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Democratization as a Cultural Confluence: The United Nations in Cambodia

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Abstract

Culture is a web of meaning-making patterns that consciously and sub-consciously guide, legitimize, and routinize human behaviors and perceptions evolving in a given communal context. The question under study for this essay is: what happens when different cultures interact with one another in a dynamic interplay of conflict resolution and national reconstruction in post-war societies? Analysis of the United Nations' peace-building operations in Cambodia offers valuable insights into this inquiry. The case study will illustrate the turbulence of cultural confluence in which Cambodian Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism interact with the distinct cultural tradition of Western democracy. The sustained tension that characterized the peace process in the 1990s is attributed in part to different meanings that the Cambodian factional leaders and the UN transitional authority attached to the sources of political legitimacy, the notion of time, and the significance of formal agreement, fairness, and neutrality. Western democratic norms and institutions introduced by the UN mission in Cambodia have encouraged pluralism, openness, and broad-based consensus building, while discouraging monopoly, closed-mindedness, and clique-based decision making. A closer look at the dynamics of the cultural confluence will reveal, however, that the UN-led democratization process, if not the notion of Western democracy *per se*, involves inherent tendencies to promote not only the former trends but also the latter. This dilemma of democratization generating non-democratic effects on the ground presents a *paradox of democratic transition* that both domestic and international policymakers must confront, in order to make peace processes more effective and sustainable.

Democratization as a Cultural Confluence: Re-examining the UN-led Peace Process in Cambodia

TATSUSHI ARAI

Introduction

The end of the Cold War brought with it a surge of optimism in the international community about the future possibilities of peacemaking. In *An Agenda for Peace* published in 1991, then United Nations Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali outlined new visions toward post-Cold War UN peace operations, ranging from preventive diplomacy to peace-enforcement to post-conflict peace-building. A widely shared assumption among protagonists of this vision was that the end of the superpower rivalry would herald a new era of international cooperation that would enable a greater degree of concerted peacemaking efforts to take place across continents. Much attention has been paid to the feasibility and modalities of such an expanded scope of operations. However, what has been overlooked is whether such operations are congruent with cultures and value systems of the local communities in which UN-led interventions take place.

Peace-building operations, spearheaded by the UN and supported by states and non-state actors, are necessarily value-laden and paradigm-driven. Today the Western tradition of democracy is widely regarded as the most popularized and accepted value system that has been introduced to non-Western, non-democratic societies; socialism, among other non-democratic paradigms, has never been adopted as a model of UN-led post-war peace-building. An important corollary of this paradigm-driven exercise is that its success and failure is also measured by criteria consistent with Western democracy. The attainment of a free and fair election and the establishment of pluralism and constitutionalism are among commonly used criteria for evaluation. An important question remains unanswered: is Western democracy, as a value system, necessarily congruent with a particular cultural community in which UN-led peace-building and democratization initiatives take place?

This essay is an attempt to answer this question based on an analysis of the Cambodian peace process in the early 1990s. The UN-led peace process will be looked at as a confluence of Cambodian political culture and Western democratic values. The cultural analysis will enable us to understand how cross-cultural dynamics have

affected relationship-building between Cambodian and foreign stakeholders, and why political rivalry intensified so rapidly and disrupted the seemingly successful peace process initiated in the early 1990s.

In the history of UN peace operations after the Cold War, the situation in Cambodia provides a unique test case, with significant global and historical implications. In May 1993, when the UN-sponsored national election took place with a ninety-percent voter turnout rate, the operation was widely hailed as a historical victory of democracy, heralding a new era of UN peace operations. However, soon after the UN withdrew, a fighting between Khmer Rouge and government forces broke out in February 1994. Hostilities resurfaced even among the factions that had formally agreed to form a coalition government, resulting in several years of open confrontations.

Why did what was once referred to as a "historical success" of Cambodia's peace process turn into a chaos? One cannot readily infer from observable facts on the ground a definitive causal link between the democratic system introduced by the UN and the political instability that ensued. At first glance, it appears more appropriate to attribute the political turmoil to the inertia of Cambodian factionalism and the clash of political aspirations, rather than to less visible cultural differences between Khmer worldviews and Western democratic values introduced to Cambodia. However, this study will make it clear that such cultural differences, however subtle and invisible, are far from insignificant in explaining, at least in part, why hostilities resurfaced so rapidly. The main contention of this essay is that Cambodia's democratization, especially from 1991 through 1993, was a dynamic process of cultural interface. It is argued that Buddhist and Brahmanist traditions, with years of socialist overtones, interacted with Western democratic values that have evolved from centuries of Christian cultural traditions and the Western commitment to market economy.

