their immense resources behind a propaganda campaign. There was never an anti-Khmer Rouge conspiracy of the "free press," Thailand and its allied governments in the West as Chomsky and Herman assert.

Accounts of Khmer Rouge atrocities began to appear in the Western press in the summer of 1975 as Chomsky/Herman point out... But this did not constitute a massive or coordinated campaign against the Khmer Rouge--not by the "free press," and also not by governments... [Among the reporters who went to the Thai border] some believed, at least for a short time (as Chomsky and Herman were to believe for years), that the refugees were unreliable, that the CIA was cooking up a bloodbath to say, "We told you so," and so on. [Emphasis added by Shawcross].<sup>18</sup>

His analysis of Chomsky and Herman's goals are perceptive, and he does not lose sight of the slippery language in which they coat their arguments. Shawcross asserts, correctly, that the Chomsky-Herman goal was "designed to give an excuse--even a justification--to all those who denied (sometimes until the Vietnamese asserted it) that terrible things were happening in Cambodia. At least that has been the effect."<sup>19</sup>

Shawcross also tackles charge of bias which Chomsky and Herman level against the media. The bias concerned differential coverage of East Timor versus Cambodia. In East Timor, the Indonesian government had allegedly killed 200,000 out of over a million Timorese, Chomsky and Herman asserted, a proportion roughly equal to that suggested for Cambodia where Ponchaud had said in 1977 that 1.2 million had died out of 7 million. Chomsky and Herman argued that the media did not cover the East Timor massacres because Indonesia, a country friendly to the U.S., was the perpetrator. Shawcross suggests instead that:

A different, less conspiratorial, but perhaps more structurally serious explanation is that there has been a comparative lack of sources [in the case of Timor]. The American Government was very

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<sup>16</sup> Shawcross, "Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster," in Chandler and Kiernan, Revolution and its Aftermath in Kampuchea: Eight Essays (1983).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 238-239.

<sup>19</sup> Shawcross, "Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster," p. 233.

anxious to say nothing of Timor. So was the Indonesian Government. There were not many refugees; there was no “border” for journalists to visit.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, we may ask, were the STAV scholars interested in visiting the Thai-Cambodia “border” where countless refugees had amassed? Porter was in Washington D.C., Summers and Caldwell were in England, Kiernan, a graduate student, was in Australia, and Chomsky was at MIT. Armchair fieldwork, perhaps? When Kiernan and Hildebrand finally cared enough to visit the refugee camps in 1979, they quickly realized that the massacres were not all “a big lie.”

Did the STAV scholars realize that the harder they fought to defend the Khmer Rouge, the more likely they were fighting against truth itself? Shawcross’ heuristic evidence points to a realization by one member of the STAV that something was bizarre. He began to doubt himself even as he pressed on with the STAV’s version of the truth. Shawcross quotes Gavin McCormick, a colleague of Chomsky’s, and a proponent of the STAV on Cambodia, as having written in an essay:

The Kampuchean question is shrouded in a dense fog of prejudices, distortions, propaganda, and half truth. The Western media and intelligence worked hard on Kampuchea. But, and here is a tragic irony, it becomes increasingly likely that some of the most malicious fantasies of propagandists, conceived with little or no regard for truth, may actually be close to the truth. This is a difficult and unpalatable conclusion.<sup>21</sup>

McCormick’s boldfaced admission is seen by Shawcross as an attempt to “vindicate the fact that he and others ... denied the suffering of those people”--a difficult position at best. In chapter 3, we saw that for Chomsky and Herman, their hypocrisy knew no bounds, so why should there be an exception for their colleagues in the STAV? Shawcross’ scathing indictment continues,

In fact, the “scepticism”--a mild word in the circumstances--displayed by the Western left towards what was going in Cambodia is one of the principal reasons why an international campaign, such as that for Chile after 1973, was never mounted on behalf of the Khmers. The moral force of the left-- Communist and non-Communist--was not exerted on behalf of the Cambodians until 1979.<sup>22</sup>

Shawcross, who is well respected by the Left for his Sideshow: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Destruction of Cambodia (1979), a book that damns Nixon and Kissinger for creating the Khmer Rouge, is merciless towards the Left. The response by Chomsky and Herman has been to argue that nothing could have been done for the Cambodians. They quote, out of context, Douglas Pike’s response to Senator George McGovern’s call

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> As quoted in Shawcross, p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> Shawcross, “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster,” p. 241.

for “international military intervention” in Cambodia as having been “the notion of a quick, surgical takeout of the government of Cambodia probably is not possible.”<sup>23</sup> Chomsky and Herman use this as proof that the U.S. government was not going to do anything, ergo After the Cataclysm made no difference with respect to the final outcome. In an endnote, they call Pike a “State Department propagandist whose effusions are often simply embarrassing.”<sup>24</sup> Again, Chomsky and Herman want to have their cake and to eat it too.

### *The State of the STAV*

Sixteen years have passed since the STAV’s last stand. Since the 1979 publication of After the Cataclysm where are the romantics of the Khmer revolution? As alluded to in chapter 3, Chomsky and Herman maintain that they were right all along. For the canonized few, some, like Chomsky and Herman have remained in the academic limelight, others have quietly disappeared. This portion of the thesis is about what has happened to them. It attempts to reconcile the image of the young idealistic scholars/student with their current image. What has happened to the members of the STAV on Cambodia? What were the avenues for Summers, Caldwell, Porter, and Hildebrand? Michael Vickery offers three paths, summarized by Gunn and Lee, as follows:

- 1) Some decided they had been wrong and lost interest in Cambodia.
- 2) Others admitted they had been wrong and accepted the STV [Standard Total View by Ponchaud, Lacouture, Barron, Paul, the media], but sought to study why the revolution had run off the rails.
- 3) Others admit the STV is partially true and continue to insist that 1975-79 brought positive achievements. This group rejects the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) or Heng Samrin government solution and accepts uncritically the STV for 1979-80 [that 1 million deaths took place that year].<sup>25</sup>

These are, of course, ideal types. Few of the canonized authors fall squarely in one category versus another. Some, for instance, George C. Hildebrand, chose (3) and then switched (1). Others like Ben Kiernan chose (2) and performed a unilateral switch to the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (Cambodia’s new name between 1979 and 1989), led by former Khmer Rouge Heng Samrin. For his act of bravery, Kiernan was immediately issued a visa to visit the PRK. This was one side of a two-sided switch. Gareth Porter, like Kiernan, chose option (2) a la Hanoi. Laura Summers took option (3) initially, but today writes for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit’s reports on Cambodia. Finally, Chomsky and Herman have taken hybrid path between option (2) and

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<sup>23</sup> As quoted in Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm p. 345n.

(3). Although, if Vickery had created it, a fourth option might be to “continue to maintain that they were right all along,” which is what Chomsky and Herman have done.

*George C. Hildebrand*

George C. Hildebrand co-author with Gareth Porter of Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution, the *sine qua non* of the Khmer Rouge Canon, has kept silent on Cambodia. At the “Kampuchea Conference” in Stockholm, November 17-18, 1979 convened after the Vietnamese invasion, Hildebrand spoke to an audience of like-minded individuals who sought the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodian soil. Marita Wikander, chairman of the Swedish-Kampuchea Friendship Association, opened the conference with a message from Democratic Kampuchea President Khieu Samphan. Samphan’s letter states that:

During these 11 months of invasion, more that 500,000 Kampuchians have been massacred and more than 500,000 others have died from starvation... The aim of the Hanoi authorities is very clear: to empty Kampuchea of its population, establish there the Vietnamese settlement in its place, annex Kampuchea to be an integral part of their “Big Vietnam” under the sign of “Indochina Federation” and to carry on its expansion in Southeast Asia.<sup>26</sup>

The death toll from the Vietnamese invasion invites debate given that it sums to a convenient 1,000,000; nearly the total death toll being blamed on the Khmer Rouge themselves. There is no mention of any deaths under their own leadership until 1987, when an official Khmer Rouge document admits to 20,000 excess deaths.<sup>27</sup> Samphan’s position is almost the ideal type for Vickery’s third option, namely that it admits something went wrong (though that would happen later) during 1975-1979, but attributes the bulk of deaths on the Vietnamese.