Culture is a dynamic web of meaning structures,[1] that is, shared and interrelated patterns of meaning-making processes that consciously and subconsciously guide ways of perceiving the reality and interacting with it. A meaning structure is not a static state of human mindset attributable to certain individuals or groups. Rather it is a dynamic and ever-evolving process through which people come to understand what

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[1] I owe Dr. John Paul Lederach at Eastern Mennonite University, Virginia the conceptualization of meaning structures.   The term is adopted from his lecture on April 18, 2001 at George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution in Fairfax, Virginia.

they believe is right or wrong, moral or immoral, and natural or unnatural. As will be explained shortly, for example, factionalism is arguably a form of meaning structure embedded in Khmer political culture. In order to appreciate Khmer factionalism as a form of meaning structure, one must look into why and how political elites and their followers come to form factions, and what functions this form of social grouping serves in Cambodian society at large. Therefore to analyze Khmer culture and how it interacts with Western values, emphasis must be placed on such a *process*-oriented understanding of culture in order to provide a useful framework for conflict analysis and resolution.

The discussion that follows will explore salient characteristics of Khmer political culture, on the one hand, and identify core values of Western democracy as applied to the Cambodian peace process, on the other. The analysis will focus primarily on elite political cultures on the part of both Khmer and international stakeholders who have shaped and reshaped the political structure of the peace process at the most visible and strategic level. By contrasting the two cultural orientations, one can highlight areas of UN-led activities through which the Western and non-Western cultures have interacted with one another, and go on to illustrate how this cultural interface has affected the peace process as a whole. It is hoped that this study provides stakeholders in UN-led peace operations with useful lessons that are relevant not only to Cambodia in the 1990s, but also to other parts of the world in which a greater understanding of cross-cultural communication is urgently needed for effective post-war peacebuilding.

Khmer Political Culture

Policy makers and field workers who enter Cambodia for the first time are confronted with a question: are there any defining characteristics of Khmer political culture they need to know for effective peace building? What follows is one possible answer to this question based on the key literature on Khmer political culture[2]. As with any process of systematic, inductive reasoning, the cultural analysis attempted here necessarily simplifies complex cultural nuances and inter-factional differences, in favor of clarity and coherence. Yet the description to be presented here has to be detailed enough so that one can establish a meaningful comparison between Khmer political

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[2] Of particular importance are Dawee Daweewarn (1982), Serge Thion (1990), Abdulgaffar Peang-Meth (1991), Somboon Suksamran (1993), John Marcucci (1994), Marie Alexandrine Martin (1994), Usha Welaratna (1993), and Pierre P. Lizee (2000).

culture and the culture of Western democracy, the main focus of the inquiry to be elaborated later.

Religion has been a defining factor of Khmer spiritual life for centuries. Despite the Khmer Rouge genocide and communist rule during the mid-1970s, religion still permeates the Khmer's collective awareness. According to Welaratna's (1993) ethnographic interviews with nine genocide survivors conducted in the late 1980s, religion remains a guiding principle of their lives despite the communist regime's systematic denial of its symbolic importance. At the heart of Khmer religiosity is a unique synergy of Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism. While the two religions follow distinctly different discourses, they have coexisted for centuries and blended into one another in such a way as to develop and nurture Khmer religiosity of its own unique character.

Brahmanism is historically derived from ancient religious beliefs in India. According to Daweewarn (1982), archeological discoveries at Mohenjo-daro near the Indus River suggest that some philosophical precursors of Brahmanism had already existed as early as the third millennium B.C. It is believed that in the second and first millennia B.C., Brahmanism gradually matured as an eclectic body of religious beliefs, with emphasis on ritualistic details of sacrifice to an absolute God (Brahman). The Brahman was considered an eternal, all-pervading, yet ultimately incomprehensible creator of the Universe in which all creatures originate and dissolve. Supplementing the practice of Brahmanism was the evolution of philosophical knowledge known as the Upanisads, dedicated to the understanding of God, man, and the world. In the mid-sixth to early fifth century B.C., Buddhism was established essentially as a challenge to the Upanisads, Brahmanism, and other pre-existing trends of Indian religion, for Buddhism denied God and the caste system. It was during this historical period of the birth of Buddhism and other reformist religious trends that Brahmanism began to take on a new sectarian character, espousing the trinity of Brahma (creator), Siva (destroyer), and Visnu (protector) as its main gods.

This new form of Brahmanism reached Cambodia in the fifth century A.D. It spread widely in the ninth century A.D. under the reign of the heroic national unifier, King Jayavarman II, who consolidated the divine image of royalty based on Brahmanism. Brahmanic political influence that came to be popularized in Cambodia features a hierarchical social order in which the royal god (Devaraja) mediates between

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human society and divine gods. Elaborate court rituals have been practiced for centuries to mark hereditary succession of royalty from one god-king to the next.

In the Brahmanic worldview of Khmer politics, such structural factors as social role, caste, rank, and status define how people should interact with one another in society. Although by the fourteenth century, egalitarian Theravada Buddhism had come to permeate the spiritual life of a majority of Cambodians, the traditional hierarchy of Brahmanic social order remains influential to date.   For example, Khmer society is considered three-layered, comprised of the royal family members (*sdech*), the noble (*neamoeun montrey*), and peasants and other categories of ordinary people (*reastr*).   In addition, the spiritual legitimacy of the royal god remains an important reality of contemporary Khmer politics.   Such spiritual trends were especially manifest when, for example, Norodon Sihanouk abdicated as the last official Devaraja in 1955 and became the first chief of state in 1960; the newly promulgated constitution that came into effect through this political transition pronounced that all state powers emanate from the sacred spirit of the god-king and every citizen owes loyalty to the god-king as the nation's symbol.   Consequently, the pyramidal social order and people's loyalty to divine leadership have come to form cultural foundations for intra-factional hierarchy and inter-factional rivalry in the recent political crises, as will be explained later.

On the contrary, Theravada Buddhism has brought distinctly different influences into Khmer society.   It is believed that the conversion of King Jayavarman VII, who ruled the country from the late twelfth to early thirteenth century A.D., accelerated a nationwide transformation of Khmer religious life into one that centers on Theravada Buddhism.   In the collective memory of many Cambodians, Jayavarman VII is generally revered as a humanistic reformer who attempted to change the hierarchical social order and promoted welfare for the poor after a long period of territorial expansion and war.   As a spiritual discourse, Theravada Buddhism denies social hierarchy and espouses equality.   It also encourages an earnest human effort as a way to attain salvation while it denounces the primacy of a god-like entity functioning as the ultimate savior.   Furthermore, the Buddhist concept of karma suggests that human life travel from the infinite past to the infinite future, accumulating good and bad fortunes from one lifetime after another.   Human beings reincarnate into a desirable or undesirable state of life depending on the amount of meritorious deeds they have accumulated.   The belief in karmic retribution leads many Cambodians to adopt a

fatalistic outlook, especially in times of crisis. This is because they believe that misfortunes in the present moment are derived from evil causes accumulated in the past, and therefore such misfortunes are, at least to a large extent, beyond the control of those who live in the present lifetime.

How do these two religious values interact with one another in the collective mindset of Khmer political leaders? One hypothesis derived from the cultural observations of Khmer scholars, such as Peang-Meth (1991), suggests a sustained inner tension between the two spiritual orientations that continuously oscillate back and forth, from one orientation to another, depending on the political conditions in which the Khmer leaders interact.   The hypothesis is summarized in the following diagram:

Internal cultural dynamics experienced within the collective mindset of Khmer leaders:
A working hypothesis

Activated in crisis		*Manifest in non-crisis situations*
Brahmanist Khmer	←————————→	**Theravada Buddhist Khmer**
Combative/Invincible		Placid/Accepting
Hierarchical/Factional		Egalitarian
Salvation by God		Salvation by human effort
Leader = Divine		Leader = Human

The diagram illustrates dynamic cultural tension. In Cambodian society, Brahmanist and Buddhist tendencies have coexisted for centuries, blended into one another, and nurtured the fertile terrain of Khmer meaning structures. It has been observed in recent Khmer history that both tendencies constantly co-arise, and legitimize or de-legitimize leaders' political behaviors. Although one orientation never overrides the other completely, there appears a general propensity that crisis situations activate the Brahmanistic elements of factionalism and invincibility more forcefully than in non-crisis situations, in which Buddhist characteristics of egalitarianism and mutual acceptance tend to pervade. The diagram illustrates which of the two tendencies is likely to manifest under what circumstances, crisis or non-crisis.

Furthermore the Brahmanistic cosmology promotes social hierarchy and factional leadership as a divine mechanism justifying collective self-defense. In crisis situations, this psychological orientation tends to prevail because allegiance to factional

leaders and the commitment to stable social order become important for survival.   In reality, this means that crises enable factional leaders and political elites to build on – and even consciously exploit – their followers' fear and combativeness, and to consolidate their divine image as god-like saviors and protectors.   As a consequence, inter-factional power struggles intensify and become increasingly entrenched in crisis.   On the other hand, the Theravada Buddhist cosmology promotes equality, mutual acceptance, and pacifism.   The shared belief in karma and reincarnation motivates Khmer leaders and their followers to accumulate meritorious deeds in anticipation of their future lives and salvation.   This pacifist orientation tends to prevail in non-crisis situations where human welfare and survival does not depend critically on loyalty to combative factionalism.

In order to understand UN-led peace-building operations as a confluence of Khmer and Western cultures, one must elaborate on the above general model in more concrete, operational terms.   Seven areas of behavioral patterns and psychological outlooks are particularly salient in Khmer culture and deserve attention:

Individualism and collectivism: Theravada Buddhism encourages individuals to be held answerable to their own deeds.   In this worldview, each individual is the locus of salvation and the fundamental unit of social accountability.   When faced with imminent threat to survival, however, Brahmanistic potential becomes more manifest; individuals are considered more justified to turn to their factional groups and their leaders for collective self-defense and protection.   Consequently, group cohesion becomes more fundamental than individual moral accountability in times of crisis.