From this, where does that leave Hildebrand? He give no specifics. From his speech, he falls in the third category of believers who resigned themselves to the fact that what Ponchaud, Lacouture, Barron, and Paul were saying was “partially true,” but continued to “insist that 1975-79 brought positive achievements.” Hildebrand, who is listed as a “scholar” at the Kampuchea Conference, begins his speech on an apologetic note:

Let me say at the out-set that, on the basis of my conversations with refugees in Thailand and the United States, I believe that there were some extremely serious problems in Cambodia during the period 1975-78. I believe that things happened that were, simply speaking, wrong, both morally

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<sup>25</sup> Gunn and Lee, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Samphan, message to the conference, Documents from the Kampuchea Conference (1980), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ashley, “Pol Pot, Peasants and Peace: Continuity and Change in Khmer Rouge Political Thinking,” IAS Chulaongkorn University paper seris no. 004, October 1992, p. 19.

and politically. Since the responsible authorities of the Government of Democratic Kampuchea, notably Deputy Premier Ieng Sary and State Council President Khieu Samphan, have acknowledged some very serious internal problems, and since they have invited constructive criticism, I feel it is my responsibility to indicate support for the reexamination and transformation, in the interests of heightening the unity of the Cambodian people in the face of what must be the most serious crisis they have ever faced [, the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam].<sup>28</sup>

Hildebrand's mealy-mouthed apology would mean something if he were actually sincere. More specifically, what does he now find so "morally and politically" wrong since having co-authored Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution? Nobody knows, he offers no specifics. In any case, at Hildebrand's askance for "reexamination and transformation," perhaps, the Khmer Rouge admitted in 1987 of having caused 20,000 deaths from malnutrition and illness during the evacuation of Phnom Penh, another 10,000 of whom died because of "Vietnamese agents" who had infiltrated the Khmer Rouge and taken liberties with innocent Cambodians.<sup>29</sup>

Hildebrand expends far more breath denouncing the Western media for its portrayal of the Khmer Rouge. For instance, he admonishes the *Washington Post* for publishing photographs which it later had to disavow, but, were subsequently republished in *Newsweek*, a subsidiary of the *Washington Post*, some months later. These were the same photographs Chomsky and Herman were crusading against in After the Cataclysm. Hildebrand then denounces the *New York Times* for trimming ambassador Kaj Bjork's positive comments on his visit to Cambodia. "All The News That's Fit to Print" citing the *New York Time*'s motto, Hildebrand retorts, "All the News That Fits." He then demolishes the almost three year-old condensed Barron-Paul "Murder of a Gentle Land" *Reader's Digest* article, pointing out that, "[Barron and Paul] unaccountably forgot to mention the Nixon Administration's February-August 1973 bombing of Cambodia -- bombing, according to U.S. Congressional sources aimed at least 50 percent [*sic*] at the Cambodian people..."<sup>30</sup> It is the same old broken record we have heard from Chomsky and Herman to Retbøll and Kiernan. In a new twist, Hildebrand mocks *Reader's Digest*'s reasons for not releasing the interviews used to write the Barron-Paul book. These reasons include (1) fear of reprisal against the refugee's family and (2)

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<sup>28</sup> Hildebrand, "Cambodia's independence struggle and Asian perspectives on the crisis in South East Asia," Documents from the Kampuchea Conference, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Ashley, pp. 19-20.

<sup>30</sup> Hildebrand, "Cambodia's independence struggle and Asian perspectives on the crisis in South East Asia," p. 66.

fear of litigation, to which Hildebrand responds: “Can people who raise such considerations really seriously be searching for truth about Cambodia?”<sup>31</sup>

Hildebrand spends the remainder of his speech condemning the Vietnamese and their propaganda practices. Having sharpened his skills on the Americans, Hildebrand has no problem portraying the Vietnamese as STAV enemy number one. He writes,

Can we trust the Vietnamese, and their friends in Phnom Penh?... This handful of subservient functionaries, who as long as 23 March [1979] announced a “serious food shortage” in Cambodia in the hopes of turning international aid into back-door recognition of their regime, and who, confronted with the failure of this play, then declared through their spokesman... last month [October 1979] in Moscow, that “No one is starving in our country?”<sup>32</sup>

His new sensibilities are refreshing. Suddenly, the “subservient functionaries” and “spokesman” to the “Vietnamese” and “their friends in Phnom Penh” are no longer good enough to converse with as the “Cambodian spokesmen” were when he co-authored his 1976 book. He discovers that, “War implies propaganda... so let us proceed with due caution in trying to understand Cambodia from all that is said about the Cambodians from their enemies, past and present.”<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately for Hildebrand, the lesson ends when revolution implies propaganda. Like the other romantics of his generation, “utmost skepticism” meant “utmost skepticism to what you don’t like.”

Hildebrand’s final comments are his most passionate yet. With respect to international relations and the balance of power in the region, he calls upon the world community to stop Vietnam now. “The policies of the Vietnamese government, Party, and Army,” he says, “are totally wrong.” He continues, “They are a threat to the region and a threat to the world. They must be stopped--and they must be stopped now.”<sup>34</sup> In retrospect, Hildebrand should have said the same about Democratic Kampuchea four years earlier, but of course, he never did. Speaking with moral authority, he states:

I strongly urge you to do everything you can to support Cambodia, to promote unity among the Cambodian people living abroad, to extend all possible aid to refugee victims of this aggression, whether Boat People or Lao and Cambodian land refugees--and contrarywise [*sic*], to deny any form of aid or support to the aggressor at this time, and to support the human rights and democratic

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Hildebrand, “Cambodia’s independence struggle and Asian perspectives on the crisis in South East Asia,” p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

struggle in the region, so that the people--the one sure force we can count on--will be free to give their fullest energies in support of the independence of their countries.<sup>35</sup>

These are a lot of histrionics from a man whose first instinct was to support the Khmer Rouge's evacuation of Phnom Penh. He sees the Vietnamese aggression as a "threat to the region and a threat to the world" but could not see the threat from within. While terrified refugees were lepers to be cautiously handled, their stories always under suspicion, now, "all possible aid" was to be extended to them. One wonders how Hildebrand reconciled his flip-flop on refugees. One wonders too what has happened to him since the 1979 Kampuchea Conference. He has not published since then, and is assumed to have switched into Vickery's first category, those who "simply lost interest."