Sources of political legitimacy and allegiance to divine leaders: Respected political leaders embody a divine image.   They serve as protectors of people in crisis.   Political legitimacy emanates from the divine origin rooted in Khmer history, but not necessarily from democratic consensus, at least not in a manner most familiar to Western policymakers.   Martin (1994) observes that newly sworn-in Prime Minister Hun Sen, who as of 1989 was hailed by many Khmers as the nation's liberator from Vietnamese tutelage and Pol Pot's influence, gained his popularity largely because of the wide-spread perception that that he was sent from Heaven.   As of late 1990, however, his popularity, together with his psycho-religious legitimacy, was tarnished as his government failed to end the war and to fight more decisively against corruptions.   Although Khmers' confidence in mythico-religious leadership constantly rises and falls

and it never stays constant, the traditional belief remains intact that sacredness is an indispensable element of trusted political leadership.

Factionalism: In crisis situations, a political faction can serve as a rallying point for unity and survival. The bond between factional leaders and their followers is determined by the mythico-religious connection that provides a collective sense of belonging, while it is also sustained by the inertia of family, lineage, and occupational ties. In times of national crisis, it is generally expected that there should not be multiple gods who reign over Khmers' social universe. Devaraja must maintain its prominent, all-pervading status in their worldview. Such aspirations for coherent social order accelerate inter-factional power struggles.

Face-saving, intransigence, and the meaning of compromise: For survival in crisis, leaders dictate. As an embodiment of Devaraja, they are expected to protect their subjects from harm and to restore social order.   Leaders are not welcomed to negotiate flexibly or to compromise, just as Devarava never negotiates on matters related to life and death.   Once leaders enter into this mythico-religious mode of non-negotiability, they resist change by all means.   They strive to save face in order to sustain the social order that resonates deeply with the Brahmanistic worldview.

Emotional equilibrium and the meaning of agreement: The Buddhist side of Khmers' psychological tendency values compassion, harmony, and acceptance of others' needs. Faced with insurmountable obstacles in political negotiations, Khmer factional leaders attempt to maintain a placid emotional appearance in the presence of others.   They tend to disclose their agony and dilemma only to their close allies and insiders behind the closed doors.   The pacifist potential of Khmers encourages negotiating leaders to sustain a harmonious appearance in public.   To maintain calmness on the surface, they may even enter agreements that do not carry any chance of being implemented in reality. This cultural observation is consistent with the fact that throughout the UN-sponsored peace process in the late 1980s and 1990s, a great number of agreements were broken immediately after they were signed.

Violent means to just ends: The Brahmanistic worldview sees individual human beings as small building blocks of a larger pyramidal social order ruled by Devaraja.   This notion of Brahmanistic social order has been used and abused in different ways, and often taken to mean the dispensability of individual lives as a necessary sacrifice to

larger political ends. The attenuation and disposability of individual lives has been justified by years of massive violence, including the genocide of about two million people under the Khmer Rouge regime. The sustained practice of violence, in turn, has consolidated the perceived disposability of individual lives as an accepted reality. Consequently, factional leaders remain motivated to justify violence as a legitimate means by which to restore social order.

Notion of time: Like light traveling the vast universe, human life comes from the infinite past, transits in the present, and continues into the future for all eternity. Salvation can be nearer if one accumulates meritorious deeds in the present lifetime. Likewise, seeds planted in the past can determine the present state of life. In this Buddhist worldview of life's continuity beyond the present lifetime and the moment of death, Western social norms that encourage achievement in the present lifetime for immediate gratification do not make a cultural sense. Even after the introduction of French colonialism and educational reform in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth, the Buddhist notion of time and salvation remained firmly embedded in Khmers' cultural awareness. As will be explained later, the gap between Khmer and Western conceptions of time became a critical challenge to the UN-led peace process in Cambodia.