*Gareth Porter*

Gareth Porter falls somewhere along the second type of reaction proposed by Vickery. He shifted gears rapidly from a focus on Cambodia to Vietnam, the country for which his old professor George McTurnin Kahin had made a name for himself. In May 1977, Porter testified in congressional hearings on human rights in Cambodia. He told the committee:

But the notion that the leadership of Democratic Kampuchea adopted a policy of physically eliminating whole classes of people, of purging anyone who was connected with the Lon Nol government, or punishing the entire urban population by putting them to work in the countryside after the "death march" from the cities is a myth fostered primarily by the authors of a *Reader's Digest* book . . .<sup>36</sup>

Of course, this was still 1977, and the STAV on Cambodia was in great shape especially with emergence of the dynamic duo of Chomsky and Herman to their rescue. Moreover, Porter's testimony would in turn help Chomsky and Herman make their own case. Since Porter continued to remain unconvinced by the refugee reports because of internal contradictions found in some of them, he pointed this out to the committee. He was subsequently embraced by Chomsky and Herman, both for his testimony and for the "well-documented" book he co-authored with Hildebrand: Cambodia: Starvation and Revolution. In After the Cataclysm Chomsky and Herman write:

In the May Hearings Porter cites the case of Chou Try, who told a CBS reporter that he had witnessed the beating to death of five students by Khmer Rouge soldiers. In October 1976, he told Patrice de Beer of *Le Monde* that he had witnessed no executions though he had heard rumors of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> As quoted in Morris, "Ho Chi Minh, Pol Pot, and Cornell," p. 59.

them... As Porter and Retbøll both insist, refugee reports should certainly not be disregarded, but some care is in order.<sup>37</sup>

To be sure, the contradictions were minor ones, but we know that Chomsky, Herman, Retbøll, and Porter invented new ways of treating refugees, “with care and caution,” “utmost skepticism,” otherwise known as suspicion. Porter, who was not discussed in chapter 3 for his involvement in the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy, played a small, but acknowledged part. In Ponchaud’s “Note for the English Translation” to his book Cambodia: Year Zero, he writes:

[In addition to Mr. Chomsky,] Mr. Gareth Porter also criticized my book very sharply during a congressional hearing on the subject of human rights in Cambodia, and argued that I was trying to convince people that Cambodia was drowned in a sea of blood after the departure of the last American diplomats. He denied that a general policy of purge was put into effect and considered that the tragedy through which the Khmer people are now living should mainly be attributed to the American bombings. He censured me for lacking a critical approach in my use of refugee accounts, on the ground that they were not credible because the refugees were deliberately trying to blacken the regime they had fled.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, Porter made significant contributions to his own stature at the 1977 May Hearings. He went to work for the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., and while there wrote letters to the editor, such as the one denouncing the *Washington Star*. According to Morris, Porter then took temporary teaching positions until he became an aid to Representative Clarence Long of Maryland. From there, he gained the position of “Professional Lecturer” in Southeast Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies. While there, he contributed an essay to the Chandler-Kiernan book Revolution and Its Aftermath in Kampuchea (1983), the same book in which William Shawcross attacked Noam Chomsky, Gavin McCormick, the STAV, viz. the Left in his essay: “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster.” Porter now specializes on Vietnam more so than on Cambodia.<sup>39</sup> His essay in the Chandler-Kiernan book is about Vietnamese communist policy towards Cambodia covering 1930 to 1970. Using Vickery’s possible paths, Porter would most likely fit in the second category. Although this author has yet to see Porter’s *mea culpa*, he has evidently tried his best to avoid the whole issue of his past involvement.

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<sup>37</sup> Chomsky and Herman, After the Cataclysm p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> Ponchaud, Cambodia: Year Zero (1978), p. xiv.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, “Little Evidence of 1968 Tet Massacre in Hue (Vietnam)” (letter to the editor), *New York Times*, vol. 137, October 29, 1987; and “Cambodian resistance: to what end?,” *Christian Science Monitor*, vol. 77, February 12, 1985.



Like Kiernan, who switched over to the People's Republic of Kampuchea not long after the invasion, Porter would presumably be in that camp. Next, we turn to Laura Summers, the only woman to be canonized.

*Laura Summers*

By 1979, Laura Summers was not so openly doting the Khmer Rouge or their revolution, though she remained quite sympathetic to their cause. In a *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* article of that same year entitled, "In Matters of War and Socialism, Anthony Barnett Would Shame and Honor Kampuchea Too Much," she argues against her fellow socialist colleague Anthony Barnett who, like Kiernan, had switched to the PRK. Summer's wrath on American foreign policy in "Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution" and "Defining the Revolutionary State in Cambodia" was replaced by a Hildebrand-style denunciation of Vietnam. In any event, Kampuchea was always the unwilling victim of foreign intrusion and intervention. In that sense, Summers falls in Vickery's third category of true believers. They "admit the STV [Ponchaud-Lacouture-Barron-Paul thesis] is partially true [but] continue to insist that 1975-79 brought positive achievements," and denounce the 1979-1980 invasion period as the genocide of a people. She writes,

The media image of Kampuchea as the most radical, heretical and murderous of socialisms probably bedevilled [*sic*] Vietnam's foreign policy thinking and sense of socialist and national superiority... By 1978, Vietnam took the bait. It exploited the Western image of Kampuchea to justify its armed and political intervention in the internal affairs of its neighbouring communist state in a manner suggesting nothing more or less than expediency.<sup>40</sup>

The mind-boggling naïveté, exposed in her first *Current History* article, has been replaced by an unadorned anti-Vietnamese line. Having been unreservedly in support of the Khmer revolution, she could not allow Vietnam's foreign policy to interfere with Kampuchea's future. It is remarkable that Summers makes no mention of any atrocities in Democratic Kampuchea in the 1979 *BCAS* article. Perhaps it is not the purpose of her article, just as it was not Porter's in "Vietnamese Policy Towards Kampuchea, 1930-1970."

Instead, Summers engages Barnett in a debate over war and socialism, to be sure, more sophistry. Summers asks, "So did the Kampuchean start the war or not? In my opinion, we'll never know. Moreover, it is probably not important to know who fired the first the first shot. They are indicative of deep political

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<sup>40</sup> Summers, "In Matters of War and Socialism, Anthony Barnett Would Shame and Honor Kampuchea Too Much," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 11, no. 4, October-December 1979, p. 11.

conflict. In the absence of resolution by other means such conflicts find martial expression.”<sup>41</sup> She surmises that, “clashes occurred between the two neighboring states [Vietnam and Cambodia] in the aftermath of their extremely difficult liberation struggles is not at all surprising.”<sup>42</sup> Her syntactic use of “Kampuchians,” presupposes that the Khmer Rouge legitimately represent all Cambodian. It is only a small change from her early adoption of “Khmer” for “Khmer Rouge” in “Cambodia: Consolidating the Revolution.” Summers partially reveals her position, with respect to the STAV, when she writes, “These impressions and judgments [against Kampuchea and in favor of Vietnam] are apparently based on the consensus of opinion in the world media, excluding the serious press—the opinions of specialists hostile to Kampuchea—Vietnamese state propaganda and other forms of hearsay.”<sup>43</sup> She refers presumably to the momentum gained after the invasion of Cambodia, in which the 1979 media that, according to Shawcross, drew worldwide attention to the atrocities in Democratic Kampuchea. Summers mocks Vietnam’s concurrence with the findings of an Oslo conference on “alleged atrocities” (a recurring marker in Caldwell, Chomsky, et al.) committed by the Khmer Rouge and is particularly critical of *Reader’s Digest* for giving Vietnam ammunition to proselytize its own citizens against Kampuchea. In what must be a strange admission, she concludes that “It is difficult not to see the imperial “divide and rule” obstructing peace between warring communist neighbors.”<sup>44</sup> Wrapping-up her article with a tampered Hildebrand-style call-to-action, she writes:

The final task confronting anti-war activists should be the most obvious (though I fear, given the extraordinary confusion and partisanship alternately paralyzing or dividing international opinion, isn’t). But if we are to lend meaningful support to the Kampuchean people *and* the Vietnamese people who pay the price for the undemocratic, martial adventures of their states as well as part of the high human cost of the criminal invasion to punish Vietnam launched by the Chinese authorities, then, it should be apparent that peace requires the withdrawal of the Vietnamese army from Kampuchea. To express disapproval of Vietnam’s Kampuchea policy, to discuss it critically, is not to “attack” Vietnam or to be “hostile” to the Vietnamese revolution.<sup>45</sup>

Her conciliatory remarks on behalf of the antiwar activists bears little resemblance to her fiery anti-American rhetoric of past articles. She concedes, by her own admission, that “martial adventures” are possible among

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Summers, “In Matters of War and Socialism, Anthony Barnett Would Shame and Honor Kampuchea Too Much,” p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

socialist states and that these are “undemocratic.” She still possesses, however, the same young, idealistic, romantic views of liberation a la peasant revolution, and anti-colonial struggles. Summers continues,

To the contrary, it is perhaps the best way to defend the *visions of liberation* from *colonial tyranny* and *imperial subjection* which inspired the Vietnamese revolution from its origins--*visions* which seem moreover *worthy of liberation*. In denying rights of sovereignty and independence to the Kampuchean nation, the Vietnamese state has simply *lost its revolutionary way*. In defense of peace between the Kampuchea and Vietnamese peoples, democrats everywhere are obliged to say so. [Emphasis added.]<sup>46</sup>

Summers herself has not lost her “revolutionary way.” Four years after the “monstrous dark age ... has engulfed the people of Cambodia,” she wants more. Though she does not elaborate how democrats can be obliged to say anything of “visions of liberation,” “colonial tyranny,” “imperial subjection” that seem “worthy of liberation,” her 1979 *BCAS* article sounds positively objective when compared to her earlier 1975 and 1976 essays in *Current History*. The irony of it is that she achieves this while attacking her socialist colleague, Anthony Barnett.

Whether Laura Summers would continue to defend the Khmer revolution to this day, no one can be sure. What is clear, though, is that she is still active in Cambodian studies. She currently teaches at the University of Hull and contributes frequently to the Internet list *Seasia-L*, though refrains from public debate through that channel. She is gratefully acknowledged for helping current scholars on Cambodia do research, myself included. Furthermore, Morris’ parenthetical note on Summers states, “[She]...subsequently reevaluated [her] pro-Khmer Rouge views, and now discretely sympathizes with the Cambodian noncommunists.”<sup>47</sup> She is rumored to be the person in charge of writing for the *Economist*’s Intelligence Unit reports on Cambodia. If that is correct, it would be ironic given the *Economist*’s noncommunist proclivity. In sum, Summers would be classified in Vickery’s typology as a type three (mostly rejects the Ponchaud-Lacouture-Barron-Paul thesis) moving slowly to a type two (where she mostly accepts the thesis). Next, we remember Malcolm Caldwell’s contributions and surmise where he would stand with respect to the STAV on Cambodia today.

*Malcolm Caldwell Remembered*

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<sup>46</sup> Summers, “In Matters of War and Socialism, Anthony Barnett Would Shame and Honor Kampuchea Too Much,” p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> Morris, “Ho Chi Minh, Pol Pot, and Cornell,” p. 60.

Malcolm Caldwell never had the opportunity to look back at the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime after it was overturned by Vietnamese troops. He was killed only days before the invasion began, while in Phnom Penh. Caldwell, along with Richard Dudman and Elizabeth Becker were the first Western journalists (Caldwell's *London Times* curiously titled article, "Inside Cambodia: another side to the picture," qualified him as a journalist) to be invited into Cambodia in December 1978. Malcolm Caldwell's last conversation with Elizabeth Becker, a correspondent for the *Washington Post*, is our last entry for him. Becker recounts their conversation the evening of his death:

After dinner, Dudman went to his room to type up notes and Caldwell and I stayed at the table to have our last argument about Cambodia. Caldwell took what he considered the longer view and said the revolution was worth it. I said, on the contrary, I was more convinced of the truth of the refugee stories—which is what I eventually wrote. That night Caldwell tried once more to get me to change my mind. He compared Cambodia to Scotland—he was a Scottish nationalist—and said Cambodia feared Vietnam the way Scotland feared the English. I saw no relevance to such a remark, and he retired to his room with the prophecy that Scotland would be independent of England by the middle of the 1980s.<sup>48</sup>

The Khmer Rouge Canon has seen many a comparison between the Khmer revolution and other revolutions. Summers compared it to the Puritan revolution in England. She thought it out of "cultural and historical context" when compared to the Russian experience. Here we see a comparison between the geopolitical status of Cambodia and that of Scotland. Many observers agree that Cambodia is like Poland, in between larger states, but like Scotland? We may ask too whether Scotland is anywhere closer to independence in the 1990s than it was in the 1980s? Predictive abilities aside, Caldwell was simply way off the mark in comparative politics.

Later that December night, Caldwell was murdered by a Khmer Rouge assassin in a "plot meant to embarrass the regime on the eve of war." Becker adds that, "Circumstantial evidence inside the confessions [of the assassins] suggests that Caldwell was selected because he was the "friend" of the revolution..."<sup>49</sup> Becker surmises that the assassination was planned by someone in the "inner party circle" opposed to Pol Pot. Also from confessions exacted from two men who were tortured at Tuol Sleng<sup>50</sup> for the murder of

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<sup>48</sup> Becker, *When the War Was Over* (1986), p. 433.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 436.

<sup>50</sup> See David Hawk's "The Photographic Record," in Jackson, *Cambodia: 1975-1978*. According to Hawk, "Tuol Sleng was an examination center at the hub of a nationwide system of imprisonment, interrogation, torture and execution. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, Pol Pot's forces retreated so precipitously that they left behind tens of thousands of pages of archives from S-21 'bureaucracy of death.'

Caldwell, Becker concludes in her Epilogue that “Caldwell’s death would show that the revolution could not even care for its friends, that it was fraught with chaos. The two Americans [Becker and Dudman] were saved so that they could write back about the attack.”<sup>51</sup>

The *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* remembered Caldwell in a 1979 article entitled “Malcolm Caldwell, 1931-1978.”<sup>52</sup> The authors of the article, Peter F. Bell and Mark Selden, eulogize him. Like Summers’ *BCAS* essay of that same year, Bell and Selden sound conciliatory if not positively dialectic:

[Caldwell’s] death was tragically linked to the contradictions of socialist revolution in Southeast Asia; he was caught in the contradictory cross-fire of the very changes for which he had struggled so long. The subsequent Vietnamese overthrow of the Pol Pot regime underlines forcibly the need for a critical evaluation of the revolutionary regimes in Southeast Asia, to which many of us gave strong support in previous years.<sup>53</sup>

On that apologetic note, which of the revolutions (Khmer or Vietnamese) Bell and Selden refer to is not self-evident. Caldwell is remembered as an “indefatigable activist” who was also “best known abroad for his books and articles and for his work as a founding editor and moving spirit of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, the only English journal explicitly committed to the revolutionary movements of Asia.”<sup>54</sup>

In Bell’s and Selden’s estimation, Malcolm Caldwell was not one to beat around the bush when it came to supporting the revolution in Kampuchea. As was clear in his own writings of the Khmer Rouge regime, published both before and after his death, Caldwell was among those who romanticized the Khmer revolution enormously. Bell and Selden write,

Malcolm, one of the staunchest defenders of the Pol Pot regime in the West, viewed that regime through the prism of agrarian revolution. His systematic attempt to deflate Western journalistic reports of mass executions in Kampuchea made him the object of attack from many quarters. He was accused by some of Stalinism for this type of reasoning: “How many people died in the French revolution? (His long essay on Kampuchea may be published in England as a book.) To the end he defended the right to national self-determination and to the charting of independent routes to socialism for Vietnam as well as for Kampuchea and all others.”<sup>55</sup>

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These meticulously kept records indicate that nearly twenty thousand were executed (literally ‘smashed to bits’) at Tuol Sleng” (Hawk, pp. 209-210).

<sup>51</sup> Becker, p. 447.

<sup>52</sup> Bell and Selden, “Malcolm Caldwell, 1931-1978,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 11, no. 3, July-September 1979, p. 19-21.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* The *Journal of Contemporary Asia*’s 1975-1979 contributions to the STAV have not been covered in the “Khmer Rouge Canon” for lack of time. Like *News from Kampuchea*, the *JCA* is yet another testament to the ubiquity of the STAV on Cambodia.

<sup>55</sup> Bell and Selden, p. 20. The *Journal of Contemporary Asia*’s 1975-1979 contributions to the STAV have not been covered in the “Khmer Rouge Canon” for lack of time. The *JCA* was a major powerhouse for the

From comparisons to Scotland's independence movement, the Puritan revolution, and Russian history, the Khmer revolution is now equivalent to the French revolution. Fittingly so, in remembering Caldwell, his colleagues compare him to the celebrated Noam Chomsky. They continue:

The British scholar and journalist, John Gittings, writing in the *London Guardian*, compared Caldwell's role to that of Noam Chomsky in the U.S.--"a lone heretic in the academic world, of enormous personal charm who was respected internationally for views which many colleagues failed to understand." Malcolm's writings did not spring from a consistent theoretical conception, and he was often eclectic. His major concern was to expose historical and contemporary exploitation. A brilliant critic of imperialism in general, and U.S. imperialism in particular, he sought to capture the *human* experience which led Asian people in country after country to rise in revolution.<sup>56</sup>

Caldwell was a dye in the wool revolutionary. He had expressed concern to Utrecht (see chapter 2) before visiting the new Kampuchea, that if an innocent peasant had been killed it was a token of fascism. But we know from Becker that after interviewing Pol Pot, "[Caldwell] returned delighted with his time with Cambodia's leader. The two had spent most of the interview discussing revolutionary economic theory, the topic of choice for Caldwell throughout the trip."<sup>57</sup> So much so that Caldwell was invited to return the following year by Pol Pot, "to measure how the revolution had prospered. [Caldwell] agreed as long as it would not coincide with the Christmas holiday, when he preferred to be with his family."<sup>58</sup> Caldwell, if he were alive, would surely be in Vickery's third category, namely those who insist "1975-1979 brought positive achievements." Next we examine whether Edward Herman has moved beyond the STAV on Cambodia.

#### *Edward S. Herman*

Like many of the STAV scholars who found solidarity with the Khmer people and their revolution, Herman has not offered any explanation, excuse, or recantation for his position. It is true that because his work with Chomsky was cloaked in media analysis, he has had an easier time defending himself. He continues to maintain that his work with Chomsky, "was and remains on target."<sup>59</sup> Given that position, he would likely fall, in Vickery's third type: those who remain believers in the Khmer Rouge mission even if it is not divorced from the violence they acknowledge took place, though on a smaller scale than is normally

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Khmer revolution and continues to operate to this day. Like *News from Kampuchea*, the *JCA* is yet another testament to the ubiquity of the STAV on Cambodia.

<sup>56</sup> Bell and Selden, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Becker, pp. 432-433.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 433.

accepted. Herman likes to use Michael Vickery's estimate of 750,000 deaths resulting from 1975-1979 because it is among the lower estimates available (notwithstanding the Khmer Rouge's admission of having caused 20,000-30,000 deaths). In a letter to the editor of the *New York Review of Books*, Herman had this to say, "Rod Nordland's assertion... that the Khmer Rouge 'tried to exterminate or at least deliberately work to death a majority of the population' resuscitates an especially foolish propaganda claim of the 1970's that has been rejected by every serious student of the subject." Adding,

It also fails to explain why, if the Khmer Rouge aim was "autogenocide," it was unable to come anywhere near meeting its objective. The best overall survey of the period, by Michael Vickery, estimates 750,000 excess deaths in the Khmer Rouge era from all causes (including starvation and disease from the terrible early postwar conditions), on a population base of six to eight million.<sup>60</sup>

Herman's assertion is a simple one: in order for the word autogenocide to be used, the majority of Cambodians would have to be dead. Since this was not the case, it cannot be called "autogenocide." What Herman would call it, nobody knows, since he does not call it anything at all. Herman writes, "Mr. Nordland's review is based on an implausible and ridiculous myth."<sup>61</sup>

Herman would not take back anything, to say the least. He felt all the more vindicated in making his conclusions in light of these myths and attacks on his work with Chomsky. This use of the evidence appears quite circular. If the media objects to the theory of the Free Press, then it must be proof that the theory is right. Herman posits:

[Mr. Nordland's] further assertion that Noam Chomsky attributed the deaths of the Pol Pot era to "nothing but" war-induced famine [by the Americans] is an outright lie. Mr. Chomsky (and the present writer, who was co-author with Mr. Chomsky of his published works on Cambodia) went to great pains to stress that there were no doubt that the Khmer Rouge was committing serious crimes, although we took no position on their scale (which was very uncertain at the time).<sup>62</sup>

Instead, Herman contends that his work with Chomsky was not about the Khmer Rouge *per se*, rather the media coverage and its distortions. He is at least partly correct, after all, the chapter on Cambodia in *After the Cataclysm* was mainly an analysis and critique of the media and the Ponchaud-Barron-Paul-Lacouture thesis. Hence, the cloak of "media analysis." Herman is vainglorious, when he asserts that, "These were perfectly legitimate subjects in themselves, justified even more by the fact that the West wasn't even

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<sup>59</sup> Herman, "Chomsky and the Khmer Rouge," *New York Review of Books*, March 27, 1988.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Herman, "Chomsky and the Khmer Rouge."

*proposing* doing anything useful for the victims...”<sup>63</sup> This final assertion which invites debate given the fact that the Left in which Chomsky and Herman were prominent members, along with the STAV, could have turned Cambodia into a *cause celebre*, as argue Ponchaud, Shawcross, and AIM, did nothing of the sort. Herman is indignant, and concludes:

But in the West, to focus on the distortions and hypocrisies of a propaganda campaign is to become an “apologist” for the villains of that campaign. Mr. Nordland’s review, which rests on one of the myths of the Pol Pot era as well as a now institutionalized lie about our own work on the subject, show that our effort was and remains on target.<sup>64</sup>

Herman’s reaction is not unexpected. “Perhaps someday,” to reverse Chomsky’s phrase, the STAV scholars “will acknowledge their ‘honest errors’ in their memoirs, speaking of the burdens” of academia and the “tragic irony of history. Their victims, the peasants of Indochina, will write no memoirs and will be forgotten. They will join the countless millions of earlier victims of tyrants and oppressors.”<sup>65</sup> This brings us finally to Noam Chomsky, *linguiste extraordinaire*.