Western Democracy as a Cultural Basis for the UN-led Peace Process

Democracy has been one of the most fundamental but contested concepts throughout the history of human inquiry into man and society. What is undisputed, however, is that it is a multi-faceted concept that has been built around certain core value and principles. Thoughtful reflections are offered by Luc Reychler (1999), who surveys contemporary literature on democracy and identifies ten building blocks of democratic governance:

1. Free and fair election
2. Separation of powers
3. Open and accountable government, with emphasis on political, financial, and legal accountability
4. Decentralization
5. Appropriate power sharing arrangements in multi-ethnic societies, through, if necessary, broad-based participation, proportionality, minority or mutual veto, and segmental group autonomy
6. Individual and collective human rights in socioeconomic and civil/political areas

7. Civil society building, including the establishment of popular network and civil control over government power
8. Rule of law and constitutionalism
9. Good governance, including non-politicized, efficient, and effective administration; control over corruption; government monopoly of the use of force; efficient and equitable taxation system; bureaucracy usable by democratic government
10. Inclusive citizenship

The parameters of democratic governance outlined above have been developed by centuries of trial and error in Western civilizations, in which the free market principle and Christianity have been among the most essential norms of social life. Financed, staffed, and administered chiefly by leading Western nations, most notably the United States, UN peace operations intervening in non-Western societies can never materialize themselves without the active role of Western democracy serving as an underlying paradigm of thinking. Since UN peace operations adopt some of the above building blocks as explicit goals of post-war operations for democratization in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world, one must critically examine whether such guiding principles of distinctly Western origin cohere with the meaning structures of non-Western societies in need of peacebuilding.

Moreover, the moral aspiration of Western democracy often differs from how it is actually practiced in the reality of UN-sponsored activities for peace-building and democratization. Through a careful analysis of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements and subsequent initiatives taken by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), one can observe the praxis of Western democracy as it was applied to the Cambodian peace process. The following is a list of salient characteristics of the UN practice in Cambodia, from a bird's-eye perspective:

Source of political legitimacy: Collective will of people is the ultimate source of political legitimacy. It should not be a mythico-religious belief that legitimizes leaders' right to rule. The rationale for popular sovereignty is the faith in the supreme status of citizens. This faith is derived, in the depth of the Western collective conscious, from the legacy of how modern European and North American governments and civil societies have evolved over time and come to be consolidated into a relatively peaceful manner of coexistence within each nation.

State as a unit of exercising power: Irrespective of factional affiliations, Khmers are expected to accept their unified state of Cambodia as the only and ultimate entity that is legitimate and capable of exercising power. In addition, they are encouraged to envision their state as the most fundamental reference group with which they must come to identify. This principle is essentially a product of the Western historical process in which democracy has evolved from the state-centric Westphalia system. In this paradigm of thinking reflected in contemporary international law, the unit of democratization must be a state that possesses a definable territory, stable population, government, and the ability to manage foreign relations (namely, external sovereignty). The UN explicitly adopted these principles in the context of its operations in Cambodia. For example, under the general scheme of confidence building proposed by the UN, the Supreme National Council (SNC) of Cambodia was established in 1990 as an inter-factional alliance. The establishment of SNC was intended to create a precondition for the UNTAC's operation, which presupposed the existence of a unified governing body capable of exercising Cambodia's external sovereignty in relation to the UN. Establishing a coalition government and neutralizing conflicting factions were both fundamental to the expected development of internal sovereignty, or the ability of the government to exercise unsurpassed control over its people. These intensive efforts to create a state structure were undoubtedly driven by the paradigm of Western democracy in which a state is the most fundamental unit of international relations and the only basis for internal sovereignty.

Faith in broad-based, inter-group consensus: The UNTAC's operations were governed by the principle that inter-factional consensus recognized by the SNC represents Khmers' collective will. Annex 1 of the 1991 Paris Agreements defines the mandate of the UNTAC by stipulating, "[t]he SNC offers advice to UNTAC, which will comply with this advice provided there is a consensus among the members of the SNC and provided this advice is consistent with the objectives of the present Agreement" (Peou 2000, 446). Confidence placed in the face value of consensus is deeply rooted in Western democracies, in which social contract is a defining element of relationship building. In this paradigm of thinking, a formally-negotiated text of agreement is biding by definition, irrespective of what contextual and cultural meanings the negotiating parties have assigned to the intent of the agreement. Simply put, a text is binding irrespective of its context.

Concept of time: In Khmer culture, the past, present, and future fuse into a holistic

whole of cosmic coherence in the present moment.   The value of meritorious deeds transcends the present lifetime into the future; harmful deeds of the past remain relevant in the present lifetime in quest of salvation.   Life is recurrent and time is cyclical.   On the contrary, Western democracy generally tends to place priority on the satisfaction and achievement in the present lifetime.   Time is non-cyclical because past karma does not accumulate.   Justice and restitution must be done in the very present lifetime, not in the next.

In the practice of UN-led peace-building activities, this difference is significant. A careful review of UNTAC operations suggests that the Western notion of time set the pace of the overall peace process.   For example, the Declaration on the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Cambodia, included in the 1991 Paris Agreements, states:

> With the achievement of the comprehensive political settlement, it is now possible and desirable to initiate a process of rehabilitation, addressing immediate needs, and to lay the groundwork for the preparation of medium- and long-term reconstruction plans. (Peou 2000, 464)

This UN-sponsored plan for national reconstruction stressed the fulfillment of present needs and the subsequent attainment of immediate future goals.   Its underlying cultural logic is that time conjugates clockwise, from the past to the present to the future. Whether this linear concept of time is congruent with Khmers' psychological process of healing, reconciliation, and salvation remains unexplored.