*Noam Chomsky*

Of all the STAV scholars who were involved in the debate on Cambodia, Chomsky was honored even by Jean Lacouture, as the most respectable among them. Bruce Sharp, editor of *Cambodian Life*, a Texan periodical on Cambodian issues, makes a number of excellent points, for which I am indebted. Sharp writes:

The mistake that I think Noam Chomsky makes is a pretty common one. He has formulated a theory about collusion between the government and the media, and he looks for evidence to support his theory ... To emphasize: he looks for evidence to support his theory. He doesn’t simply examine evidence objectively. He seeks out evidence that supports his theory, and disregards evidence that tends to dispute it. And in the case of Cambodia, that has caused him to accept some very dubious conclusions ... Any attempt at honest scholarship would have revealed that the stories were true. But Chomsky never bothered to make that effort; because Hildebrand and Porter were saying what he wanted to hear, he did not subject their claims to the same rigorous critique that he applies to works which contradict his opinions. That is a pity... I think Chomsky has few peers when it comes to cutting through bullshit.<sup>66</sup>

Sharp’s critique of Chomsky underlines the academic mistake that caused scholars in the STAV to reject refugee stories with suspicion. They were so caught-up in the idea of a peasant revolution that they did not stop and ask the peasants themselves how they liked the ride. Sharp’s assertion that Chomsky “has few

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Chomsky, *At War with Asia*, p. 187.



peers” is especially true now, since he continues to maintain no one has successfully challenged his claims in After the Cataclysm. He and Herman do admit to having expressed “skepticism” in “Distortions at Fourth Hand,” though that would be a “mild word in these circumstances” according to Shawcross. In 1988, Chomsky’s and Herman’s theory of the Free Press is still on target according to their latest book, though their scale of atrocities in Cambodia is quite a bit off.

### *Manufacturing Consent*

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman devote a paltry thirty-six pages and seventy-two endnotes to Cambodia (a far cry from their 159 pages and 427 endnotes in After the Cataclysm) in Manufacturing Consent (1988).<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, they offer little that is new. By the third page of their section on Cambodia, Chomsky and Herman continue their blame the U.S. game. Their righteous rhetoric is mildly tampered now, though still present. Chomsky and Herman clarify that they expressed “skepticism” in “Distortions at Fourth Hand” in reference to claims of atrocities. They write, “To be clear, in our one article, to which Ponchaud alludes, we did express some ‘skepticism,’ not only about the claims that had already been withdrawn as fabrications but also about other that remained to be assessed.”<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding this concession, they continue to insinuate that because the cessation of U.S. aid would have caused one million deaths in Cambodia after 1975, that America bears indirect responsibility for most of the deaths incurred under Pol Pot, hence “war-induced famine.” In After the Cataclysm Chomsky and Herman suggested that the Khmer Rouge were right to evacuate Phnom Penh, because it had saved lives. The flip side of it is that had the United States continued emergency aid to the Khmer Republic, and the Khmer Rouge been contained, no death march to the countryside would have taken place. For Chomsky and Herman, that scenario is out of the question.

Of course, they continue to argue that the war was mostly America’s doing, notwithstanding the fact that the Khmer Rouge and Vietcong were on the other side fighting too. From this familiar baseline, Chomsky and Herman make an incredible comparison: “it seems fair to describe the responsibility of the United States and Pol Pot for atrocities during ‘the decade of the genocide’ as being roughly in the same

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<sup>66</sup> Sharp, “Re Chomsky, and my screwup,” personal e-mail, February 21, 1995.

<sup>67</sup> Many of the endnotes in that chapter refer the reader to their handiwork in After the Cataclysm.

<sup>68</sup> Chomsky and Herman, Manufacturing Consent (1988), pp. 290-291.

range.”<sup>69</sup> How is this done, or for that matter possible, the reader might wonder? Chomsky and Herman use an estimate of 500,000 casualties resulting from the 1970-1975 War in which the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, the Khmer Republic, and the FUNK which was composed primarily of the Khmer Rouge, fought and bombed one another on Cambodian soil. In their calculus these half-million lives fall squarely on the shoulders of the Americans. As for the casualties during the Democratic Kampuchea period, Chomsky and Herman use Michael Vickery’s figure of 750,000 deaths (recognized to be among the lowest available). This Chomskian comparison is not a parallel one: casualties of war versus revolution die for different reasons. While it might be plausible for both sides to sustain casualties during war, the Kampuchean revolution cost the lives of primarily non-revolutionaries and in 1978 began to take the lives of purged “Vietnamese agents” cum revolutionaries too.

The historical revisionism continues unabated when Chomsky and Herman shrink the STAV on Cambodia into “Maoist circles,” while excluding themselves and their colleagues. The Khmer Rouge Canon shows that this was not the case. They write, “there was virtually no doubt from early on that the Khmer Rouge regime under the emerging leader Pol Pot was responsible for gruesome atrocities. But there were differing assessments of the scale and character of these crimes.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, that scale ranged from the very truest believers in Pol Pot who thought that the atrocities were, to begin with, alleged, and those who did not, namely Ponchaud, Barron-Paul, Lacouture, Shawcross, and the media. Having successfully obfuscated the debate on the Khmer Rouge, while reiterating that they were careful to admit to the possibility of bloodbaths, Chomsky and Herman do some relevant handiwork on the image of Cambodians as a “not-so-gentle” people to begin with. With heuristic quotes, they suggest that Cambodians, especially peasants, “appear to have lived under conditions of extreme hatred for oppressors from outside the village,”<sup>71</sup> thus somehow excusing their use of violence against those they perceived to have been American cum Khmer Republic collaborators. There is but one problem with this abuse excuse, namely that half of the 1.5 million estimated to have perished during the Democratic Kampuchea period were peasants themselves.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, p. 267.

<sup>72</sup> CORKR’s statistics claim 825,000 rural Khmer deaths out of 1.671 million deaths. The proportion is forty-nine percent.

Chomsky and Herman still uphold every argument forwarded in After the Cataclysm. They add that no one has yet been able to prove them wrong. On the face of it, this sounds ludicrous, but they are partly right. It is true that they adroitly peppered the chapter on Cambodia in After the Cataclysm with qualifications, but their motive was hardly in doubt.<sup>73</sup> They caught a number of erratas in the media, Barron-Paul and Ponchaud books and magnified them, generalized on them, to make a model. As much as their pretext was to analyze the media, this cannot absolve them of liability for their own Khmer Rouge propaganda campaign. They accuse the media of “manufacturing consent,” when it is they, along with their STAV friends, who manufactured dissent on the basis of feeble evidence and contrary objectives. The evidence used to crucify the Khmer Rouge, they contend,

was of a kind that would have been dismissed with derision had something of the sort been offered... [during the U.S. bombardments of 1968-1973] of the genocide or other U.S. atrocities, including faked interviews or photographs and fabricated statements attributed to Khmer Rouge officials, constantly repeated even after they had been conceded to be frauds; fabricated casualty estimates based on misquoted studies that became unquestionable doctrine even after they were publicly withdrawn as inventions; and highly selective refugee reports that ignored much refugee testimony, including detailed studies by Cambodia scholars, that could not be exploited for what soon became a propaganda campaign at a level of deceit of astonishing proportions.<sup>74</sup>

The litany of erratas seems only to originate from the Chomskian opposition, notwithstanding, Chomsky and Herman made no attempt to seek the truth for themselves. They proudly restate their goal of examining the media in After the Cataclysm in quotation, and use it to their benefit. It did not matter where the truth lay, simply that Chomsky and Herman had valid points that could be used against the media’s “propaganda campaign” against the Khmer Rouge. Of course, we know from the first round of media analysis that, to the contrary, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the three television networks were doing little on Cambodia as opposed to Chile or South Korea in 1976. From round two, we examined the media in 1977, and determined that there were more fragmentary reports, but that these were mixed with simultaneous Porter/Hildebrand/Chomsky/Herman objections. In the third round, Shawcross nailed Chomsky’s thesis by proving that the reporters did not all believe the refugees in the beginning, and that it was not until after the Vietnamese invasion that news stories on the Cambodian genocide picked up significantly.