In addition to the above four characteristics of Western democracy that are uniquely relevant to Cambodia's peace process, there are more general, inherent features of the Western democratic paradigm that have helped to generate far-reaching effects on the peace process.   These features include:

Value contestation in pluralism: Boris DeWiel argues that "[d]emocracy is the method of government in which people find a way to live together despite their irresolvable differences of priority among common goods" (2000, 173).   Simply put, democracy is a sustained process of value contestation.   This is because, according to DeWiel, throughout the history of human thought, every new idea has evolved from an old one. However, such a historical process of value contestation cannot be assimilated into a given social context "when the institutions of contestation have not yet been established

and entrenched or when their existence is threatened" (DeWiel 2000, 174). To the extent that factionalism in Cambodia exemplifies value contestation, DeWiel's proposition is potentially relevant to the analysis of Cambodia's peace process. Drawing on DeWiel's view on democracy, one can hypothesize that democracy is likely to become a viable system only when the society has internalized capacities for establishing sustainable institutions of value contestation, as well as capacities for transforming or at least managing conflicting views without resorting to uncontrolled violence.

Control of violent means: Lizee (2000) views the state's ability to control violence as an essential component of democratic governance. According to this view, the development of capitalism and industrialism has necessitated modern Western society to minimize arbitrary use of force and to maximize the regularity and predictability of the use of force. Lizee further argues that the evolution of representative democracy is attributed in part to the society's need to centralize the means to use force. Consistent with Lizee's proposition, state monopoly and control of violence was a desired goal from the UN perspective. What was less clear was whether this principle of Western democracy was congruent with Khmers' ways of meaning making.

Universality of fairness and neutrality: When Western democracy is introduced into an unfamiliar context, a tacit assumption is made that interveners, if committed to skilful diplomacy, can remain relatively fair and neutral in the democratization process. The Paris Agreements require that the UNTAC maintain neutral status in coordinating the interests of Cambodian factions. The Agreements also encourage the implementation of a fair election as a necessary step toward democratization. The underlying rationale for these assumptions is that the UN, with or without the assistance of local parties, can define standards of fairness and neutrality that have a universal appeal and transcend specific cultural contexts. This confidence in the universalism of value judgment was observed in the UN's reaffirmation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the Paris Agreements, as well as in the new Cambodian Constitution adopted under the UNTAC's supervision.

Interface of Khmer Culture and Western Democracy
The preceding analysis has highlighted both Cambodian ways of meaning making and fundamental characteristics of Western democracy as reflected in the UN-led peace process. A comparison of these two cultural orientations will reveal tension, potential

and manifest, summarized in the following chart.   The analysis will focus on Khmer cultural tendencies in crisis situations, as well as on Western democracy in a manner that was applied to the UN praxis.

A Comparison between Khmer Political Culture and Western Democracy

	Khmer Culture (Focus on Crisis Situations)	Western Democracy (Focus on UN Praxis)
Source of Legitimacy	Factional leaders (as a manifestation of divine Devaraja)	People's will and consensus.
Basic Unit of Group Identity	A faction (as a basic unit of protection and survival)	A Cambodian state (which should be established as a rallying point for unity and national identity)
Meaning of Agreement	Agreement should be honored when established in an appropriate social context.	Agreement should be honored regardless of the social context in which it is established.
Notion of Time	Time is cyclical. Both meritorious and evil deeds of the past accumulate and affect the present and future state of life. Justice and restitution can be done in both the present and future lifetimes.	Time is non-cyclical. Life starts and ends during the present lifetime. Justice and restitution must be done in the present life. Immediate gratification of social achievement is emphasized.
User of Force	Violence is justifiable to restore social order. God-like leaders are authorized to use force.	A state is the only legitimate user of force under clearly defined circumstances.
Institutions of Value Contestation	Legitimization of violence and factionalism may turn value contestation into physical fighting. (Cultural potential for nonviolent contestation is still to be explored.)	Institutionalizing the practice of nonviolent value contestation is a desired norm.
Meaning of Fairness and Neutrality	God-like leaders define fairness and neutrality in non-negotiable terms.	Human conscience and consensus define universal standards for neutrality and fairness.

Based on the above proposition on the cross-cultural tension, one can interpret key events that took place during the UNTAC's operation in the early 1990s. The following case study will demonstrate how the foregoing cultural analysis helps to understand the rapid deterioration of inter-factional relations in 1994 onwards.