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<sup>73</sup> Chomsky and Herman do a good job of quoting themselves out of context. They re-engineer the chapter on Cambodia in After the Cataclysm to make themselves appear quite more concerned with the gruesome atrocities for which they devote, in reality, very little ink.

<sup>74</sup> Chomsky and Herman, Manufacturing Consent, p. 281.

Unfortunately for Chomsky, that invasion took place while he wrote After the Cataclysm in which he, along with Herman, forward their theory of gravitating propaganda machines against the “evils of communism.” But that does not really matter, does it? Chomsky is a very, very intelligent man. To be sure, Chomsky is a genius, but this does not necessarily make him right all the time. Chomsky and Herman do not use statistical analysis to prove their propaganda thesis for Cambodia. They do this for the mass-media coverage of “worthy and unworthy victims” in Latin America versus Poland,<sup>75</sup> perhaps because they know something can be shown from it, but for Cambodia, news anecdotes are sufficient. In any case, they argue, what could the U.S. have done anyway? What difference would it have made had they not criticized the media and the refugees? No difference whatsoever, hence no harm, no foul. But they are wrong again, says Shawcross. He writes, “The moral force of the left--Communist and non-Communist--was not exerted on behalf of the Cambodians until 1979.”<sup>76</sup> In the following chapter, which concludes this thesis, the common threads of chapter 2 and 3 are woven together to create an STAV quilt that shows how the “Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979” was the “Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia.”

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., table 2-1 and 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> Shawcross, “Cambodia: Some Perceptions of a Disaster,” p. 241.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

*This [deceit] was apparent to anyone listening closely to his [Pol Pot's] speeches and press conferences in 1977 and 1978 and to the unsettling propaganda broadcast every day over Radio Phnom Penh by the Kampuchean Communist Party (meaning Pol Pot himself) from 1975 until January 7, 1979, when Vo Nguyen Giap's blitzkrieg brought down Phnom Penh. Never in the human memory has a leader (be he an emperor or dictator), government, or a political party in power sung its own praises in such a dithyrambic, insolent, deceitful, shameless, and immodest way as the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime did. As Radio Hanoi has since stated, Messers. Pol Pot and Ieng Sary outstripped even their guru, the late Joseph Goebbels, when it came to propaganda!*

--King Norodom Sihanouk, 1980<sup>1</sup>

For once, it seems, Sihanouk was right. “The Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979: The Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia,” as this thesis is titled, represents more than anything a blunder on the part of academia. If we are to understand how the STAV developed, we must go back to the very beginning of our story. In the context of the Vietnam War, a common thread runs through the STAV: the vision of a struggle between two forces, good versus evil, socialism versus neo-colonialism. The deceptions which successive presidential administrations (Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon) pressed on the American people could serve to mitigate why this generation of Cambodian scholars grew increasingly suspicious of everything the U.S. government said and did. But this does not explain how suspicion of the government turned into suspicion of the U.S. media and Cambodian refugees. This had been, after all, the same American press that almost single-handedly pushed public opinion away from further American intervention in Vietnam before Watergate. For the answer, we must go beyond the surface and venture into the very heart of the STAV.

As we have seen throughout this thesis, common threads in logic, arguments, and evidence have recurred. Among these threads, two stand out: (1) a pro-revolutionary prism through which these scholars saw themselves in a greater struggle against imperialism; (2) a romanticization of peasants and the Khmer revolution in an appallingly detached context. They were all scholars and professors who thought nothing strange of romanticizing peasants and revolutions from arms-length. We know that the scholars canonized in this thesis did not bother to walk the distance and ask the tough questions that would test their “solidarity with the peoples of Kampuchea” and the Khmer revolution. Others admitted they did not know

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<sup>1</sup> Sihanouk, War and Hope (1980), p. 37.

where the truth lay, but made no pretense to search for it. This error was perhaps more egregious in retrospect.

In the next section, we briefly examine Ben Kiernan's 1979 *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* article entitled "Vietnam and the Governments and Peoples of Kampuchea" for the purpose of seeing an actual apology from an ex-STAV scholar. In chapter 4, Hildebrand sounded apologetic, but he was really very insincere. Caldwell never had a chance, but we concluded that he probably would not have thought it necessary. Summers and Porter were surmised to have recanted, but they made no public exhibition of it. As for Chomsky and Herman, all they concede is "skepticism," but insist they "remain on target."

*The Two-Sided Switch: Benedict Kiernan and the Khmer Rouge*

Ben Kiernan, noted academic and author of the serious and worth reading book How Pol Pot Came to Power (1985) and co-editor with David Chandler of such other notable works as Revolution and Its Aftermath (1983), will lead the U.S. State Department funded Yale University program that will create a database documenting Khmer Rouge genocidal crimes. We know from this thesis, however, that there is another story to Dr. Kiernan; the story of a young, idealistic graduate student, mesmerized by the idea of a people's revolution and socialism. Ben Kiernan was a leading Khmer Rouge defender during Democratic Kampuchea.<sup>2</sup> With all due respect to him and the studied work he has done since 1979, he deserves to be canonized for being a leading proponent of the STAV on Cambodia.

In fact, it was not until Kiernan interviewed five hundred Cambodian refugees in the camps in 1978 or 1979 that he recognized that he had been "late in realizing the extent of the tragedy in Kampuchea."<sup>3</sup> In what amounted to a *mea culpa* in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1979, entitled "Vietnam and the Governments and People of Kampuchea," he writes,

I was wrong about ... the brutal authoritarian trend within the revolutionary movement after 1973 was not simply a grass-roots reaction, and expression of popular outrage at the killing and destruction of the countryside by U.S. bombs, although that helped it along decisively. There can be

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<sup>2</sup> Kiernan was not canonized because his works were unavailable for review. His *BCAS* article states plainly that he no longer supports Pol Pot's faction of the Khmer Rouge, thus implying that he supported that faction in the past. From that article, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, and Cambodia Watching Down Under, see Kiernan, "Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia," *Australian Outlook*, December 1976; "Revolution and Social Cohesion in Cambodia," ASEAN Seminar, Sydney, 1-4 September 1977; and *News from Kampuchea* 1977-1978.

<sup>3</sup> Kiernan, "Vietnam and the Governments and Peoples of Kampuchea," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, vol. 11, no. 4, October-December 1979, p. 19.

no doubting that the evidence also points clearly to a systematic use of violence against the population by that chauvinist section of the revolutionary movement that was led by Pol Pot. In my opinion this violence was employed in the service of a *nationalist revivalism* that had little concern for the living conditions of the Khmer people, or the *humanitarian socialist ideals* that had inspired the broader *Kampuchean revolutionary* movement. [Emphasis added.]<sup>4</sup>

Kiernan was indeed very wrong about the brutality of the Khmer Rouge and their “systematic use of violence.” He also reveals one of the excuses which the STAV fondly dangled when critics questioned the draconian practices of the Khmer Rouge. The convenient “U.S. bombs” made them do it. To be sure, Khmer Rouge membership increased, but the bombing had already stopped by that time. Moreover, Kiernan reveals that it was the “humanitarian socialist ideals” of the Khmer Rouge that attracted him to them. His point about “nationalist revivalism” sounds familiar, because Caldwell confided to a friend that “If it is true that Pol Pot has also killed Khmer Peasants, [it] is a token of fascism.”<sup>5</sup> In fact, attempts to commit this senseless act of historical revisionism on Cambodia’s contemporary history has succeeded. The debunked Pol Pot-Ieng Sary regime, it is now said, was more of a fascist cum Nazi regime than a Communist cum Maoist one! Truth may yet be stranger than fiction.

In April 1977, Kiernan and his Cambodian wife Chanthou Boua among many others, published the *Australian News from Kampuchea*. The goal of the newsletter, according to Gunn and Lee was “to keep Kampucheans in Australia informed of developments in their native country” and “to develop and foster close ties between the peoples of Australia and Kampuchea.”<sup>6</sup> By November 1978, its goal was amended to “also [lending] support to all progressive movements in the world trying to rid themselves of all forms of domination” and to refute the “imperialist media”<sup>7</sup> (a mission shared by Chomsky and Herman). In November 1979, when *News from Kampuchea* was renamed to *News of Democratic Kampuchea*, “[it] revealed itself exclusively an Australian mouthpiece of Democratic Kampuchea.” By that time, however, Ben Kiernan and Chanthou Boua had been expelled from *News from Kampuchea*, and “aligned themselves more closely with the Australian Vietnam Society.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in “Introductory Note,” Caldwell, Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Gunn and Lee, Cambodia Watching Down Under (1991), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

It should be noted that Gunn and Lee themselves present a curiously uncritical view of this disturbing record, when, in other instances, they write:

Whatever else, the Tarr's description of the events surrounding the evacuation of foreigners from the French Embassy compound [contrary to the then prevailing media stereotype—a description of the orderly nature of the evacuation, the absence of executions and other atrocities, the degree of voluntarism and the absence of coercion on the part of cadres and the degree of understanding on the part of evacuees of the rationale for the uprooting] stands in *studied contrast* to the *banalised* “killing fields” which has since become the “definitive media interpretation” ... The “Killing Fields” was made in Thailand on a budget of fifteen million dollars around the theme of the sentimental rendez-vous [*sic*] between a *New York Times* correspondent and his Cambodian offside, a “miraculous” survivor of Democratic Kampuchea. [Emphasis added.]<sup>9</sup>

Granted, the “Killing Fields” became a cinematic symbol of despair and hope for many Cambodians, but that fact need not be mocked. Surely, nothing of the sort would be contemplated of “Schindler’s List,” for instance.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to Kiernan’s confession, it is useful to us since it brings an insider’s perspective to understanding the STAV. In one particularly poignant reference to George Orwell, he eloquently states,

[The] many proven falsehoods spread in the Western Press led to preoccupation with the correction of specific lies or distortions (fake atrocity photographs, fake interview, etc.). While such correction is important to anyone sorting through the evidence, it does not by itself establish the truth about the actual situation in Kampuchea. As George Orwell pointed out in reference to atrocity stories about the Spanish Civil War, those whose interests are against social change will always spread disinformation about revolutions; but these stories are irrelevant to the truth, neither its identity nor its opposite. It is up to those interested in the truth to establish it positively.<sup>11</sup>

Kiernan is correct in asserting that the correction of falsehoods became a substitute for truth. Indeed, if the STAV scholars were interested, they made little effort to establish it positively anywhere near Cambodia as we saw in chapter 4. Next, we speculate on how this community of academics became so consumed by the need to prove their theories supporting peasant revolutions to realize the consequences of their actions on Cambodia.

*The Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979: The Standard Total Academic View on Cambodia*

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<sup>9</sup> Gunn and Lee, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, Gunn and Lee actually laud the points made by Chomsky and Herman on the media. They take part in the same attacks on the media that became hallmarks of the Chomsky and Herman school: “The radical exodus from the Cambodian capital was widely regarded in the Western media as proof of a “bloodbath”, or at least the prelude to a more sustained campaign by the western media that would soon blossom into the horror story that was to follow. Rumour quickly became fact and individual refugee stories were rapidly generalized into a total picture. The word of a few journalists set the tone, a case in point being Sydney Shandberg of the *New York Times*” (Gunn and Lee, p. 59).

<sup>11</sup> Kiernan, p. 19.



The goal of this thesis, reiterated, was to construct a Khmer Rouge Canon 1975-1979, while at the same time deconstruct the STAV on Cambodia. Having done this, more or less, the question remains: why Cambodia? The reasons seem clear now. To the STAV scholars, Democratic Kampuchea symbolized their wildest hopes and dreams. From the classroom to the politburo, the new Kampuchea was, to these scholars, theory becoming reality, from Chomsky's 1973 prediction for Cambodia of "a new era of economic development and social justice" to Caldwell's 1978 conclusion that:

[The] Kampuchean Revolution will appear more and more clearly as one of the most significant early indications of the great and necessary change beginning to convulse the world in the later 20th century and shifting from a disaster-bound course to one holding our promise of a better future for all. In the mean time we can surely rejoice that the people of Kampuchea are assured now steadily rising living standards while those of their still "free world" neighbors continue to deteriorate.<sup>12</sup>

The standard total academic view on Cambodia hoped for, more than anything, a socialist success story with all the romantic ingredients of peasants, fighting imperialism, and revolution. A cursory examination of the titles to the articles they wrote on Cambodia during that period yields further evidence of their rapture for these elements: "Consolidating the Revolution," or "Defining the Revolutionary State," or "Social Cohesion in Revolutionary Cambodia," or "Rationale for a Rural Policy," and still, not be outdone, "Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology."

It would be facile to dismiss the authors of these works as outliers or exceptions, but for one problem: they were not the exception. In fact, these scholars were the norm, hence the title of STAV scholars. Their stance was not the result of some freak accident of nature, but an institutionalized revolutionary conditioning. Indoctrination, whether through academia or by other means, seems to be the only plausible explanation. In Australia, England, and America, Ben Kiernan, Malcolm Caldwell, and Noam Chomsky reached similar conclusions on Cambodian refugees. The only common denominator: a proclivity for revolutions in an academic backdrop. Seeking "truth wherever it may lead," in the words of Thomas Jefferson, had no place when it came to revolutions. For that purpose, the empirical process was turned upside down, first came theory, followed by evidence.

As Bruce Sharp asserts, Chomsky created his theory of the Free Press and from then on sought only evidence that would support it. Together with Herman, Chomsky painted all other contrary evidence

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<sup>12</sup> Caldwell, "Cambodia: Rationale for a Rural Policy," Malcolm Caldwell's South-East Asia, p. 103.

with wide strokes of the same color: imperialist media propaganda and disinformation “that ‘liberation’ by ‘Marxists’ is the worst fate that can befall any people under Western dominance.” Chomsky and Herman were professional sophists, whereas Caldwell, Summers, Hildebrand and Porter could only have considered themselves amateurs. The evidence leaves little doubt: “Consolidating the Revolution,” “Defining the Revolutionary State,” “Rationale for a Rural Policy,” and Starvation and Revolution had virtually no cloaks or token allowances. Chomsky and Herman, on the other hand, submitted that the atrocities were true, but questioned their scale. They latched on to a few mistakes by the media, Ponchaud, Barron-Paul, and turned these into one hundred pages of text without appearing to even argue or pretend to know the facts on Cambodia.

Few people today remember the Chomsky-Lacouture Controversy, fewer people still, remember what Summers, Caldwell, Hildebrand, and Porter wrote between 1975 and 1979, and when they do, these are looked back upon as the utterances of idealistic scholars who were caught up in the revolutionary spirit of their decade. It is always easier to forget than to remember the past, but for this parenthesis in history, we may use the World War II phrase: “Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for people.”

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