In May 1993, Special Representative of UN Secretary-General Yasushi Akashi declared that the UN-sponsored election in Cambodia was "free and fair" after ninety percent of eligible voters participated in this historical event. Election results showed that Prince Ranariddh's party, the United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC), won forty-five percent of the vote while Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) gained thirty-eight percent. After this election, the Constituent Assembly restored Prince Sihanouk as the head of state, who then made both Hun Sen and Ranariddh prime ministers. Only two months after the UNTAC's withdrawal from Cambodia in December 1993, fighting broke out and intensified between Khmer Rouge, which boycotted the election, and government forces. Throughout 1994 and 1995, factionalism also broke the ties between FUNCINPEC and CPP, the two coalition partners. During the same period of time, FUNCINPEC suffered defections from within. By 1997, the rivalry between Hun Sen and Ranariddh came to involve an intensive use of violence, leading to the expulsion and indictment of Ranariddh.

From the UNTAC's point of view, the high voters turnout rate no doubt contributed to the establishment of popular sovereignty and legitimacy of the newly elected assembly. It was an unequivocal success in the UN-led democratization process. However, from the Khmer factions' point of view, the broad-based grassroots participation had little to do with the legitimacy of the newly established governing body. Undoubtedly, democratic theorists might argue, ninety-percent turnout rate represented ordinary Cambodians' hope for a peaceful transition and a change in political leadership. However, as explained earlier, the Brahmanistic instinct resurfaced and prevailed when factional leaders and their followers were faced with an imminent threat to survival. The ultimate legitimacy had remained firm in the hands of the factional leaders, who continued to maintain the mythico-religious power that could be wielded to restore social order and control chaos in their own ways. This cultural logic helps to explain why and how inter-factional tension escalated in 1994 onwards.

Khmer leaders and the UNTAC assigned different meanings to the ceremonial signing of agreements for political transition.   By the UN standard, the power-sharing arrangement in the Paris Agreements, the result of the popular election, and the newly promulgated constitution were all binding as social contracts, regardless of the political and cultural contexts in which they were established.   On the contrary, Khmer leaders' understanding of agreements was more nuanced and contextualized.   A series of inter-factional agreements were made between 1991 and 1993, with international pressure on Khmer leaders mounting.   The pacifying potential of the Khmer encouraged the factional leaders to maintain emotional equilibrium in the face of insurmountable international pressure, and prompted them to sign undesired agreements with little chance of fulfillment.   The sudden resurfacing of inter-factional fighting that followed immediately after the UN withdrawal is consistent with this observation.

Implications for Conflict Resolution

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the UN-sponsored democratization process in Cambodia was a dynamic interface of conflicting cultural orientations.   In this process, the relationship between the two cultural orientations is neither symmetrical nor reciprocal.   The introduction of Western democracy into an non-Western context is bound to influence or even reshape the indigenous culture, but not the other way around, at least in the short run.

Generally speaking, Western democracy encourages pluralism, openness, and broad-based consensus building whereas it discourages monopoly, close-mindedness, and clique-based decision-making.   The pragmatics of *democratization*, however inadvertently, tend to promote not only the former tendency but also the latter.   As will be explained shorty, this is not necessarily because of the inherent nature of democratic values, but rather because of the modalities of democratization that are not necessarily consistent with democracy.   At the heart of this problem is the very nature of foreign intervention in which one cultural paradigm unilaterally transplants its essence – or metaphorically put, its cultural DNA – into another.   This dilemma, in which democratization creates non-democratic effects, is hereafter termed a *paradox of democratic transition*.   Three examples of this phenomenon deserve special attention for policymaking: (1) the universality of neutrality and fairness, (2) the conceptualization of time, and (3) top-down and bottom-up approaches to democratization.

The UNTAC's operation presupposed its capability to maintain equidistance and impartiality with each of the Khemer factions involved. It also pursued a fair election and promoted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a universally applicable standard. Whether this version of neutrality and fairness is congruent with Khmer patterns of meaning making remains an important question that merits in-depth inquiry beyond the scope of this study. What is duly noted, however, is that neutrality and fairness are culturally constructed, relativistic concepts although these ideas have not been explained to the Khmer as such. The importance of this observation is highlighted by a simple question: why should an intervener be regarded as neutral in the first place? There is no simple answer to this question in the Khmer cultural context, in which god-like rulers define what ought to be done in crisis, instead of serving as neutral mediators. From the Khmer's point of view, therefore, the Western model of neutrality does not necessarily represent the true meaning of neutrality in any sense. Another illustration of this dilemma is found in the UN attempt to practice fairness in a non-religious, non-ideological manner. For example, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, adopted in September 1993, states that "[t]he motto of the Kingdom of Cambodia is: 'Nation, Religion, King'" (Peou 2000, 468). In the cultural context in which Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism have been the cornerstone of social norms for centuries, and religion is explicitly cited as a symbolic unifying force of the nation, the sense of fairness with no religious underpinning is neither credible nor appealing. In short, from the Khmer's point of view, the UN-led democratization process introduces a mode of neutrality and fairness that artificially standardize, but not pluralize, the Khmer's norms of behavior.

Another paradox of democratic transition is associated with the notion of time. John Paul Lederach (1999), based on his extensive experience in cross-cultural peacebuilding, observes that reconciliation is a formula-driven process. According to Lederach, conflict parties' notion of time and healing determines which particular formula of reconciliation is optimal in a given cultural context. One of the three formulae he identifies is the past-present-future approach, in which the parties first acknowledge what happened in the past, then settle the ongoing hostility at present, and finally reconstruct their relationship to envision a shared future. This formula describes the way in which the parties' attention shifts clockwise, along the three conjugated tenses. Another formula of reconciliation is the present-future-past sequence. In this approach, adversaries with deep-rooted hatred are first encouraged to

work out schemes of cooperation in order to meet their immediate needs for coexistence. They are then expected to continuously work together and gradually rebuild their relationship into the future. Finally, after these steps are taken, they are encouraged to reconcile with their past grudges, building on the emerging sense of interdependence. The third formula is the future-present-past sequence, in which adversaries share commitment to peace in future generations and decide to work together for this common goal in the present, in anticipation of the possibility that they can eventually reconcile with their past hardship at some point in the long-term process of their relationship building.

Which path to reconciliation is most congruent with the Khmer's ways of meaning making? According to Tan Vunyaung, Political Counselor at the US Embassy of Cambodia, the future-present-past formula is likely to be most appealing to the Khmer's patterns of thinking.[3] Consistent with Vunyaung's observation, Lederach (1999) cites comments made by Cambodian officials in 1994 as an example to support the cultural relevance of the future-present-past formula. However, no definitive claim is made here on possible congruency between this formula and Khmer culture in general terms since this question calls for more careful treatment than pointing out anecdotal evidence. What may be argued with certainty, however, is that these cultural nuances of time remained unheeded in the UN-sponsored democratization process. As noted earlier, the demanding timetable of the UNTAC's operation compelled the peace process to pursue a "present-future" formula, in which the past remained virtually untouched. The short lifespan of the UNTAC operation meant that Cambodians were to be left to undertake the task of long-term reconciliation on their own, regardless of their level of readiness to do so on completion of the UNTAC's mission. Due to the time-bound nature of the UNTAC operation and its need for organizational resource management, the concept of time for reconciliation was standardized, following a particular pattern necessitated by the interveners' expedience. Cultural congruence with Khmers' notion of time and healing failed to be incorporated into the UN-led democratization process.

The dilemma of top-down and bottom-up approaches to democratization is yet another example of the paradox of democratic transition. Peou (2000) argues that generally speaking, there are two approaches to democratization in a given social context. The top-down approach is a state-centered process in which the intervener

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[3] My telephone interview with Tan Vunyaung on April 19, 2001. His official title was current at the point of the interview.

assists in installing a new government and the newly established government mobilizes the population to put democratic institutions in place.   The bottom-up approach, on the other hand, is a social, cultural, and economic path to democracy.   It aims to build a national identity by accommodating factional divisions, develop rules and institutions of nonviolent value contestation, and strengthen civil society leadership for nation building. In the Khmer cultural context, a bottom-up approach would entail a harmonious blending of democratic values into the Buddhist and Brahmanist cosmology.   In policy debates on democratization, such a bottom-up approach is generally considered ideal because it is consistent with Western democratic principles, such as broad-based popular participation, pluralism, and egalitarianism.   In reality, however, the UN operation necessitates immediate, tangible results within a designated timeframe.   In the context of Cambodia's peace process, the UN mandate focused on establishing and supporting the inter-factional coalition, SNC, which was meant to centralize local decision-making structures in order to exercise Cambodia's internal and external sovereignty.   In this process, the rapid construction of a Khmer state was not accompanied by a balanced, systematic development of mature civil society leadership.   Consequently, the imbalance grew between the central government and civil society.   In the process of transition designed to *pluralize* the sources of political power over time, the UN-sponsored democratization led to a rapid *centralization*, if not monopolization, of political power, with little prospect of robust civil society building in sight.   The praxis of democratization initiatives resulted in non-democratic effects, such as the centralization of power unmatched by the still embryonic civil society.

These paradoxes of democratic transition pose serious questions.   Are the challenges created by the interface of the two cultural orientations insurmountable? Do the paradoxes of democratic transition demonstrated in Cambodia suggest that Western democracy is fundamentally incompatible with non-Western societies in general?   No definitive answers are readily available to guide a way forward. However, it appears reasonable to propose that both the local population and foreign interveners must first acknowledge these paradoxes do stand in their way.   The stakeholders, both domestic and international, in cross-cultural peace building need to confront the known side effects generated by the Western mode of democratization. Only after the UN and other interveners build such cultural awareness can they work side by side with local stakeholders to envision possible ways to transcend the paradoxes of democratic transition.

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